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# *The* **Violin** *Family*

and its  
Makers in the  
British Isles

AN  
ILLUSTRATED  
HISTORY  
AND  
DIRECTORY

Brian W. Harvey

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# Chapter One

## 🦋 *The Introduction of the Violin Family into England: Musical and Historical Context*

*Artistry and Acoustic Design — The Violin World — The Significance of Demand and Supply — A Note on Sources — The Problem of Tone: Old Versus New — Pre-Restoration String Music and Musicians — Origins of the Violin Family — Early Bowed Instruments of the Violin Type — Introduction of the Violin into England — The Musical Scene at the Restoration — The Promotion of Chamber Music — String Music and Music Publishing — Musical Education — The Meeting of Demand for Stringed Instruments in England — The Viola, Cello, and Double Bass in England*

### *Artistry and Acoustic Design*

MODERN biologists assert that anything which can be said to have been 'designed' is either living, has lived, or is an artefact created by a member of one of those two classes. Blake spoke of the 'fearful symmetry' of the 'Tyger! Tyger! burning bright'. The bodies and organs of living creatures have this quality of symmetry. But the creativity of man is unique in the animal kingdom. Tools were his first invention. Musical instruments followed at a surprisingly early stage. They were, and are, an advanced test of man's ability to design for the dual purpose of producing an efficient acoustic artefact which is also a pleasure to look upon—and that pleasure is tied in closely to its symmetry. The basis of this symmetry as regards the violin, and its relationship to Greek architectural principles (involving the 'golden section' and other rules of proportion), are graphically explained by Kevin Coates in *Geometry, Proportion and the Art of Lutherie* (Oxford, 1985).

Many would consider the violin, in all its apparent simplicity, as the most potentially beautiful of all these dual-purpose challenges to the designer—'potentially' because it is cruelly difficult to produce an instrument which is both

ultra-efficient acoustically and entirely satisfactory aesthetically when examined by the most critical eye. It is the achievement of this dual purpose which has been the motivating factor in the lives of many violin-makers of Europe and its former colonies and dominions, often leading them to a life of comparative poverty.

The search for the Holy Grail of the perfect violin, or even for something to match the perfection achieved in eighteenth-century Italy, has proved elusive. But, as in the story of *Turandot*, there never seems to be a lack of candidates prepared to try their luck at considerable risk, and violin-making in England is no exception to this noble propensity amongst suitably talented artistic people. Admittedly, the necessity of making at least something of a living has in England, as elsewhere, led to the periodic debasement of standards of both workmanship and honesty, but many a maker has given testimony that the challenge and innate satisfaction to be derived from making a fine instrument or bow more than counterbalance the natural tendency to maximize profits at the expense of standards. It is this feature which makes it such an elevating and interesting task to try to analyse the social, cultural, and economic background to the work of individuals who are often eccentric, sometimes very talented, but seldom dull.

### *The Violin World*

As the editor of any violin periodical soon finds out, the 'violin world' consists of many different constituencies. There are, for instance, professional players, professional teachers, makers, dealers, collectors, and addicted listeners. The musical side of the instrument will be pre-eminent for some. For others the craftsmanship side will be the exclusive preoccupation. Some makers despise dealers, thinking of them as parasites, perhaps, or rag-and-bone men in smart suits. A maker may have little interest in or knowledge of old instruments; dealers may have little or no experience of the process of making and be largely uninterested in new instruments.

Yet all these categories of votary need one another. They have an economic function as well as a social one. Without new violins the stock would not be replenished. New violins will sooner or later come on to the market, and the dealer, as the intermediary, will have a powerful say in their valuation and marketing. The fact that a new violin can be sold to its first owner for a price which reflects the maker's outlay in (primarily) time and (secondarily) materials is an acknowledgement of the achievement of dealers in helping to establish the market for stringed instruments of all ages and antecedents. Even the player cannot be considered the final link in the chain because professional players need audiences from whom the resource will come to enable the player to invest in and live by his or her instrument in the first place.

### *The Significance of Demand and Supply*

At first glance a study of makers of the violin family in the British Isles might appear to be comparatively straightforward. There already exists a number of directories either wholly or partially devoted to makers of the British Violin School, and full reference to their sometimes conflicting and often obviously derivative views will be made later on in this book. From these sources may be deduced brief biographical details of the makers and features of some of their instruments. But a closer scrutiny reveals a good many gaps in existing knowledge. In any modern study the reader deserves more than simple biographical details and a very often subjective account of the characteristics of makers' instruments. We need to know the answer to the basic question: *what was the demand* for bowed string instruments made locally? For without *demand* there can be no commercial *supply*. In turn, demand has to be deduced (in the absence of firmer economic data) from the likely requirements of players at any particular time. This in turn prompts us to ask: who were the players and how were they educated and trained? For what forces did the composers being played at any particular time write their music? And where did those players go to purchase their instruments? In what circumstances did they prefer to buy locally rather than to buy from makers on the continent of Europe—particularly Italy? What prices would these makers have been able to charge in the light of market conditions at any particular time?

