

The Gertrude Clarke Whittall Collection

Library of Congress, Washington DC, USA

The *Castelbarco* violin and cello

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In 1935 the US Library of Congress (LoC) collection of Cremonese instruments was initiated by Gertrude Clarke Whittall (Mrs Matthew John Whittall). According to a LoC web-page Mrs Whittall ‘enlisted the aid of famed violinist Louis Krasner who was able to locate no fewer than five excellent instruments by Antonio Stradivari [...]’¹ Mrs Whittall’s gift to the LoC eventually consisted of three violins, a viola, and a cello – all made by Antonio Stradivari – together with five bows made by François Tourte (1747-1835) and a fund to support the maintenance of the items (which would be seen and heard in public concerts); all the instruments and bows would be displayed in the purpose-built Whittall Pavilion (1939).

The five instruments were:

The *Castelbarco* cello (1697?)

The *Castelbarco* violin (1699?)

The *Ward* violin (1700)

The *Betts* violin (1704)

The *Cassavetti* viola (1727)

Within the archives of the Library of Congress is the formal certificate which was issued by the Librarian, Herbert Putnam, to Mrs Whittall, dated 30th December 1935, indicating receipt of ‘the items noted on the attached sheet’ – the *Castelbarco* violin and cello, the *Betts* violin, and the *Cassavetti* viola, together with two François Tourte violin bows (known as the *Baillet* and the *Russian*) and two un-named Tourte bows, one for the viola and the other for the cello. On 10th February 1936 Mrs Whittall issued an additional condition to her gift, which H Putnam outlines:

“That no one who has ever been employed by ... [you] be permitted to play on the instruments or use the bows without [your] ... permission in writing.” – cf. your supplementary letter of February 10, 1936.²

The reason for Mrs Whittall’s rule with regard to her previous employees – Krasner? – is unknown.

In 1937 Mrs Whittall donated the *Ward* violin and, in January 1938, a purpose-made case for carrying all three violins and the viola. The date on which she donated a fifth Tourte bow (for the *Ward* violin) is unknown.

¹ <https://www.loc.gov/tr/perform/guide/instru.html>. Louis Krasner (1903-1995) commissioned Alban Berg’s *Violin Concerto* and gave the first performance in 1936; he also gave the first performance of Arnold Schoenberg’s *Violin Concerto* in 1940.

² Putnam’s text is reproduced exactly as typed by him (including his editorial insertions). Library of Congress documents were provided to the present author by Carol Lynn Ward-Bamford (Curator of Musical Instruments); photographs of these documents were provided by Carla Shapreau (Curator, Salz Collection of String Instruments, University of California, Berkeley, USA).

A short monograph about the Whittall instruments was written by William Dana Orcutt – *The Stradivari Memorial at Washington, the national capital* – and published in 1938 by the Library of Congress in partnership with the Gertrude Clarke Whittall Foundation. The monograph was designed by William Dana Orcutt ‘and printed at the Plimpton Press under his personal supervision.’

The 1696?/1699?/1701? Castelbarco violin

William Dana Orcutt begins his descriptive account of the *Castelbarco* violin (p. 35 of his monograph) by quoting from a letter (dated 8th May 1931) sent by Alfred Hill³ to ‘Mr [J C?] Freeman’ of The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co., New York, giving a history of ‘the Castelbarco “Stradivari”, dated 1699, [a duplicate] certificate for which, made out in the name of Mrs Renton and dated April, 1907, accompanies this letter [...]’. In his letter Alfred Hill states:

The violin is mentioned in our *Life of Stradivari* on page 48.⁴ When the book was written (in 1902) the figures on the label were 1701, an anachronism I long ago detected, for, although the label was genuine, the figures had been badly bungled, the correct date, in my opinion, being 1698 or '99, so, when the violin came into our possession [in 1906; see p. 9 this account] I decided to right matters and inscribed therein, once and for all, what I believe to be the original date, namely 1699. I have always had a great admiration for this particular fiddle, it fore-shadows the end of the period during which the “Long Stradivari” was the instrument of the Master’s predilection. Its beauty of workmanship and appearance are apparent to all, and its state of purity is beyond criticism.

The accompanying certificate – a copy of that which was originally issued to Mrs Renton on 8th April 1907 – has ‘Duplicate’ hand-written at the top and states:

We certify that the violin in the possession of Mrs Renton [...] was made by Antonio Stradivari whose original label dated Cremona 1699 the instrument bears. [...].

There is an immediately-obvious discrepancy between the ‘figures on the label’ as they were in 1902, i.e. ‘1701’, and the ‘original label dated Cremona 1699’ as identified in the 8th April 1907 certificate and reported in Alfred Hill’s letter of 8th May 1931 (above).

The Library of Congress web-page for their *Castelbarco* violin does not confirm the existence of Alfred Hill’s corrective indication of the instrument’s date, yet the page identifies the date of the violin as ‘1699’. The web-page also states that the violin contains an internal annotation, ‘inscribed in the top [?on the underside of the top plate] in the lower bout on the treble side’:

“The ‘Castelbarco’ Stradivari / for many years in possession / of John Mountford Esq. / A. Hill.”

Ernest Doring, following his personal inspection of the violin, specifies ‘1699’ as the date of the violin, citing ‘Alfred Hill’s statement attributing the work to 1699.’⁵

In their 1902 monograph, p. 48, the Hills write:

Fine examples of the “long Stradivari” are those in possession of –
[...]

Mr. J. Mountford, 16-- , and ----.

The latter is a most charming specimen, though unfortunately its original date has been altered to 1701.⁶

³ (of the London violin dealers W. E. Hill & Sons)

⁴ Antonio Stradivari: his life and work (1644-1737), London, 1902.

⁵ *How many Strads?* (1945), pp. 99-100.

⁶ Note that Alfred Hill’s 1931 letter does not identify ‘figures’ which had been ‘altered’.

Identical text appears in the 1909 second edition of the Hills' monograph (apart from the omission of the word 'and'). It is noticeable that the Hills offer no suggestion for the 'original [pre-alteration] date' of Mr Mountford's 'latter' violin, nor, in their 1909 second edition, do they acknowledge Alfred Hill's corrective inscription of '1699'.

