ANTONIO STRADIVARI 1694 'MARIA EX MUIR MACKENZIE'

DESCRIPTION AND MEASUREMENTS: ROGER HARGRAVE

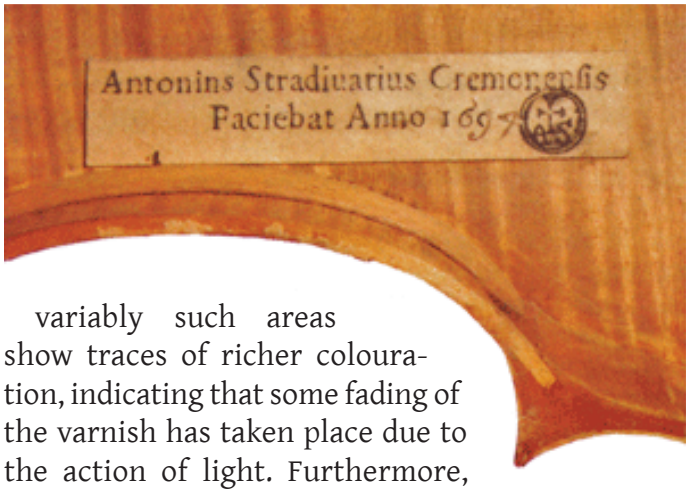
Stradivari's so called long pattern violins first appeared in 1690 and, with some few exceptions, he continued to make them until the end of the century. From their estimated minimum total of 52 long violins, the Hill brothers cite eight fine examples. Of these the example dated 1694, and noted to be in the possession of Mr. K.S. Muir Mackenzie, is illustrated here. It is one of several instruments that were in the collection of Muir Mackenzie and have since retained his name.

Not only is this violin still a fine example of the 1690s decade, but today, when so few classical instruments remain in good condition, it has become a rare and beautiful example of a `clean' Stradivarius. With the exception of a small repair to the pegbox, the violin has suffered no structural damage in almost three hundred years. Indeed, the inside work is so fresh that it has almost the shocking appearance of a modern copy. So many violins have been reworked, the plates thinned and the blocks and linings cut down etc, that the tiny clues which a maker may leave behind, and which may help us to piece together his working methods, have been obliterated. In the case of the `Maria ExMuir Mackenzie' the presence of such details serves to underline the purity of the inside work. The sturdy unaltered corner blocks quite obviously indicate the use of a mould; in fact, the outline of this instrument fits extremely well

around the mould, marked with the letter B and reproduced below (Nos. 11 to 15 in the catalogue of Stradivari relics in the Cremona Museum). The linings, too, retain their strength, and the manner in which the master fixed them into the blocks can clearly be seen. Undoubtably the solid quality of this inside construction work has contributed towards the instrument's excellent state of preservation. However, the most interesting feature of the inside must be the traces of Stradivari's compass, which are still visible on both f holes. The place at which the compass point was fixed is marked by four small pin pricks at the tip of each wing, while the arcs, made by the swinging arm, are to be seen in the vicinity of the f hole nicks. Clearly Stradivari marked the position of the nicks from the inside of the plate and with a compass, not as most modern makers now do, with an outside fhole template. The feature and the method are further described by Sacconi in his book 1 segreti di Stradivari.

The remaining inside work is also remarkably clean, and both ribs and plates reveal traces of the scraper only under the closest scrutiny. The label, which is fixed in the usual place, is of particular interest. As Doring in his book How many Strads? tells us: `The label in this violin is unique being one of the rare examples of the inverted letter "U" in Antonius'.

Finally, before leaving the inside, it is perhaps worth mentioning that the reddish stain visible on the photograph of the fhole appears to be the remains of varnish which has come through the hole and which has soaked into the apparently unsealed inside of the belly. The darker reddish colour of this `varnish' on the inside also occurs outside on the area of the belly protected by the fingerboard. Almost in-



variably such areas show traces of richer colouration, indicating that some fading of the varnish has taken place due to the action of light. Furthermore, Cremonese instruments were apparently varnished after their original wedge shaped boards had been finally fitted. The close proximity of these boards to the belly made it difficult to reach underneath, and as a result much of this area remained unvarnished. The varnish on the remainder of the violin is paler in colour but still rich in quality. It is quite thinly applied and seems closer to the Amati varnish in appearance than to some of Stradivari's later, vivid orange red finishes.