It must be emphasized that there is virtually no existing published account of most of the answers to these questions. Indeed, owing to the passage of time, some of the questions can only be answered in a hypothetical way—but nevertheless some attempt must be made to do so. This is why the early parts of this book concentrate on the *context* in which music for the violin family was written and performed. It is from this context that we can deduce the reasons why stringed instrument making in England is so variable and fascinating an art.

### *A Note on Sources*

It is a regrettable feature of almost all of the 'directories' (details of which appear in the Directory) or quasi-historical accounts of violin-makers that the authors do not reveal their sources. Sandys and Forster are better than most and the unassuming Eliza Cecelia Stainer, the daughter of Sir John Stainer, whose *Dictionary of Violin Makers* was compiled in Oxford and completed in 1896, is refreshingly honest: 'It was, of course, necessary that this small work should largely depend on the fruits of other people's labours, as personal research was out of the question.' But

the latter author both corresponded with contemporary violin-makers, 'thereby ensuring accuracy', and fully acknowledged the work of Vidal, Hart, Coutagne, Berenzi, Hill, and others. The book is also preceded by a respectable bibliography. More modern dictionaries such as Vannes and Henley generally give no indication of the source of their information, though this can sometimes be traced without too much difficulty from one to the other! W. Meredith Morris's *British Violin Makers* (editions of 1904 and 1920) bears the stamp of careful personal investigation, though since it was written perspectives have changed and reputations have either died or been enhanced. Unique in terms of scholarship is the third volume of von Lüttgendorff's work on *Die Geigen- und Lautenmacher* by Thomas Drescher (1990), which is scrupulous in citing sources both from books and periodical literature.

A serious 'health warning' should be given about these very intensively used but in the main essentially unscholarly productions. A writer who simply copies some other source, often itself second- or third-hand, is just as likely to perpetuate mythology as truth. Unless a modern scholar can retrace the steps of the author being studied, the original source may never be found and, in the world of violin-makers, may become entirely untraceable. In any event, the major subject-matter of these dictionaries is not really 'violin-makers' as such; it is *the fruits of their labour*. And if their instruments have been correctly identified the primary evidence needed for an assessment of the maker's contribution to the art of lutherie is readily to hand.

As a recent example of the general point, Albert Cooper, in his monograph on the Salisbury maker Benjamin Banks,<sup>1</sup> has established, by careful examination of the record of trade apprenticeships in the Public Record Office, that the widely held belief that Benjamin Banks served an apprenticeship under Peter Wamsley (sometimes 'Walmsley') or another London maker is erroneous.<sup>2</sup> Banks was in fact the apprentice of William Huttoft, musical instrument maker of New Sarum, from 1741 for seven years. Yet this myth had become almost biblical apparently for no better reason than the fact that Wamsley's maturity coincides with Banks's youth.

Although, as a matter of record, the standard dictionaries have been proved wrong on this point, there may, in fairness, be another side to the question. Huttoft was not a violin-maker. There are some similarities of style between Wamsley and Banks. Despite the apprenticeship arrangement in Salisbury, Banks may have spent some time in Wamsley's workshop in his early years. He must have been taught the craft somewhere. But in this situation authors should at least discriminate between fact and speculation, however informed the latter may be.

<sup>1</sup> *Benjamin Banks, The Salisbury Violin Maker* (Haslemere, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. W. Henley, *Universal Dictionary of Violin and Bow Makers*, 2nd edn. (Brighton, 1973), 75: 'Studied the art of Peter Wamsley in London.'



So, although the present author must disclaim with other authors, such as Miss C. Stainer, any pretence of having reinvestigated every relevant biographical detail, an attempt has been made to make the source of each fact or opinion or quotation of any importance clear, and the value of that source can be assessed by the reader. Meanwhile none of the received wisdom on British makers should be taken on trust. As the Directory contained in this book shows, and the main text frequently suggests, fine instruments have been made by makers traditionally meriting a low rating and the output of many makers is very variable. It was commonplace to charge differentially according to quality of materials and workmanship. The most objective barometer of a maker's overall reputation is prices obtained at auction, and in the Directory this information is so far as possible indicated. Auctions are not infallible as regards correct identification and mistakes can still be made.<sup>3</sup> But taken overall, they reflect informed demand for a particular maker's products.

