

THE WORKSHOP OF THE CHANOT FAMILY

In December of last year The Bate Collection secured an important and historic collection of 764 workshop items which represent the activities of many generations of the Chanot family of violin-makers. The Chanot Collection includes a great number of violin-making tools, patterns, templates and some partially and fully carved instruments. The moulds, patterns and templates appear to have been taken directly from original violins, violas and cellos by Stradivari, Guarneri, Amati, Ruggieri and many other Italian makers.

Along with the Hill family, the Chanots could be regarded as the most important dynasty in the history of British violin-making. From the 1700s onwards generations of gifted Chanots worked in Mirecourt and Paris while several of their descendants carried on the family's superb skills to England.

Many of the tools and patterns in the collection, as well as the workbench are stamped or inscribed by members of the Chanot family.

In the fullness of time, some items will be used to recreate a typical eighteenth-century violin-maker's workshop, to illustrate how violins made during this period. The entire collection will provide a fund of knowledge to student and/or professional violin-makers interested in the methods used by the Chanot family.

Identifying and cataloguing has started and to date over 250 items are included in the on-line Chanot Checklists. Once catalogued, the collection is passed on to the Bate Conservators, photographed, listed in the Bate Database and then placed in their recently purchased chests ready for display and use.

Curiously the identification has not been as simple as one might have expected. Woodworking tools - planes, saws, gouges, chisels, measuring gauges and clamps are much the same, whatever they are being used for. However violin making does have a selection of its own bespoke tools; such as peg-hole reamers and peg cutters, soundpost inserters and setters. There are a number of unexpected tools, such as a set of beautifully made proportional dividers.

There are also a number of tools that as yet defy identification.

The patterns and templates are even more intriguing. Complete violin backs and belly are obvious – as are the neck scrolls and finger boards. However, there are many collections of 10 to 15 shape profiles – marked “Stad” or “Amati” – , whose nature and use are far from clear. There will be a method and a set of primary measuring points but we have yet to gain this understanding - but we can be sure that much of this is common practice even today.

The Chanot family of French and English violin makers trace their origins to Joseph Chanot, the first member of the family to add violin-maker to his list of profession - he already considered himself a successful wine maker and farmer. Joseph ran a small shop in Mirecourt, France, and the first violins that featured his label were produced around 1790. Generations of gifted Chanots had worked in Mirecourt and Paris, with Georges II being the most notable. In the mid 1800s, his sons Adolphe and Georges III – the 4th generation of the Chanot family - moved to London to work with John Turner. By 1860 Georges had opened his own workshop in London in Wardour Street.

It was here that the remarkable Edward Heron-Allen studied under Georges Chanot III to write "Violin-Making, As It Was And Is" (1884), the most influential book ever to inspire British violin-making.

The illustrious Georges Chanot III's tools, patterns and expert knowledge were in turn passed down to the next generation of British Chanots: Georges Adolphe (Manchester) and London's Joseph Anthony, William Arthur and John Alfred. William kept shop in Wardour Street, eventually moving to Herne Hill. His son John Chanot set up in nearby Dulwich and was the last in a 200-year line of continuous family violin-making.

During the time after the moves to London, the Paris workshop continued to prosper with Joseph Chardon in-charge – the illegitimate son of George II – under the name of Chanot-Chardon. This continued throughout the wars to eventually Josephine Chardon died in 1981 ending the many generations of Chanot and Chardon violin makers.

Refs:

1. Sale catalogue entry: The Saleroom Auction House, December 2015
2. Chanot-Chardon: The Violin-Making Soap Opera Family, Stefan Aune – <http://blog.feinviolins.com/2011/11/chanot-chardon-violin-making-soap-opera.html>
3. *Universal Dictionary of Violin & Bow Makers* by William Henley, published by Amati Publishing Ltd.
4. *Parisian Violin Makers in the XIXth and XXth Centuries, Tome 1: The Family Chanot-Chardon* by Sylvette Milliot, published by Les Amis de la Musique, 1994
5. *The new Grove dictionary of music and musicians* – Chanot Violin Makers