The wood which Stradivari selected for the two piece back has a well defined, small, even figure, coupled with a tight growth. According to Hills, Stradivari more frequently used backs of one piece for the long pattern violins. However, the one dated 1693, and illustrated in the Hill book, has an almost identical two piece back. .

The ribs, which are of remarkably even thickness ranging from 1 mm to 1.1 mm, match the back wood perfectly. The slope of the figure runs very slightly left to right from the belly to the back. In common with almost all Strads it keeps to the same direction all the way around the instrument.

The head, of similar wood to the back and ribs, is boldly cut. Typically, tool marks are visible only on

the vertical surfaces of the second and third turns. The fluting and volutes are cleanly finished. The curves of the flutings have the usual flatish bottoms at the back of the pegbox, running into a rounder curve over the top and under the throat. Several small compass points are visible on the central spine between the flutings their function is also described by Sacconi in 1 segreti. Like all Stradivari's heads, the pegbox is generously wide and deep allowing plenty of room for the strings. Completing this fine set of materials the belly wood is of extremely close growth, widening only slightly in the bouts.

The distinctive feminine outline of the long pattern is as much the result of the rounder quality of the top and bottom bouts as of the extra length. This was a marked change from the flatness across the area of the two end blocks which, to some extent, Stradivari had inherited from the Amati and to which he was later to return.

The edgework and corners on this example are longer and more delicate than we would normally expect from the later golden period. The purfling, however, especially the blacks, is stronger, with joints coming together at the corner in long curving mitres rather than stings.

On both back and front the central cross archings are full to the purfling channel. By contrast a slight scooping in the top and bottom bouts gives the whole arching a barrel like appearance. Whether this arching is due to the slimmer lines of the model or to some remnants of the Amati influence is difficult to say. However, despite the deep working of the wing flutings, the f holes definitely lie on a more convex surface, rather than halfway between the convex and the concave, as was usual with the Amatis.