### *The Problem of Tone: Old Versus New*

To some extent the quality of tone is necessarily a subjective matter. But the fact that one violin when played by a competent soloist is readily audible over a full orchestra whereas another one is not is beyond argument. Numerous attempts have been made and described to differentiate between old and new, good and not so good. For example, Paolo Peterlongo in *The Violin: Its Physical and Acoustic Principles* deals at some length with the acoustical evaluation of violins. As the author comments: 'The present writer has more than once witnessed the enthusiasm of distinguished performers for a modern instrument which sounded superb in the restricted space of a workshop. Great was their disappointment when they heard the same instrument in a large hall where numerous experiments were carried out with the help of a variety of players. Surprises of this kind are particularly unwelcome when a deal over an instrument has already been concluded.'<sup>4</sup> His work includes the results of experiments showing the average frequency curves (mean acoustical intensity) of six good classic violins compared to six good modern violins and six average modern violins. These experiments show the superiority of the classical Italian violins which evinced a good intensity of sound with a high-quality fundamental timbre. A 1717 Stradivari was found to have a peak resonance at around 400 Hz, corresponding to the natural resonant frequency of the volume of air in the resonance chamber. The sonority of old violins in the lower frequencies

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Anne Inglis, 'Profile of Roger Hargrave', *Strad* (June 1992), 532-7. Roger Hargrave himself found his own copy of a Joseph Guarneri filius Andreae advertised for sale as genuine in a Viennese auction-house in March 1992. It is understood that brands had been removed and that the instrument was accompa-

nied by a spurious certificate.

<sup>4</sup> (London, 1979), 95. See also Bernard Richardson, 'The Physics of the Violin' in Robin Stowell, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Violin* (Cambridge, 1992), ch. 2.

ensures that they possess the sound and the characteristic timbre associated with classic Italian instruments. In the higher frequencies they are found to have good penetrative power without too much wastage of sound emitted in phase opposition. Another feature observed was that in double-stopping the higher note always tends to dominate the lower one in modern violins, whereas with old violins the ear perceives a more balanced evenness between all four strings.

Nevertheless, it must be added in fairness that a well-made new violin is often infinitely preferable to an indifferent old one. And Peterlongo's thesis has been challenged, one recent writer arguing that the high reputation of old Italian violins is not a matter of physics or psycho-acoustics but a mixture of psychology and shrewd commercial marketing. 'The sound of a good violin does not depend on who made it, or whether it is old or new, but rather on how it is played.'<sup>5</sup>

We find a curious pre-echo of the preference of many musicians for older violins given by Thomas Mace in his delightfully idiosyncratic book *Musick's Monument* (London, 1676) conveying advice about acquiring a viol:

Your best provision, (and most compleat) will be, a Good Chest of Viols; six in number; viz. Two Basses, two Tenors, and two Trebles: All truly and Proportionably suited. Of such, there are no better in the world, than those of Aldred, Jay, Smith, (yet the Highest in Esteem are) Bolles and Ross (one Bass of Bolles's I have known valued at a hundred pounds). These were Old; but we have now, very excellent good Workmen, who (no doubt) can work as well as those, if they be so well paid for their work, as they were; yet we chiefly value Old Instruments before new; for by experience, they are found to be by far the best.<sup>6</sup>

Mace's statement is valuable not only for its demonstration of the antiquity of the belief in the virtues of older instruments, but because of the listing of English viol-makers who were considered by the, perhaps partial, author to be worthy of note. Luckily there are beautiful surviving examples of some of the old viol-makers' work, particularly the bass viols by or attributed to John Rose (spelled 'Ross' by Mace), which are in the Hill Collection in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. One of these (c.1600) has double-purflled edges, with back and ribs of rosewood. The intricate purflled inlay of tulip-wood on the back is a very English feature, often used in subsequent violin-making in the next two centuries to add interest to relatively unfigured wood. The pegbox is intricately carved. This and other instruments surviving from this period<sup>7</sup> are strong evidence of the truth of the claim that English instruments were amongst the finest and most sought-after in Europe.

<sup>5</sup> W. Güth, 'The Physics of Violins, Ancient and Modern', *Strad* (Aug. 1991), 688.

<sup>6</sup> pp. 245-6. Jean Rousseau (of Paris) also makes it clear in his *Traité de la Viole* (Paris, 1687) how esteemed in Europe English makers of viols were. Ian Woodfield in 'the Viol in 16th-Century England', ch. 6 of his *The*

*Early History of the Viol* (Cambridge, 1984), points out that John Rose sen. received the high price of 40s. for a viol of 'the finest sort' in 1552 (226).

<sup>7</sup> The collection of 17th-cent. viols in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, includes examples by Rose and Henry Jaye (1667).



There is another reason why Mace's opinion is far from being of purely anti-quarian significance. It was because the market has always favoured old instruments that many makers have been tempted to 'antique' their anonymous instruments so that they can be passed off (either to the purchaser or by the purchaser) more easily as having age and perhaps pedigree. As will be seen, John Lott, one of England's finest makers, was an adherent to this view. Activity in the field of false labelling has been with us since the earliest days of commercial dealings in the violin family and is certainly still with us today.<sup>8</sup> There remains a delicate line, however, between a fine facsimile which never pretends to be anything else and the reproduction designed to defraud.