Within the Cozio Archive of the Tarisio.com website the *Castelbarco* violin (ID 40117) is dated '1699' in the web-page title but is also identified as having an 'original label, dated 1696, but changed to 1701.' It is curious that the compiler of the Tarisio.com web-page should be able to specify an 'original label, dated 1696'; it raises questions over why the Puttick & Simpson employees, in 1862, could not see the same date (see below for further information), likewise the Hills in 1902 and in 1906-07, and Ernest Doring in 1945.⁷

Cesare Pompeo, Il Conte Castelbarco-Visconti-Simonetta, was born on 30th November 1782 and died on 28th August 1860. Alfred Hill's aforementioned letter of 8th May 1931 refers to the auction of Count Castelbarco's instrument collection:

In 1862, the Count decided [posthumously!] to sell his Collection, which, accompanied by an Italian agent of the name of Pietro Bozzolo, was sent to London for that purpose.

The sale of 'The Superb Collection of Cremona Instruments of the late Count Castelbarco, of Milan' took place on Thursday 26th June 1862 'at three o'clock most punctually' at the London offices (47 Leicester Square) of the auctioneers Puttick & Simpson (P&S).⁸ It is of significance that on the same afternoon, and at the same location, the Castelbarco auction was preceded by two other auctions:

- the first began 'at one o'clock most punctually' and consisted of 'A Small Collection of [printed] Music' (Waltzes, Quadrilles, piano duets, etc.)
- the second began 'at half-past One precisely' (Lots 122-249) and consisted of pianos and harmoniums, flutes and clarinets, miscellaneous items, and some string-family instruments including examples identified as having been made by Stradiuarius, Guarnerius, Rugerius, Amati, Jacobus Steiner, Lupot, Fendt, etc.⁹ According to the P&S ledger, two individuals – 'G Lott' and 'J Lott' – successfully bid for sixteen items; these included:

Lot 152: 'A Tenor' [viola], which was bought by J Lott for seven shillings.

Lot 191: 'A Violin by AMATI', was bought by G Lott for £1.11.0 (one Pound and eleven shillings).

Lot 212: 'A fine Violoncello by LEOPOLD WIDHOLM [1747-1806], formerly the property of Mr. Lindley',¹⁰ was bought by G Lott for £17.10.0 (seventeen Pounds and ten shillings).

Lot 213: 'A violoncello case and a bow by Dodd', was also bought by G Lott (for eleven shillings). In the auction ledger for both Lot 212 and Lot 213 the clerk has written the name 'Hudson' against that of G Lott – it seems that the latter was acting as an agent for the former; further identification of 'Hudson' has not been located.

Lot 214: was a violin, the first of a set of instruments which had been owned by 'a deceased Baronet'. The violin is described in the catalogue as 'A Violin by NICOLAS AMATI, grand

⁷ The present author was unable to obtain from the LoC a photograph of the violin's label.

⁸ All the P&S auction documents and ledgers are archived at the British Library in London.

⁹ James Coover, *Music at Auction*, Harmonie Park Press (1988), p. 183, mistakenly dates these auctions to 16th June rather than 26th.

¹⁰ Robert Lindley (1776-1855) was a celebrated English cellist.

pattern, double purfled, and jewelled, *very beautiful and perfect*'. In the ledger the clerk has identified the purchaser as 'J Lott (Vuillaume)'. The price paid was £60 (sixty Pounds).¹¹

Lot 216: 'A violin bow by Tourte, *gold and tortoiseshell mounted*', was bought by G Lott for £3.

Lot 235: a 'Double mahogany case', was also bought by G Lott, for sixteen shillings.

Lot 236: 'A very fine old Tenor [viola], full size', was bought by J Lott for £1.18.0 (one Pound, eighteen shillings).

In addition:

Lot 240: 'A very fine Tenor by GASPAR DA SALA', was bought by 'Statham' for £1.10.0 (one Pound, ten shillings); the name 'Statham' reappears in the P&S ledger for the subsequent Castelbarco auction (see p. 7 of this account).

Lot 246: 'A fine old DOUBLE BASS by KENNEDY', was bought by 'Hill' (assumed to be William Ebsworth Hill) for £6.10.0 (six Pounds and ten shillings). This Double Bass is the only instrument listed by the ledger-clerk as having been bought by Hill, who, it is assumed, was standing in the P&S Auction Gallery at the very end of this second auction. If this assumption is correct it is implausible that Hill (likewise George and John Lott) would have left the Gallery before the Castelbarco auction started, a few minutes later, at 3.00p.m.

Within the somewhat murky world of violin-copying during the nineteenth century in England the name of John Frederick (II) Lott (1804-1870), a.k.a. 'Jack', stands above all others; his brother, George (1801-1869), also made copies of violins but with less panache and flair. John Lott's copies of Guarneri *del Gesù* violins, in particular, have been described as 'original fakes' so well did Lott capture the 'careless' constructional character of the originals. Lott spent many years travelling and working in Europe and, as a result, could speak French; when Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume (who could not speak English) visited London it was John Lott who acted as his translator and agent.

Clearly, both George and John Lott were present at the second P&S auction on Thursday 26th June 1862; the auction ledger reveals that, in addition to buying for themselves, George bought on behalf of 'Hudson' while John bought on behalf of Vuillaume (who may, or may not, have been standing by his side in the Auction Gallery). If, as is stated by Alfred Hill (see below, p. 5), Vuillaume *was* present at the Castelbarco auction, and bought instruments via an agent, he would surely have used John Lott in that rôle; however, the P&S ledger for the 'three o'clock' Castelbarco auction makes no mention of J Lott, G Lott, or Vuillaume (see the tabulation later in this account) which suggests that Vuillaume was not present. A further consideration might be: would Vuillaume have thought it worth his time and effort to travel from Paris to London in order to bid through an agent? – a simple letter of instruction to John Lott would surely have sufficed. Indeed, Vuillaume could have bid for the Amati violin (and any other instruments) through Puttick & Simpson themselves:

*Gentlemen who cannot attend the Sale may have their Commissions faithfully executed by their obedient Servants, PUTTICK AND SIMPSON.*¹²

¹¹ This violin is very likely the 1656 Amati which has double purfling on both plates and fleur-de-lys designs at the corners; the designs have previously been identified as being enhanced with jewels. Information from the Smithsonian Institution, http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_763853 (accessed August 2017), indicates that the 'jewels' are made of glass.

¹² Puttick & Simpson Conditions of Sale.

There were 31 Lots (of which 13 were bows and cases) in the Castelbarco auction; there was also 'An Autograph Letter of Antonio Stradiuarius, 12 Agosto 1708'.¹³ The Stradivari instruments being auctioned were:

Violins:	1685	'yellowish red varnish, in the most perfect preservation' [Lot 8]
	1699	'large pattern, fine yellowish red varnish, highly preserved' [Lot 2]
	1701	'brilliant red varnish, in the highest preservation' [Lot 6]
	1712	'large pattern, rich red varnish, in fine preservation' [Lot 1]
	1713	'the back of one piece, slab wood, yellowish red varnish, highly preserved' [Lot 9]
Viola:	1715	'the back in one piece, rich red varnish' [Lot 5]
Cellos:	1687	'reddish brown varnish A rare and important Instrument' [Lot 28]
	1697	'grand pattern, red varnish, in the most perfect preservation An Instrument of the highest degree of rarity' [Lot 26].