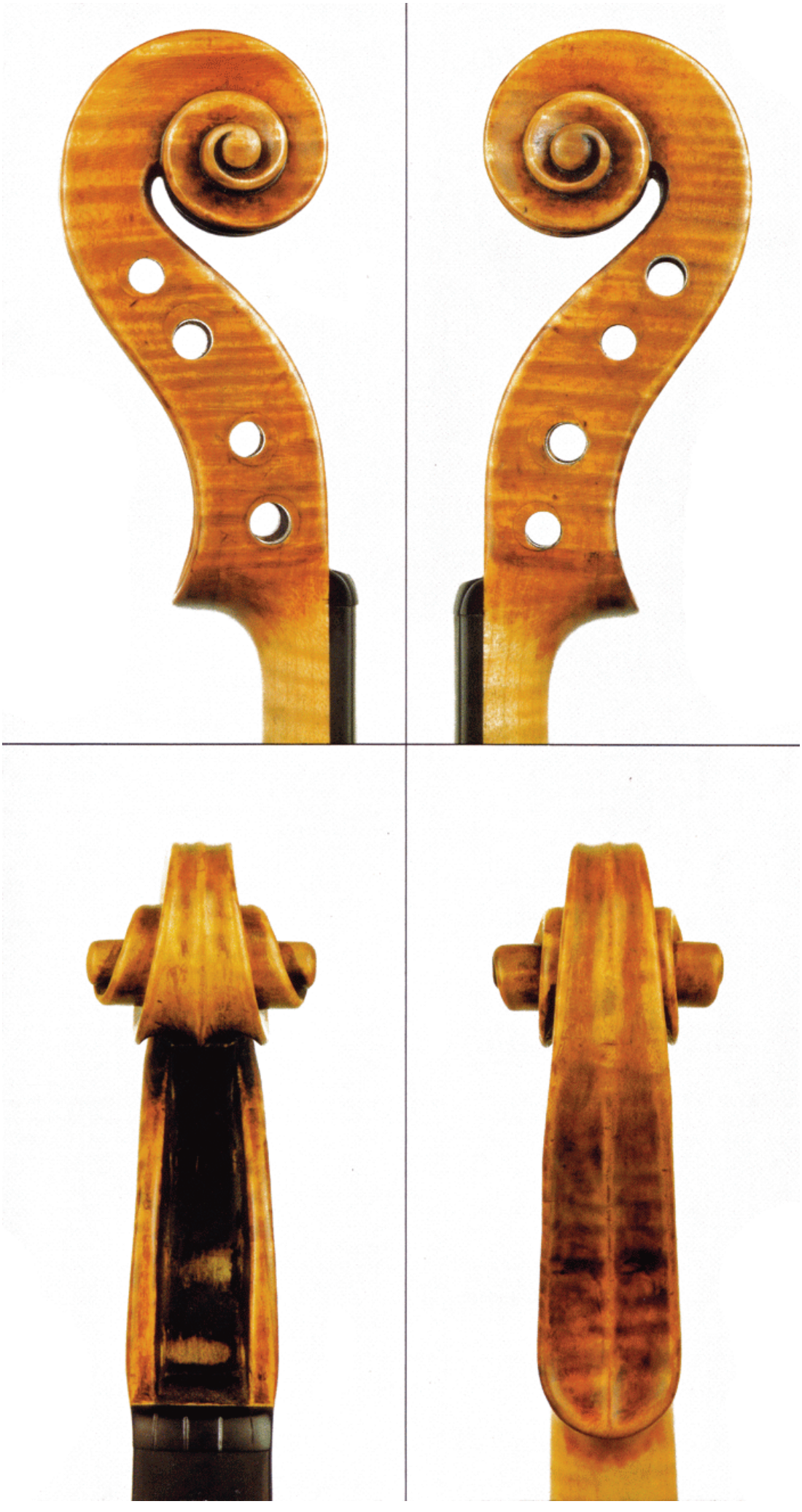
The f holes themselves are pristine, perfect in both cut and design. The four top and bottom circles have obviously been cleanly drilled and are at right angles to the surface of the plate, as is the knife cut central section of the `f' s'. As a result of this right angle cut, the inside edges of the outside sweep of both `f' s' are visible when the instrument is viewed from the front.

Since all photographs and printed outlines distort slightly, I have included with this poster my own reconstruction of the left f hole which may be used in conjunction with the measurements and photographs to better overall effect. For those contemplating a copy of this violin, it is worth pointing out that tonally the `Maria Ex Muir Mackenzie' is magnificent, with both power and quality.

HISTORY

The `Maria Ex Muir Mackenzie' has a long and distinguished history that is outlined in a letter from W.E. Hill & Sons, dated 1902, as follows: `It formerly belonged to the celebrated Collection of M. Charles Willemotte of Antwerp, and was, we believe, purchased by him from Gand of Paris. In 1887, he sold it to Mr. C.G. Meier, an ardent amateur, a German by birth who spent the whole of his life in this country. In due course, this last named gentleman sold the violin to the late W.E. Hill and weubsequently sold it to Mr. Robert Crawford of Edinburgh, who later owned the celebrated "Messie". From Mr. Crawford, the fiddle passed into the hands of David Laurie, a dealer who frequently visited France, and from him it was acquired by an amateur of Lille, Mr. van de Weghe who retained possession of the fiddle until his death. In 1897, it was sold at the Hotel Drouet, we being the purchasers, and resold by us to Mr. Richard Harrison, an exceptionally good amateur violinist and intimate client of our firm'.

As well as a 1902 certificate from W.E. Hill & Sons of London (now Great Missenden), the violin has also been certified by Etienne Vatelot of Paris, Alfred Vidoudez of Geneva and Heinz J. Machold of Bremen. The violin is now in the possession of a professor of music in West Germany. THE STRAD wishes to thank her for giving permission for the violin to be illustrated.