### *Pre-Restoration String Music and Musicians*

Thomas Mace's statement also serves to remind us that, although this present study formally starts just before the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, there is an important 'prehistory' of bowed string music in England. An analysis of this is beyond the scope of this work but it is a historical fact that the Tudor monarchs, particularly Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, were skilled and appreciative musicians whose courts created a highly sympathetic environment for the performance of all types of music. Polyphonic vocal music from the time of Thomas Tallis to the death of William Byrd (a period spanning, say, 1500 to 1623) represented a golden age in English musical history. Although Byrd was a master of a cappella music for voices, both he and Orlando Gibbons used viols instead of (or sometimes with) the organ as an accompaniment to some of their work.<sup>9</sup> In the early part of the seventeenth century Thomas Weelkes brought out his 'Madrigals of Five and Six parts, apt for the Viols and Voices', Dowland his 'Songs or Ayres', with tablature for the lute or orpharion, with the viola da gamba, and Morley his 'First Booke of Ayres or Little Short Songs to sing and play to the Lute with the Bass-Violl' (1600). Charles I was a patron of music and apparently a fine player on the bass viol, especially in 'those incomparable Fancies of Mr. Coperario to the organ'—Charles being a pupil of Coperario, (sometimes 'Coprario') the Italianized name of one John Cooper who himself excelled as a performer on the viol da gamba. Charles maintained a band in 1625 consisting of over forty players, eleven of whom are described as 'Musicians for the Viols'.<sup>10</sup> One of the later acts of Charles I

<sup>8</sup> See Ch. 11 and the Brian W. Harvey, *Violin Fraud: Deception, Forgery, Theft, and the Law* (Oxford, 1992). Mace refers to 17th-cent. false labelling of 16th-cent. lutes.

<sup>9</sup> See Edmund H. Fellowes, *English Cathedral Music*, 5th edn., ed. J. A. Westrup (London, 1969) 71, 74, 163.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Holman, *Four and Twenty Fiddlers* (Oxford, 1993) 229; William Sandys and Simon Andrew Forster, *The History of the Violin and other Instruments played on with the Bow from the Remotest Times to the Present* (London, 1864) 138.

was to grant a charter to Nicholas Lanier and others so as to incorporate them into the style of 'Marshall Wardens and Cominalty of the Arte and Science of Musick in Westminster, in the County of Middlesex', giving them many privileges.<sup>11</sup>

During this period there is abundant evidence of great activity as regards the use of bowed stringed instruments, not only in music for the court and church but also, of course, for dancing purposes. Indeed, it was the indelible association of stringed instruments, particularly 'the fiddle', with both the devil and dancing, that led to the abandonment of string music for ecclesiastical purposes in the Commonwealth period following the execution of Charles I.<sup>12</sup> But as twentieth-century scholars have shown, the two decades prior to the Restoration, although imbued with the deadening spirit of Puritanism, to some extent pushed the performance of music 'underground' and in these years chamber music continued to thrive.<sup>13</sup> Oliver Cromwell himself is reputed to have had a liking for music and Colonel Hutchinson is said to have enjoyed all sorts of music and to have given his children the kind of education which included 'music, dancing, and all other qualities befitting their father's house'.<sup>14</sup> And the eminent publisher John Playford (1623–86), a Norwich-born stationer with a business in London, published in 1651 *The English Dancing Master*, which itself suggests that even at this time people were not averse to music as a form of recreation.

### *Origins of the Violin Family*

There has been a great deal of scholarly writing about the time and place of the birth of the violin. It seems likely that in the early part of the sixteenth century experimentation took place with the shape of bowed stringed instruments which could be held against the upper part of the body and were reasonably portable. Most experts now accept that the first recognizable violins emanated from northern Italy, probably Brescia. Credit is traditionally given to Gasparo da Salò as the founding father of the instrument (in its present recognizable form) between the years 1550 and 1610, though more modern research antedates its birth to about 1530, judging by contemporary literary references and pictures.<sup>15</sup> Gasparo da Salò was certainly an accomplished maker of viols and, according to Hart,<sup>16</sup> 'in his works may be traced the gradual development of the system upon which his followers

<sup>11</sup> Sandys and Forster, *History*, 140.

<sup>12</sup> See the discussion of John Bunyan's fiddle in Ch. 3.

<sup>13</sup> See Percy A. Scholes, *The Puritans and Music* (London, 1934).

<sup>14</sup> See E. D. Mackerness, *A Social History of English Music* (London, 1964), 80, citing Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the life of Colonel Hutchinson*, 292.

<sup>15</sup> David Boyden, writing in *The Violin Family* (The

New Grove Musical Instruments Series; London, 1989), ch. 1. See also George Hart, *The Violin: Famous Makers and their Imitators* (London, 1885), 157; and John, Dilworth, 'The Violin and Bow: Origins and Development', in Stowell (ed.), *Cambridge Companion* 14–15.