The 1862 P&S auction pre-dates, by more than 40 years, the date-correcting inscription – '1699' – implemented by Alfred Hill in 1906, and therefore it must be Count Castelbarco's 1701 violin which had the 'genuine label' with the 'badly bungled figures' (and which, today, is apparently the violin owned by the Library of Congress). The LoC violin cannot be that which, in 1862, was dated '1699'.

The full P&S catalogue entry for the 1701 violin was:

[Lot] 6 A Violin by ANTONIUS STRADIUARIUS, anno 1701
brilliant red varnish, in the highest preservation.

The aforementioned Hill certificate of 1907 specifies 'the varnish of a golden-orange colour.' W D Orcutt (*op. cit.*, p. 35) specifies 'golden orange'. Ernest Doring (*op. cit.*) identifies 'a rich golden-orange color.' William Henley offers 'rich golden-orange varnish.'¹⁴ Such a colour is confirmed by the high-quality photographs provided by Jost Thöne;¹⁵ Thöne's historian defines the varnish as 'of a dark orange colour over a golden ground.' It is difficult to reconcile the Puttick & Simpson description – *brilliant red varnish* – with the general agreement that the LoC violin has 'golden-orange' varnish.

According to the P&S auction ledger the 1701 violin was bought by 'Charlesworth' for £135 (135 GBP); further identification of Charlesworth has not been located. Charlesworth did not buy any other instruments at the auction.

Alfred Hill's May 1931 letter to J C Freeman continues:

The instruments were put up for auction in Puttick & Simpson's sale-room, and, in my Father's [copy of the auction] catalogue, I find this violin enumerated under lot 6 and described as "a violin by Antonio Stradivari dated 1701: in the highest state of preservation".¹⁶ It was bought by an agent named Jordan, on behalf of Vuillaume, who came from Paris to attend the sale, for £135: he also purchased several other of the best instruments.

In light of Alfred Hill's punctuation (reproduced above exactly as in his letter) it might be assumed that 'who' and 'he' refers to 'Jordan' rather than to the Paris-based dealer Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume.¹⁷ However, in a letter dated 5th January 1934 (concerning the 1697 *Castelbarco* cello; see later in this

¹³ James Coover (*op. cit.*) reproduces (pp. 185-188) the auctioneer's annotated catalogue for the Castelbarco auction as well as the relevant pages from the account ledger.

¹⁴ William Henley, *Antonio Stradivari: His Life and Instruments*, Amati Publishing (1961), p. 34.

¹⁵ Jost Thöne, *Antonius Stradiuarius*, Vol. II, pp. 72-79.

¹⁶ It is curious that Alfred Hill does not convey the catalogue's identification of the 'brilliant red varnish'.

¹⁷ The name 'Jordan' does not appear in the P&S ledger (and why would Vuillaume use 'Jordan' as an agent when, as already shown, both of the Lott brothers attended the afternoon's auctions?).

account) Alfred reiterates his statement – see above – that Vuillaume was present at the 1862 P&S auction. Alfred also places his father, William Ebsworth Hill, at the same auction:

Prior to his death[!], the Count [Castelbarco] decided to sell his Collection, for which purpose, the instruments were sent to London in 1862. My Father was present at the Sale¹⁸, a catalogue of which is actually in our possession. [...]. Vuillaume, who came from Paris to attend the Sale, negotiated the purchase of most of the good instruments [...].

With respect to the statement that Vuillaume 'purchased several other of the best instruments' or 'negotiated the purchase of most of the good instruments' see the tabulation below and on p.7 of this account.

William Euing [sic] (1788-1874) was an insurance broker based in Glasgow. During his life he amassed an extensive book collection which he donated to the University of Glasgow; included in his bequest was a large collection of musical items. Within the University's holdings is Euing's copy of the 1862 Castelbarco auction catalogue.¹⁹ On his copy of the catalogue Euing noted the prices at which the instruments were sold and the names of the purchasers. Strangely, his annotations do not always agree with those which were entered into the P&S ledger:

	<u>P&S auction ledger</u>	<u>William Euing</u>
Lot 1 Stradivari violin, 1712	Holloway £70	Bennett £70
Lot 2 Stradivari violin, 1699	Bennett £56	Holloway £56
Lot 5 Stradivari viola, 1715	Pearson £100 , Plowden £120 ²⁰	Pierson £100
Lot 6 Stradivari violin, 1701	Charlesworth £135	Jordan £135
Lot 8 Stradivari violin, 1685	Piatti £135	Piatti £135
Lot 9 Stradivari violin, 1713	Pearson £90	Pearson £90
Lot 26 Stradivari cello, 1697	Holloway £210	Holloway £210
Lot 28 Stradivari cello, 1687	Bennett £115	Bennett £115

The name of 'Bennett' is unlikely to refer to the collector Richard Bennett (b.1848) of Southport, Lancashire; it is not plausible that he would have been buying instruments at a London auction house at the age of thirteen or fourteen. 'Plowden' is certainly C H C Plowden who was a collector (d.1867); 'Piatti' is certainly the cellist Alfredo Piatti (1822-1901). 'Pearson'/'Pierson' appears to have been the owner (prior to 1890) of the 1710 *Lord Dunraven* Stradivari violin and also (around 1895) the *Ashburnham* violin of 1718. 'Holloway' was possibly Thomas Holloway (1800-1883) a Victorian manufacturer of patent medicines who became immensely wealthy and, as a philanthropist, funded the founding of a sanatorium at Virginia Water, Surrey, England, and Royal Holloway College at Egham, Surrey, England. According to G C Boase (who contributed the entry on Thomas Holloway for the *Dictionary of National Biography*) Thomas, as a child, had violin lessons with a Danish teacher named 'Lawrance'. In a biographical essay²¹ – *Thomas Holloway, Victorian Philanthropist* – the author, Anthony Harrison-Barbet, reflects on Holloway's purchases of Victorian fine art:

¹⁸ (a statement which supports the proposition that it was W. E. Hill who bought the Kennedy double-bass)

¹⁹ Archived as 'Special Collection, C.d.46'.