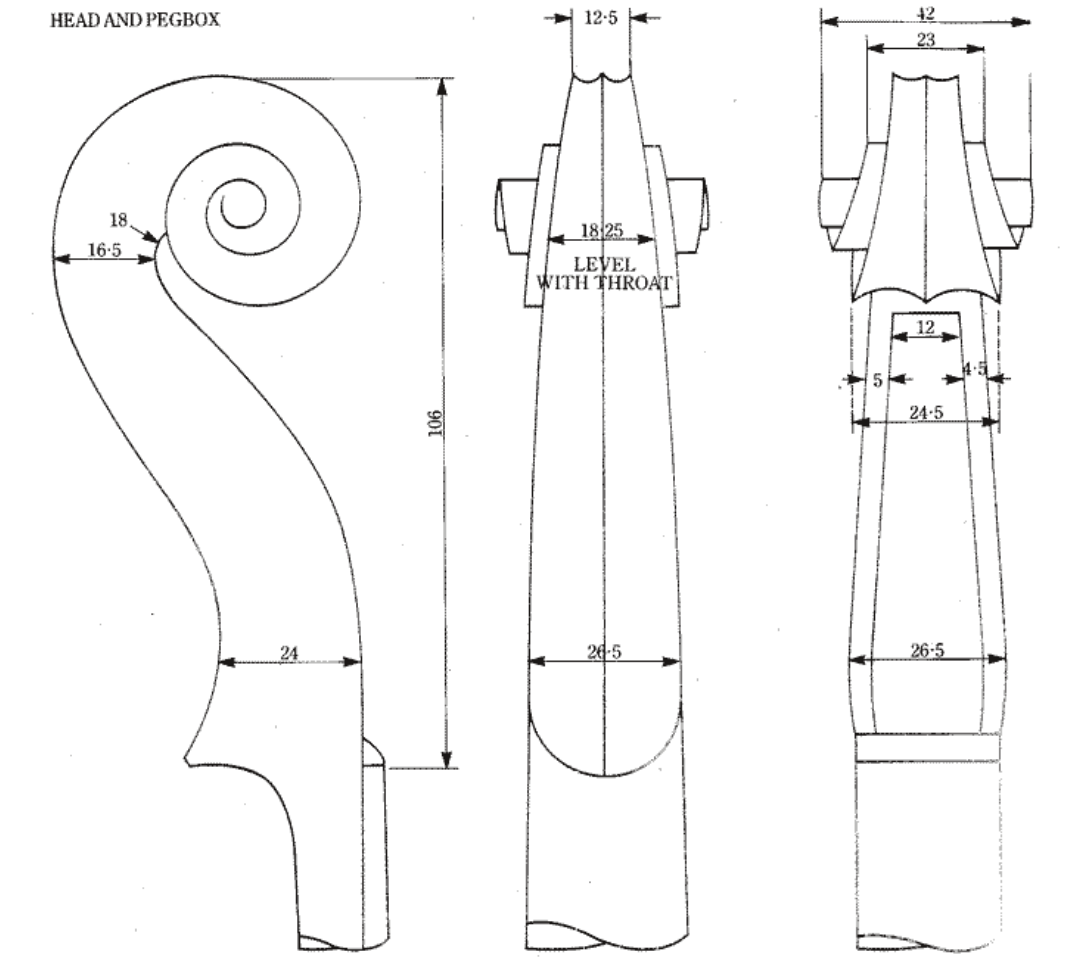


	Back	*Belly*
Length (over arch)	362.5	
Upper bouts	161	161.5 mm
Middle bouts	112	112.5 mm
Lower bouts	202	201 mm

Stop length taken from the left side of the neck: 197 mm
Approximate thickness of the edges, taken from the back only:
Corners 4.5 mm
Centre bouts 4.2 mm
Upper and lower bouts 3.8 to 4 mm
Overhang of the edge from the rib outline: approximately 2.5 mm at centre bouts increasing at corners, and 2 to 2.25 mm around the top and bottom bouts including corner area

Rib heights	*Left*	*Right*
Neck root	29.5	29.5 mm
Upper corner	30.5	30.5 mm
Lower corner	31	30 mm
Endpin	30.5	30.5 mm

Purling: the distance from the edge is 3.5 mm approximately. The total width is 1.6 mm approximately. The width of the whites is 0.7 mm approximately.
The outline is accurate to within 1 mm over the length. The thicknessing measurements, in mm, are viewed from the inside of the plates. The head and *f*-hole drawings are only facsimiles on which to mount the measurements.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