<sup>16</sup> *The Violin: Famous Makers*, 158–9.

built their reputation, viz, a well-defined model, excellent materials, and choice of varnish. It is to be regretted that his immediate followers, with the exception of Paolo Maggini, departed from the path so successfully trodden by this great pioneer.' Hart also credits Gasparo da Salò with having commenced with a high-modelled form 'and gradually, as experience taught, lowered it'.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the focus shifts from Brescia to Cremona where the first significant member of the Amati family, Andrea, had set up his workshop. Andrea Amati's most famous products were the set of (reputedly) thirty-eight violins (twelve large- and twelve small-patterned), six violas, and eight cellos made for Charles IX, which, Hart informs us,<sup>17</sup> 'were kept in the Chapel Royal, Versailles, until October 1790, when they disappeared. These were probably the finest instruments of Andrea Amati. On the backs were painted the Arms of France and other devices with a motto, "Pietate et Justitia".<sup>18</sup> The date of these instruments is given by Hart as 1572, though the fine specimen at present on display in the collection at the Town Hall at Cremona is dated 1566, though not by the maker. This instrument bears on its back traces of the original gold coat of arms of the Kings of France and on its ribs the above-quoted motto. It is described in the museum's literature as having 'a strong and brilliant voice, and stands as a very rare example since it is one of the only five surviving ones of the group of historical instruments proving the great art of this master'. (The instrument does not in fact have an original label but is described as 'Authenticated and signed by the restorer Nicholas Lupot'.)

There are two further examples from this series in the Hill Collection, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. The violin with a body-length of only 13<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (342 mm), is dated 1564 and the very large viola (body-length 18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in., 470 mm) is dated 1574.<sup>19</sup> Another example is in the City Museum of Carlisle, also of 1574. The English maker Bernard Simon Fendt made a fine copy of a cello from this set in about 1830, which was sold in the London sale-rooms in 1991. This is illustrated in Plate C.

Although there is still some disagreement, the origin of the violin is thought to be from the lira da braccio, the rebec, and the fiddle, rather than the viol family which is regarded as a separate and distinct development. 'We can only say with certainty that by about 1550 the four-string ("true") violin must have been a familiar part of the European musical scene, since the instrument and its tuning were described in detail by Philibert Jambe de Fer in his *Epitome Musical* (Lyons), 1556.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>18</sup> See also Boyden in *Violin Family*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> David D. Boyden, *Catalogue of The Hill Collection of Musical Instruments in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford* (London, 1969), 17, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Dominic Gill (ed.), *The Book of the Violin* (1984), 15. See also John Dilworth in Stowell (ed.), *Cambridge Companion* 5-8 and the accompanying illustrations; and the survey in Agnes Kory, 'A Wider Role for the Tenor Violin', *Galpin Society Journal*, 47 (1994), 123.

Probably the key factor in the development of the design and structure of the modern violin family was the simple fact that the old viols could not supply sufficient volume of tone to compete with a well-trained choir or to fill a large building such as a cathedral, church, or theatre. The search for a full and penetrating tone must have been in the forefront of the minds of the early designers of the instruments from Brescia and then Cremona and Venice (for example the Linarolo family) to answer the contemporary demand from the royal courts of Europe and the Venetian churches. Exactly the same problem must have occurred in England where after 1660 the need increasingly was for orchestras in the cathedrals and theatres which could provide a convincing accompaniment and context to performance of anthems and operas by trained singers. The human voice cannot have varied much over the centuries in terms of tone and intensity. It provides a ready and unchanging measure of the volume and intensity of sound which needs at least to be matched by an economic number of string players.

### *Early Bowed Instruments of the Violin Type*

The ancestry of the violin is a topic which is separate and distinct from a study of musical instrument makers of the seventeenth century. Makers obviously concentrated on producing what instruments were in demand, and in the context of bowed string instruments in London in the mid-1600s these were viols and violins. But owing to the confusion on the subject of ancestry a word of explanation may be helpful.

There are many representations in the medieval wood carvings of English church and cathedral pews and in roof bosses of figures playing instruments often of a guitar-like shape and held against the body (i.e. the chest or collar-bone) as distinct from being straddled by the legs or resting on the lap. Some of these have been classified indiscriminately as 'viols'—for example by Sandys and Forster.<sup>21</sup> By the sixteenth century there are a number of references to 'fiddles' in the literature of the period. An example occurs in *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (c.1551), where Diccon says:

Into the town will I, my Frendes to vysit there,  
And hether straight again to see th' end of this gere;  
In the meantime, felowes, pype up your fiddles, I say take them  
And let your frendes here such mirth as ye can make them.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *History*, ch. 5, which reproduces many examples. An easily accessible one, formerly the constant companion of the author, will be seen carved on the pew adjacent to the Decani Bass Stall in Worcester Cathedral, presumably

the one reproduced by Sandys and Forster on p. 29. See also Holman, *Four and Twenty*, ch. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Sandys and Forster, *History*, 106.