²⁰ The situation with the 1715 viola would appear to have been as follows: that 'Pearson' was the successful bidder, at £100, but a dispute ensued and the viola was immediately re-auctioned; C H C Plowden then out-bid Pearson at £120. Such a situation is covered by Puttick & Simpson's Conditions of Sale: 'I. The highest Bidder to be the Buyer; and if any dispute arise between two or more Bidders, the Lots so disputed to be immediately put up again and resold.'

²¹ Published by Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey, 1994. Thomas Holloway's violin lessons are reported on p. 14 of the essay.

Thomas also started to buy fine paintings – again as an investment rather than for any intrinsic aesthetic merit they may have possessed; we have no reason to suppose that he was in any way a connoisseur.

If 'Holloway', at the 1862 P&S auction, was Thomas Holloway (as above), perhaps his purchase of instruments was also a matter of investment. It is noticeable that 'Holloway' bought three violins and a cello (see tabulations above and below) costing £338, a total which represents slightly more than 25% of the entire sale proceeds from the Castelbarco auction. Such an outlay would barely register with someone who, in 1864, spent £40,000, world-wide, advertising his pills and ointments.²²

A possible alternative identification of 'Holloway' is as Thomas Holloway who was a music publisher with premises in Hanway Street, London (just north of Oxford Street at the Tottenham Court Road intersection). However, this identification is countered by noting that Holloway retired from business in 1864 and 'about two thousand engraved music plates embracing valuable copyright works, forming the stock of Mr. T. Holloway' were auctioned by Puttick & Simpson on 6th July 1864. It seems most unlikely that, two years before his retirement, 'Mr. T. Holloway' would be spending £338 on four Cremonese instruments.

Clearly, there are contradictions within these different sources – P&S ledger, William Euing, William Ebsworth Hill, Alfred Hill. It is difficult to imagine that the auctioneer (or his clerk) would have made mistakes in registering the buyers' names (especially when large sums of money needed to be promptly and accurately collected from the successful bidders, and payments distributed, just as promptly and accurately, to the vendors) but, equally, it is difficult to imagine that William Ebsworth Hill would have mis-identified the successful bidders. William Euing's identification of the purchaser of the 1701 violin – 'Jordan' – might suggest that he made a simple mistake, but, if so, W E Hill made the same mistake.²³

Alfred Hill was born in 1862; his elder brothers, Henry and Arthur, were born in 1857 and 1860 respectively; none of the three brothers would have had any personal knowledge of the 1862 P&S Castelbarco auction; subsequently-gained knowledge would have been gleaned from their father's documents (William Ebsworth died of senile dementia in 1895). Some of Alfred Hill's statements in his letters of 1931 and 1934 (for the latter see later in this account) may have been built upon slender evidential support.

One further uncertainty is created by Alfred Hill's comment (in his 1931 letter) that 'he [Vuillaume] also purchased several other of the best instruments', a comment which is echoed in his letter of 1934: 'Vuillaume [...] negotiated the purchase of most of the good instruments'. The non-Stradivari instruments were bought as follows:

	<u>P&S auction ledger</u>	<u>William Euing</u>
Lot 12 Nicolas Amati violin, 1674	Statham £40.19.0 ²⁴	Statham £40.19.0
Lot 13 Andreas Amati violin, 1701[!]	Holloway £37.16.0	Holloway £37.16.0
Lot 16 Nicolas Amati violin, 1647	Pearson £25	Wilson £25
Lot 17 Nicolas Amati violin, 1658	Holloway £21	Holloway £21
Lot 20 Joseph Guarnerius 'son of Andrew' violin, 1766[!] Calthorpe £22		Calthorpe £22
Lot 21 Joseph Guarnerius 'son of Andrew' violin, 1740 Bennett £19		Bennett £19
Lot 30 Nicolas Amati cello, 1687[!]	Gordon £130	Gordon £130

²² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²³ A just-possible explanation might be that Euing, although he had obtained a copy of the catalogue, did not/could not travel from Glasgow to London to attend the auction, but, wanting to know what had happened – and since the auction report in *The Times* newspaper (see later) provided prices but no names – perhaps wrote to W E Hill, and the names which are found in Euing's copy of the catalogue are those which were provided for him by Hill.

²⁴ Forty pounds, nineteen shillings, no pence (i.e. 39 guineas). See earlier (p. 4) for 'Statham'.

Unless multiple errors were made when P&S were typesetting their auction catalogue at least three of Count Castelbarco's instruments contained fraudulent labels; the instruments themselves may also have been fraudulent. Andrea Amati was born *c.*1505 and died in 1577; Nicola (or Niccolò) Amati was born in 1596 and died in 1684; Giuseppe Guarneri *filius Andreae* was born in 1666 and died in 1740.

No further identification has been located for 'Statham', 'Wilson', or 'Gordon', but they surely cannot all have been agents acting for Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume; if they were agents why did the ledger-clerk not enter Vuillaume's name against theirs as he had done earlier that afternoon with respect to the purchase by John Lott of the £60 Amati violin?

'Calthorpe' may have been the politician Frederick Gough-Calthorpe, 5th Baron Calthorpe (1826-1893).

With just two exceptions, the remaining Lots comprised bows and cases; the two exceptions were a 'Jacob Steiner' viola (Piatti, £25) and the Stradivari letter of 12th August 1708 which was bought by 'Fite' for £8.

The Castelbarco auction was reported in *The Times* newspaper on Saturday 28th June 1862; the report does not identify any of the purchasers:

A collection of fine Cremona instruments was on Thursday brought to the hammer by Messrs. Puttick and Simpson of Leicester Square. Prominent among them were the well-known instruments of the late Count Castelbarco, of Milan. [...]. The following were the more remarkable lots, with the prices at which they sold:

Lot 1, a violin by Stradiuarius, date 1712, £70

Lot 2, ditto, 1699, £56

Lot 5, a tenor, ditto, 1715, £100

Lot 6, a violin, ditto, 1701, £135

[...]

Lot 29 [26], a violoncello by Stradiuarius, 1697, £210

Lot 28, ditto, 1687, £115

[...]

The 17 articles of this collection produced the large sum of £1,239. 15s[hillings].²⁵

The Hills also report on the Castelbarco auction in their 1902 *Stradivari* monograph (p. 273):

1862 At the sale of the collection of instruments formed by Count Castelbarco, of Milan, held in London in 1862, the highest prices paid for Stradivari instruments were: A viola, transformed from a viol, dated 1715, £120; a violin dated 1701, £135;²⁶ another dated 1685, £135; two violoncellos, dated respectively 1687 and 1697, were sold for £115 and £210.