Sandys and Forster remind us that by the seventeenth century a company of fiddlers was accorded the disparaging, if evocative, collective noun 'a noise'. In Marston's *The Dutch Courtezian* the following dialogue ensues: 'O Wife! O, Jacke how does thy mother? Is there any fiddlers in the house?' *Mrs Mul*: 'Yes, Mr. Creak's Noyse.' *Mul*: 'Bid 'em play, Laugh, make merry.'<sup>23</sup>

Representations of fiddles with between three and six strings, variously named by early writers fidel, fideile, viddle, viele, vielle, viola, etc. and often show features in common with the rebec and Renaissance fiddle, are plentiful.<sup>24</sup> It was probably the need for easy portability combined with better acoustic penetration for dancing and minstrelsy purposes that led to an instrument that was tonally bright, and physically light, small, and shallow enough to be held easily against the breast-bone, or even tucked under the chin.

Structurally the *lira da braccio* (held in the arm), evolving from the fifteenth-century fiddle, whilst being distinct from the violin in having two 'sympathetic' strings running off the fingerboard, as well as five or so stopped strings, resembles the violin in having an arched back, an outline not too dissimilar to the violin, normally overlapping edges, 'f' rather than 'C' soundholes, and a soundpost. A good example can be seen in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in the Hill Collection, made in Venice, c.1525.

The viol family, strictly so-called, had a much earlier birth-date than the violin (probably as a bowed guitar-like instrument in Valencia, c.1450, according to modern scholars) but evolved separately; it is the rebec, the fiddle and the *lira da braccio* that are the more direct ancestors of the violin family; alternatively the *lira da braccio* may have developed contemporaneously with the violin. The subject is complicated by the confusion between the French word *violon* (= violin) with Italian *violoni* (= viols). Later terminology became stabilized as *violin* (England), *violino* (Italy), *violon* (France), *Violine* or *Geige* (Germany). The German expression for viola, *bratsche*, appears to derive from the Italian *viola da braccio* or 'arm viola'. The 'crwth' or 'crouth' associated particularly with Wales is known also as the 'croud' or fiddle, and there are many references to 'crouds' in English, Welsh, and Scottish literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and occasionally earlier).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 133.

<sup>24</sup> See the illustrations in Mary Remnant, *English Bowed Instruments from Anglo-Saxon to Tudor Times* (Oxford, 1986) and the same author's *Musical Instruments: An Illustrated History* (London, 1989), ch. 2; also in Anthony Baines (ed.), *Musical Instruments Through The Ages* (Harmondsworth, 1961), 112; id., *The Oxford Companion to Musical Instruments* (Oxford, 1992), esp. under 'Fiddle', 109-10; and David Rubio, 'The Anatomy of the Violin', in Gill (ed.), *The Book of the Violin*, partic-

ularly the 'family tree', 22-3. Holman makes the bold statement that an alarming number of old instruments on which violin evolutionary theory is based are turning out to be forgeries (*Four and Twenty*, 1). This is certainly the verified position in a few cases; see L. Libin, 'Early Violins: Problems and Issues', *Early Music*, 19 (1991), 5-6.

<sup>25</sup> See the examples cited by Sandys and Forster, *History*, 30-1 and in Remnant, *English Bowed Instruments*. The crwth is discussed in more detail in Ch. 8.

*Introduction of the Violin into England*

Although by the middle of the sixteenth century the violin, viola, and bass were well established in France and Italy, it is now necessary to look for evidence as to when these instruments were introduced in England. Both nineteenth-century writers on this topic and modern scholars<sup>26</sup> have identified a number of references apparently to 'violins' (often 'vyolens'), both in estate inventories and in literature, including dramatic productions of the period such as *Gammer Gurton's Needle* already mentioned. One of the best-known is the direction of the commencement of the dumb show to the first act of the early tragedy *Gorboduc* (1561). This states: 'Firste the musicke of Violenze began to play, duryng whiche came in uppon the Stage sixe wilde men clothed in leaves.' Raynor remarks that this play was presented in the Inns of Court as part of the Christmas celebrations of 1561-2: 'Whether the authors meant violins, instruments at that time very new to English music, or viols, is not clear; violins were rare, but a wealthy audience like that to which *Gorboduc* was first acted might well have been able to afford violinists.'<sup>27</sup> The position is complicated by the existence of arm-held 'fiddles' and other rebeck-type instruments played with a bow and having some of the features but none of the refinement of the genuine violin.