Alfred Hill's 1931 letter to J C Freeman continues: 'Within a short time, he [Vuillaume] sold it [the 1701 violin] to Dr Tesse of Douai, a passable amateur, who, after retaining it until 1872, sold it back to Vuillaume.' The next owner was David Laurie who sold the violin to the composer Richard Wagner.²⁷ Alfred Hill writes:

²⁵ The 'large sum' of £1,239 and 15 shillings reflects the 1715 viola being bought at £100 rather than at £120.

²⁶ cf. Alfred Hill's letter-text of 8th May 1931 (p. 2 of this account).

²⁷ Richard Wagner is not mentioned in Laurie's autobiographical *Reminiscences of a Fiddle Dealer*.

[Wagner's] peace of mind being disturbed by the doubts cast upon the authenticity of the instrument by some of the German experts Laurie forthwith rescinded the purchase – a fact related to me by Laurie himself, who, bringing the violin to London [in 1873-74?], sold it to my Father for £270.²⁸

Alfred Hill does not identify the German experts and it is noticeable that he does not reject their doubts concerning the violin's authenticity; perhaps he expected J C Freeman to conclude that since Alfred's father bought the violin from David Laurie the German doubts were not valid.

According to Alfred Hill the next owner, in 1875, was John Mountford, 'a modest amateur' who 'kept a tavern in the Edgware Road'. Mountford 'numbered amongst other well known visitors, Joachim, Piatti, Strauss, Ries and Lady Halle, to which galaxy of talent, I would add the names of my Father and his three sons!'²⁹ Mountford sold the violin back to the Hills in 1906 (it was surely at this date that Alfred Hill apparently inscribed '1699' somewhere inside the violin) and the Hills then sold it to Mrs Renton in 1907. Alfred Hill writes:

This lady parted with the fiddle in 1928, when it was taken to the States: its subsequent history is known to you.³⁰

Alfred Hill's phraseology clearly indicates that it was not to J C Freeman that Mrs Renton sold her violin; according to Ernest Doring (*op. cit.*, p. 99) the purchaser was the collector Nathan E Posner, of Beverly Hills, California. It would seem that Posner, perhaps early in 1931, consigned the violin to the Wurlitzer company in New York prompting J C Freeman to write to Alfred Hill for historical information and a duplicate certificate – hence Hill's reply of 8th May 1931.³¹

The Library of Congress owns a letter sent by J C Freeman to Mrs Whittall's agent – Louis Krasner – on 27th February 1934. Freeman writes: 'With reference to insurance on the Castelbarco Violin and also the Castelbarco Violon-Cello, both of which were formerly in our collection, my opinion is that you should have coverage as follows. [...].' A few days later (3rd March 1934) the *Castelbarco* violin was sold by Posner to Mrs Whittall; the LoC owns a 'payment received' document – seemingly an entirely plain sheet of paper – on which is written:

March 3, 1934; Sold to Mrs. Matthew J. Whittall one Antonius Stradivarius violin dated 1699 known as the "Castelbarco" for the sum of thirty five thousand dollars (\$35,000.00). Payment received. N. E. Posner.³²

The duplicate certificate supplied by the Hills to J C Freeman displays an annotation written along the left-side margin:

The violin designated in this certificate is now the property of Mrs Matthew John Whittall of Boston, U.S.A., July 21st, 1934.

It is not clear whether the word 'now' was intended to indicate that it was only on 21st July 1934 that Mrs Whittall became the full owner of the violin or whether 21st July 1934 was simply the date on which the annotation was written – probably the latter.

The rather ornate handwriting of the annotation is found again at the end of the aforementioned Hill-Freeman letter of 8th May 1931; at that location the unknown annotator has repeated, exactly, the side-margin text which is found on the duplicate certificate. In both locations the annotation is counter-

²⁸ In 1873 Alfred Hill was eleven years old.

²⁹ It is quite out of character that W E Hill and his three sons, exemplars of sobriety and rectitude, should patronise a tavern.

³⁰ i.e. known to J C Freeman of The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co.

³¹ What had happened to the original certificate which the Hills had issued to Mrs Renton on 8th April 1907?

³² It is noticeable that Posner states that the violin is 'dated 1699'.

signed, in ink, 'W. E. Hill & Sons', which demonstrates that the two annotated documents were sent back to Bond Street, London, to be counter-signed by a representative of the firm.³³

Alfred Hill's letter of 1931 appears to have been a principal source for the historical narratives which are provided by W D Orcutt (1938), Ernest Doring (1945), William Henley (1961) and the web-pages of the LoC. The uncertainties which flow from the content of the letter render it a source of questionable reliability.

Unknowns within the commonly understood history of the LoC *Castelbarco* violin include:

1. the period between the June 1862 auction and Vuillaume's sale of 'a' violin to Dr Tesse
2. what were the reasons for the doubts expressed by the German violin experts?
3. was it simply to avoid reputational damage that David Laurie so quickly refunded the purchase monies to Richard Wagner?
4. should the present-day investigator assume that because William Ebsworth Hill subsequently bought Wagner's violin from Laurie the German experts must have been mistaken?
5. why does the Puttick & Simpson specification of the 1701 violin's varnish as 'brilliant red' not match with the 'golden-orange' colour identified by so many others?
6. who was 'Charlesworth'? (and if he was not a Vuillaume agent how did the 1701 violin which he bought apparently come to be in Vuillaume's possession?).

Jost Thöne specifies calliper measurements (back/front) of the *Castelbarco* violin as:

UB width 160/162mm; CB width 105.5/106mm; LB width 199.5/201mm; Length 358/358mm.³⁴

A Library of Congress web-page specifies the measurements as:

UB width 159mm; CB width 104mm; LB width 197.8mm; Length 355.5mm.³⁵

The same LoC website states: 'The "Castelbarco" [violin] is among the last of these long-form instruments – slightly longer in body length [than?] but also narrower across the bouts.'

The two body-length measurements (in particular) are difficult to reconcile; perhaps '355.5mm' was a typographical mistake and should have been '358.5mm'.

The 1697? *Castelbarco* cello

The history of this cello is even more problematic than that of the 1701 violin since it is tangled together with another Stradivari cello which is known as the *Fau*.

The difficulties begin on the Library of Congress web-pages for their *Castelbarco* cello where they identify it as having been made in 1699;³⁶ its label-date is actually 1697 (i.e. it is apparently the cello which was Lot 26 at the 1862 Puttick & Simpson auction). As shown earlier, the Lot 26 cello was

³³ See later in this account for information relating to the certificate and letter issued for the LoC *Castelbarco* cello.