The conventional view is that almost all the native compositions for, or requiring accompaniment, by strings in England during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were written for viols, including the treble viol. Interesting exceptions to this are Dowland's *Lacrimae or Seaven Teares figured in seaven passionate Pavans* (1605), for 'lutes, viols or violons', and Anthony Holborne's *Pavans . . . for Viols, Violins or other Musicale Winde Instruments*.<sup>28</sup> Thurston Dart has described a manuscript from a similar date which includes 'Fancies | of 2 & 3 parts to ye organ | of Mr. Gibbons, and Mr. Coperario | with ye viol and violin too ye organ' and suggests that from about 1612 the combination of two violins, bass viol, and chamber organ was the one Orlando Gibbons and his contemporaries had in mind for court performances.<sup>29</sup> Peter Holman in his *Four and Twenty Fiddlers* exhaustively analyses the composition of early string consorts, often formed at court from immigrant musicians, and sees evidence from the music for these, and from numerous cited archival materials, of the much more extensive use of the violin than has hitherto been suspected.

<sup>26</sup> See particularly Sandys and Forster, *History*, ch. 8, and Holman, *Four and Twenty*.

<sup>27</sup> See Henry Raynor, *A Social History of Music* (London, 1972), 149-50.

<sup>28</sup> 'Other' here must mean 'otherwise'—see Ernest

Walker, *A History of Music in England*, 3rd edn. by J. A. Westrup (Oxford, 1952), 86.

<sup>29</sup> 'Purcell and Bull', *Musical Times*, 104 (1963), 31, and 'The Printed Fantasies of Orlando Gibbons', *Music and Letters*, 37 (1956), 342.

There can be no doubt that instruments described as 'violins' were employed in Elizabethan court and aristocratic circles. At the other extreme 'violins' were used by waits and for dancing purposes. But the (scant) evidence from contemporary paintings seems to throw some doubt on whether there is sufficient identity to qualify these instruments as violins as now understood. One of the best-known is the frieze at Gilling Castle, York, painted in about 1580 and illustrated by Galpin in his book on *Old English Instruments of Music*, Pl. 55, by Van der Straeten in his *History of the Violin* (p. 41), and in the *Cambridge Music Guide* (1985), Pl. 7. These 'violins' appear to be five-stringed, played against the breast, and in outline, as Van der Straeten points out, more like a known *lyra da gamba* of Tieffenbrucker of Padua dated 1590. Van der Straeten also illustrates<sup>30</sup> two bowed stringed instruments of a guitar-like outline, held against the shoulder, taken from a painting of a wedding (or some similar celebration) at Horsleydown in 1590 by Hoefnagel, a painter at the English court.

It may be objected that to insist on an instrument having 'f' holes, corners, and four strings before classifying it as a 'violin' is too narrow a view. Whether such an instrument has, internally, a soundpost and bass bar may be just as important, but is impossible to tell from pictures. What is undeniable is that instruments which are identical to the violin as we now know it were in production in Brescia and Cremona by the mid-sixteenth century and these would almost certainly have had important acoustical differences from the cumbersome instruments depicted above. Both pictures remind us of the inventiveness of makers at this date before the design of the 'violin' proper had really settled down. They do not support the argument that the violin *as now understood* was used in the sort of circumstances depicted. Furthermore, if the violin was in more general use from about 1560 onwards, England's distinguished viol-makers appear, paradoxically, to have ignored it. The tangible evidence for this is that whilst a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century viols are preserved, as we shall see there appear to be no English violins or viols known prior to about 1640. (Cellos came later in any event.)

The preponderance of the literary, artistic, and musical evidence favours the view that the viol retained a firm hold on the affections of the musical public in England (at least outside court circles) for longer than was the case in Italy and France. Returning to the pages of *Musick's Monument* by Thomas Mace, writing as late as 1676 the author makes a number of disparaging references to the violin. In the context of the deplorable 'new fashion' of using violins and thus, in his opinion, unbalancing the texture of the music, he comments: 'What injury must it needs be, to have such things played upon instruments unequally suited, or unevenly numbered. viz. one small, weak-sounding bass viol and two or three

<sup>30</sup> *History*, i. 65; also in Remnant, *English Bowed Instruments*, Pls. 152-3. Holman, *Four and Twenty*, 116-17, discusses two Elizabethan paintings which may show dancing accompanied by 'a violin consort'.



violins, whereas one (in reason) would think that one violin would bear up sufficiently against two or three common sounding basses. . . . or suppose a theorbœ lute, the disproportion is still the same. The Scoulding violins will out top them all.<sup>31</sup> The only concession that the author makes to the violin, in the context of the gentleman's provision for musical instruments, is that 'you may add to your Press, a Pair of Violins, to be in Readiness for any Extraordinary Jolly, or Jocund consort-occasion; But never use them, but with this Proviso, viz. Be sure you make an Equal Provision for them, by the addition, and strength of basses; so that they may not Out-cry the Rest of the musick . . .'<sup>32</sup>

J. M. Fleming, writing in 1883, restated the conventional view of the slow introduction of the violin in England, relying primarily on Roger North and Anthony Wood.<sup>33</sup> Roger North, a distinguished lawyer who was born in 1650 and whose valuable *Memoires of Musick* bears the date 1728, comments:

But in the reigne of King Jac.I, and the paradisicall part of the reigne of King Cha.I, many musick masters rose up and flourished. Their works lay most in compositions for violls; but at that time the lute was a monopolist of the ayere kind, and the masters, gentlemen and ladyes, for the most part use it. . . . The violin was scarce knowne tho' now the principall verb, and if it was anywhere seen, it was in the hands of a country croudero, who for the portability served himself of it.