³⁴ Jost Thöne, *Antonius Stradiuarius*, Vols. I-IV (2010); the measurement data is presented on an accompanying DVD.

³⁵ <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200155589/> (accessed May 2017).

³⁶ <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.ihas.200155598/default.html> (accessed May 2017).

bought for £210 by 'Holloway', this name being specified both in the P&S ledger and in William Euing's annotated copy of the auction catalogue:

26 A Violoncello by ANTONIUS STRADIUARIUS, anno 1697, grand pattern,
*red varnish, in the most perfect preservation*³⁷
 An Instrument of the highest degree of rarity

The P&S descriptive comment – 'grand pattern' – would suggest that the Lot 26 cello was of large proportions. Supportive of the P&S comment and of their evaluation – 'An Instrument of the highest degree of rarity' – is William D Orcutt who states (*op. cit.*, p. 43) that the *Castelbarco* cello 'bears the Stradivari date of 1697 and was one of the three violoncellos of its period which have not been reduced in size.'³⁸ Basic measurements of the *Castelbarco* cello, from the LoC and from Jost Thöne, are reasonably consistent:

	UB max. width	CB min. width	LB max. width	Body length
LoC:	355mm (back/calliper)	no measurement	452.2mm (back/calliper)	774mm (back/tape)
Thöne:	356.7mm (back)	241.2mm (back)	453.6mm (back)	772.1mm (back) ³⁹

As already indicated, the Hill brothers state that 'two violoncellos, dated respectively 1687 and 1697, were sold [at the Castelbarco auction] for £115 and £210.' It is noticeable that the Hills do not suggest that the physicalities of the two violoncellos are in any way inappropriately represented by their label dates. However, while the P&S catalogue describes the 1697 cello as being of a 'grand pattern' (although smaller than the *Medici* and the *Servais* celli) the 1687 cello, apparently made ten years earlier, is not so described⁴⁰ which might suggest that it was of normal proportions, i.e. the proportions which are demonstrated by post-1707 '*forma B*' celli (see footnote 69 for measurements).

In the aforementioned letter dated 5th January 1934 (see p. 6 of this account) from Alfred Hill to Louis Krasner (who had just bought the 1697 *Castelbarco* cello from the Hills and would subsequently sell it to Mrs Whittall), the former writes:

[...] the [Castelbarco] instruments were sent to London in 1862. My Father was present at the Sale, a catalogue of which is actually in our possession. The above violoncello figures therein as Lot 26, and was bought in for £210 (two hundred and ten pounds). Vuillaume, who came from Paris to attend the Sale, negotiated the purchase of most of the good instruments, amongst which was this "Stradivari" [cello].⁴¹ In 1863 he [Vuillaume] sold it to an Italian amateur of the name of Egidio Fabbri [...].

It is not known why Alfred Hill should state that the Lot 26 cello was 'bought in' at the auction (i.e. the cello did not reach its reserve price and therefore was withdrawn from the auction and returned to

³⁷ The varnish on the LoC 1697 *Castelbarco* cello is orange-brown.

³⁸ Two other un-cut celli are the 1690 *Medici* (Florence) and the 1701 *Servais*; both instruments are of almost identical size but that size is significantly larger than the *Castelbarco* cello at the Library of Congress. *Medici* 364/248/465.5/792.5mm; *Servais* 363/245.7/466.8/791.5mm. In addition, the *Lord Aylesford* cello of 1696 is specified on Tarisio.com/Cozio Archive (ID 40267) as having measurements of 362/255/461/794mm.

³⁹ Thöne, *Antonius Stradiuarius*, Vol. I, pp. 314-325, and DVD. Thöne's photographs of the *Castelbarco* cello are specified as being at 97% of true size; the diagrammatic measurements provided on the associated DVD are similarly specified at 97% of true size (which seems to indicate that the measurements were taken from the photographs, not the instrument itself). Thöne's 97% measurements have been recalculated to 100%.

⁴⁰ '[Lot] 28 A Violoncello by ANTONIUS STRADIUARIUS, anno 1687, *reddish-brown varnish*. A rare and important Instrument.'

⁴¹ Alfred Hill's comment – 'Vuillaume [...] *negotiated* the purchase of most of the good instruments' (present author's italics) – might suggest that, after the conclusion of the auction, Vuillaume negotiated privately with the successful bidders to buy their instruments from them (Vuillaume presumably paying a higher price than that which the bidders had just paid) but this seems an unnecessarily complicated and risky method of obtaining the instruments.

the vendor). The P&S ledger (likewise William Euing's copy of the auction catalogue) clearly indicates that the cello was sold to 'Holloway' for £210, the *Times* newspaper report states that the cello was sold for £210 (see p. 8 of this account), and the Hills, in their 1902 monograph, also state that the cello was sold for £210 (see p. 8). Alfred Hill's use of the word 'in' (as in 'bought in') may have been simply a slip of the fingers on the typewriter keys but it is disconcerting that the resultant contradiction with his next sentence was not observed before he posted his letter.

As indicated earlier, Vuillaume's name does not appear anywhere in the P&S documentation for the Castelbarco auction. It is not known how the 1697 cello which was bought by 'Holloway' was subsequently obtained (apparently) by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume.

According to an historical narrative published on a Library of Congress web-page, after the death of Count Castelbarco the 1697 cello passed through J-B Vuillaume to Egidio Fabbri, of Rome. 'It later came into the possession of [Fabbri's] son-in-law, the Marchese Giovanni de Piccolellis and then went into obscurity'. The web-page further indicates that the cello was subsequently discovered in New York, was taken to London (to the firm of W. E. Hill & Sons), but returned to New York (to Wurlitzer) and then passed to Mrs Whittall in 1934.⁴²

Alternatively, Philip Kass states:

Conte Cesare Castelbarco's quartet had been sold to Vuillaume in 1862 [not auctioned?] and subsequently separated. Vuillaume sold the cello to Egidio Fabbri, related by marriage to the Marchese de Piccolellis [...]. The Marchese's son was a cellist, a pupil of Servais, and he used the instrument throughout his life. On his death it was returned to the Fabbri family [...] and in the 1920s it was stored in their New York home.⁴³

Egidio Fabbri's daughter, Alice, married Ottavio Antonio de Piccolellis (1861-1928) in 1891; Ottavio, a cellist, was the son of Marchese Giovanni de Piccolellis (1839-1912, author of *Liutai Antichi e Moderni*, 1885). Ottavio's teacher at the Brussels Conservatoire was not Adrien-François Servais (as might be assumed from the reference by Philip Kass to 'Servais') since Adrien-François died in 1866; Ottavio's teacher was Joseph Servais (1850-1885) the youngest son of Adrien-François. If, 'on [Ottavio's] death', his cello was returned to the Fabbri family then that restitution took place in 1928, possibly 1929. Ernest Doring (*op. cit.*, pp. 25-26) relates going to evaluate the cello, at a New York mansion, but does not provide a date for this event:

A telephone call brought me to an imposing edifice in an exclusive residential section [of New York] to pass on the merits of an old violoncello regarding which, it was explained, there was a question as to the advisability of carriage to Europe, whither the owner was shortly journeying. When I was ushered into a room in which a variety of articles such as trunks and appurtenances of travel were stored, as well as a 'cello case of the usual heavy wood construction in common use abroad, the latter was placed before me with the request that I examine the instrument enclosed within. [...] Further examination confirmed my first impression; here was a real gem, one of first magnitude, stored away in a New York mansion, apparently without knowledge of the owner that it was an object of great value. [...] For it was a Stradivari, long a possession of noble Italian families [...] this being the [cello] of 1697, originally in the Castelbarco collection at Milan which, as an heirloom, had found its way to New York.

Doring does not explain what his advice was with respect to sending the cello to Europe, but in view of his comment that 'if, while thus sequestered, some mishap had overtaken it, or it might have been

⁴² See <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ih/as/loc.natlib.ih.as.200155598/default.html> (accessed May 2017).

⁴³ 'National Treasure', in *The Strad*, November 2006, pp. 58-63.

destroyed [...] it is plausible that the cello did not travel to Europe and, instead, was consigned to the Rudolph Wurlitzer Company. Such a consignment would explain how Wurlitzer could include the cello in his 1931 *Rare Violins* catalogue⁴⁴ and would explain how J C Freeman, in his 'insurance' letter to Krasner (27th February 1934; see p. 9 of this account) could identify the *Castelbarco* cello as having been 'formerly in our collection'; such a consignment, however, makes it more difficult to understand how Alfred Hill could have bought the cello from a member of the Fabbri family in 1930, as he reports in his 5th January 1934 letter to Louis Krasner:

I first became acquainted with it about 1900, when, on a visit to Florence, I happened to call upon an old friend, the Marquis de Piccolellis, a son of the author of a book on violins entitled "Liutai Antichi e Moderni", [...].⁴⁵ On the death of the Marquis de Piccolellis [i.e. Ottavio Antonio], some ten years ago [c.1924? – actually 1928], the 'cello passed back into the possession of the Fabbri family from a member of which I purchased it in 1930.

If the 1697 cello was passed back to the Fabbri family after the death of Ottavio (i.e. passed back in 1928 or 1929), and if Alfred Hill bought the cello in 1930 from a member of the Fabbri family, surely the vendor – Egidio Fabbri?⁴⁶ – would have informed Hill that the cello had only very recently returned to the family's ownership from Ottavio Antonio de Piccolellis, such information making it unlikely that Hill, when he came to write his letter four years later, would have dated Ottavio's death to 'some ten years ago'.

The movement of the cello between 1928 and 1934, and the sequence of ownership during that period, is uncertain (to the point of being a mystery).

It may be significant that Alfred Hill's first meeting with the Fabbri/Piccolellis cello was not until 'about 1900'. If Ottavio Antonio de Piccolellis (or, post-1928/29, a member of the Fabbri family) showed Alfred Hill documentation which demonstrated the cello's secure provenance dating back at least as far as the P&S auction in 1862, then Alfred, in his January 1934 letter to Louis Krasner, makes no mention of it. If such documentation existed one would expect it to have accompanied the cello when Alfred Hill bought the instrument (apparently) in 1930, when Hill sold the instrument to Louis Krasner in 1934, when Krasner sold it to Mrs Whittall, and when Mrs Whittall, in 1935, passed the cello to the LoC; the present author has been unable to ascertain whether the LoC possesses this documentation. It is possible that the cello seen by Alfred Hill in 1900, in Florence, had no connection with the 1697 cello, with 'red varnish', which was bought by 'Holloway' in 1862.

Unlike the certificate for the *Castelbarco* violin the certificate made out by Alfred Hill to Louis Krasner for the 1697 cello is not a duplicate:

January 6th 1934: We certify that the violoncello sold by us to Louis Krasner Esq. of Boston, Mass., U.S.A. was made by Antonio Stradivari, whose original label dated 1697 the instrument bears. The wood of the back, sides, and head is of poplar, that of the table, of vigorous pine, the grain of which is well defined; the varnish being of an orange-brown colour, and the whole instrument in an exceptionally pure and fine state. W. E. Hill & Sons.

Like the violin's certificate this cello certificate contains, along its left margin, effectively the same hand-written annotation as previously described:

⁴⁴ The cello (front view only) appears in the catalogue on p. 178, where it is dated '1697' and identified as 'ex Castelbarco'.

⁴⁵ In 1900 the Marchese was Giovanni de Piccolellis; his son, Ottavio Antonio, only became the Marchese on the death of his father in 1912. Ottavio's cello-playing skills are evaluated by Alfred Hill in his letter: '[he] remained a more or less good dilettante all his life.'

⁴⁶ Egidio (or Egisto) Fabbri died on 17th December 1933 in Florence.

The violoncello designated in this certificate is now the property of Mrs Matthew John Whittall of Boston, U.S.A., July 21st 1934.

As before, this annotation also appears at the end of Alfred Hill's 5th January 1934 letter. The certificate's annotation is counter-signed 'W. E. Hill & Sons' while the letter's annotation is counter-signed by Alfred Hill.

Alfred Hill evaluates Krasner's cello:

I have always regarded it as a remarkable example of Stradivari's work, both on account of its beauty of form and its wonderful state of preservation – if only the back, sides and head had been of handsome maple, it would have been the ne plus ultra of perfection! I would furthermore add, I know of no other existing Stradivari violoncello in such remarkably fine condition, for it is practically free from restoration. Its dimensions are as left by the maker, the cutting of the sound holes and the carving of the head, superb! and I repeat that, taken as a whole, it is amazing to think that the instrument should have preserved its present pristine state from the year 1697.