This is a valuable and significant reference to the strong association of the violin with itinerant musicians playing primarily for the dance—the reference to a 'croudero' meaning (at least originally) an itinerant crouth-player, the crouth (as mentioned above) being another ancestor of the violin. And Anthony à Wood, in the *Diary of his Life*, states 'But before the restoration of K. Ch.II, and especially after, viols began to be out of fashion, and only violins used, as treble violin, tenor, and bass violins, and the King according to the French mode, would have twenty-four violins play before him while he was at meals, as being more airey and brisk than Viols.' And the same author explains that before the Restoration gentlemen attending music parties played on Viols, 'for they esteemed a violin to be an instrument only belonging to a common fiddler, and could not endure that it should come among them, for feare of making their meetings vaine and fidling'.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Mace, *Musick's Monument*, London, 1976 (1933).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 146.

<sup>33</sup> James M. Fleming, *Old Violins and their Makers* (London, 1883), 195. The following quotations are from pp. 194–5.

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Francis W. Galpin, *Old English Instruments of Music*, 4th edn., rev. Thurston Dart

(London, 1965), n. 70. Peter Holman in ch. 6 of *Four and Twenty Fiddlers* regards North and Wood as 'not necessarily reliable witnesses' on the early history of the violin in England. Simon McVeigh writes that 'though the violin was known (in England) in the sixteenth century, the viol retained its status well into the next century'—a balanced statement of the likely position, see *Cambridge Companion*, 47.

A slightly later view is put by Sir John Hawkins, writing in 1776, who states in his *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* as follows (incorporating his posthumous notes into the text):

It has already been mentioned that the practice of singing madrigals, which had prevailed for many years throughout Europe, gave way to concerts of viols, such as are above described; but the Languor of these performances, which consisted of Fantazias of five and six parts, was not compensated by that sweet and delicate tone which distinguishes the viol species; the violin, though it had long been in the hands of the vulgar, (Dr. Tudway, in his letter to his son, says that within his remembrance it was scarce ever used but at Wakes and Fairs, and that those who played on it travelled about the country with their instrument in a cloak-bag), and had been so degraded that the appellation of Fiddler was a term of reproach, was found to be an instrument capable of great improvement; and the softness and delicacy of the violin tone, and the occasional force and energy of the instrument itself, were such recommendations of it as determined the Italian masters, about the beginning of the 17th century, to introduce it into practice.

Hawkins then mentions that the modern violin had assumed the form which it now bears almost as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century and that the *Orfeo* of Claudio Monteverdi represented at Mantua in 1607 'prefixed on the names and numbers of the instruments used in the performance; and among the latter occur "duoi Violini piccoli alla Francese"'. The *violino piccolo*, typically with a body length of approximately 75 per cent of a standard full-size violin (between 270 and 355 mm), formed part of a consort of violin-family instruments and was tuned a fifth higher than the standard violin. One view is that this was the instrument called for by Monteverdi in his opera *Orfeo* (1607).<sup>35</sup> David Boyden in *The Violin Family* takes the view that these were 'boat-like pochettes' tuned an octave higher than the violin and treated as a transposing instrument in Monteverdi's notation. The *Violino Ordinario* meant the violin proper.<sup>36</sup>

Hawkins continues:

It is certain that at the beginning of the 16th century the practice of the violin was cultivated in Italy with uncommon assiduity; so that in a few years after it became the principal of concert instruments. From Italy it passed into France, and from thence into England. At first it was used in accompaniment with the voice, and was confined to the theatre; but the good effects of it, in giving to the melody a force and expression that was wanting in

<sup>35</sup> See M. O. Banks, 'The Violino piccolo', *Early Music*, 18 (1990), 588.

<sup>36</sup> p. 20. See also the well-known illustration showing types of violin-like instruments in the early 17th cent. in Michael Praetorius's *Synagoga Musicum* (Wittenberg, 1620), illustration xxi, and Lenz Meiro, 'Small is Beautiful', *Strad* (Dec. 1993), 1181. The 'Kit' or 'Pochette'

designed to be pushed into the dancing-master's pocket was the only one of these small-form instruments to continue to be used for about another two hundred years and there are many attractive examples by English 18th-cent. makers. Stradivari made one in 1717, now in the Paris Conservatoire.