High-quality photographs of the large, un-cut LoC *Castelbarco* cello (Jost Thöne, Vol. I, pp. 314-325) reveal that the back plate is made from plain wood, with some sweeping grain lines running longitudinally, particularly noticeable on the left side and at the upper-right. This plainness only serves to accentuate the drama of a trio of dark brown knots in the centre of the lower bout; two of the knots are contiguous and occupy an area of 4×2cms. These distinguishing marks are unmistakable and one might expect any written description of the *Castelbarco* cello to mention them. The front plate is made from two pieces of spruce with the pieces arranged in mirror-image: wide growth-rings at the edges, narrow rings towards the centre-joint. The varnish is orange-brown, with a deeper, more intense colour on the plates than on the ribs; the varnish on the scroll is nearer to yellow. As already indicated, the Hill certificate of 6th January 1934 states: 'the varnish being of an orange-brown colour [...]'. At the 1862 P&S/Castelbarco auction the varnish of the 1697 cello was described as 'red'.

A second distinguishing feature of the LoC cello can be found in the upper rib on the treble side: although the Thöne photograph (*ibid.*, p. 316) is not ideal, it can be seen that there is a straight (but lying at a slight diagonal) worm-track running round the rib quite close to its joint with the back plate. A better photograph of this track is available on the LoC website;⁴⁷ the photograph of the rib can be enlarged, and the worm-track, which extends almost all the way from the treble side of the neck to the C-bout upper-corner joint, can be observed. Clearly, this worm-track has not been excavated and plugged with replacement wood.⁴⁸

A third distinguishing feature can be seen (in both photographic sources) at the outer edge of the scroll on the bass side: a segment of wood, approximately 7mm square, has been broken off from the edge and a replacement piece neatly slotted into the resultant cavity.

Alfred Hill's letter to Louis Krasner concludes: 'The label it bears is as clean as if inserted yesterday and it is particularly instructive to note the mis-spelling of the name Antonius [assumed to be 'Antonins'] and the way in which the printed figures have been written over.' The Hill certificate simply states that the cello bears an 'original label dated 1697'.⁴⁹

Ernest Doring (*op. cit.*, p. 92) writes of the *Castelbarco* cello:

1697 The CASTELBARCO. One of two Stradivari 'cellos (the other being the specimen now known as the "Fau" attributed to the period 1707) once owned by Count Cesare Castelbarco of

⁴⁷ <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ihas.200154818.2> (accessed May 2017).

⁴⁸ cf. Albert Caressa's description of the *Fau* cello (p. 16 of this account).

⁴⁹ A request by the present author to the Library of Congress for a photograph of the cello's label was unproductive.

Milan who maintained two complete quartets of Stradivari instruments, each at a different residence.⁵⁰

William Henley (*op. cit.*, p. 93) describes a cello which he identifies as the 1697 *Castelbarco*:

1697. The Castelbarco.

One of the two specimens owned by the Count Castelbarco. Realised 200 guineas in London, 1862. Found its way to America, 1928. Perfect state of preservation. Wine-red varnish. One-piece back and ribs of poplar wood, rather plain material, but acoustically fine. [...] Period 1707-1710, according to Hill & Sons, the instrument being falsely dated 1697. Presented to the Whittall Foundation, Library of Congress, Washington, by Mrs Gertrude Whittall.

Henley has seemingly conflated the '1697/grand pattern/red varnish/£210' cello (P&S 1862) – which, apparently, is the LoC's *Castelbarco*/Whittall cello – with an entirely different cello which is identified by the Hills thus:

M. Fau, *ex Castelbarco*, falsely dated 1697, approximately 1707-10.⁵¹

This *Fau* cello cannot be that which was dated 1697 at the P&S auction since its physicality is not that of a 'grand pattern'. As shown earlier, the Thöne measurements of the 1697 LoC cello are:

UB width 356.7mm; CB width 241.2mm; LB width 453.6mm; Length 772.1mm.

The Thöne measurements of the much smaller *Fau* cello (callipers; back plate) are:

UB width 341.5mm; CB width 227.5mm; LB width 439.5mm; Length 758mm.

William Henley (*op. cit.*, p. 94) then identifies another *Castelbarco* cello which is also dated '1707-1710':

1707-10. The Castelbarco, No. 2.

Of normal proportions, was in the possession of Vuillaume who sold it to Mr. Fau [...]. In a very fine state of preservation, with wonderful red varnish. It remained in the Fau family and about 1940 came into the possession of the late Alfred Vidoudez from whom it passed to Werro of Berne.

The P&S specification of 'reddish brown varnish' for the 1687 cello matches the colour of the present-day *Fau* cello but the label-date of 1687 does not match the *Fau*'s current label-date of 1697 (even if that date is false). Only if the P&S personnel specified the wrong date for the Lot 28 cello – i.e. mistakenly printed '1687' instead of '1697' – and only if it was Vuillaume (rather than 'Bennett') who bought the cello, took it back to Paris, and sold it to Eugène Fau (in whose family it remained until 'about 1940') could the *Fau* cello which is described by Alfred Vidoudez and dated by him as '1697' (see below) be the same instrument. This tentative 'only if' proposition is countered by the Hills' unambiguous report on the Castelbarco auction: 'two violoncellos, dated respectively 1687 and 1697, were sold for £115 and £210'. Since William Ebsworth Hill was present at the auction (see p. 6 of this account) he would surely have noted any error of identification in his copy of the auction catalogue; such a correction would then have been used by his sons when they came to write their

⁵⁰ Only one Stradivari viola was included in the 1862 auction, an instrument dated 1715 which had previously been a *viola d'amore*; it was apparently converted into a viola by Vuillaume. Until recently, the instrument was part of the collection at the Royal Academy of Music in London and known as the *Kux/Castelbarco* viola. The Cozio Archive of the Tarisio.com website (ID 41473) states that at the 1862 P&S auction the viola was bought by someone 'unknown'; according to the auction's ledger the purchaser was C H C Plowden.

⁵¹ Hill (1902), p. 129; see p. 17 of this account for the Hills' text which precedes the quotation.

1902 *Stradivari* monograph. In addition, the P&S auctioneer would certainly have corrected his own copy of the catalogue; no such correction is found therein.⁵²

Ernest Doring (*op. cit.*, p. 131) also writes of the 'Fau, ex Castelbarco' cello but not through any personal experience of the instrument:

1707 The FAU, ex Castelbarco. Another violoncello once in the possession of Count Castelbarco has been recorded [earlier in Doring's publication] as a work of 1697 [i.e. the Lot 26 cello]. Oddly, both of these magnificent instruments have their backs and sides fashioned of poplar wood. Also a peculiar circumstance, the label of the example here noted [i.e. the *Fau*] had been altered to read 1697. Hill attributes it to the period 1707-10.

Doring does not identify the pre-alteration date on the label, nor the source of his knowledge of a label-date alteration; Doring does not provide any descriptive information for the *Fau* cello.

A description of a cello belonging to Pierre Fau appears in the *Jacques Francais Rare Violins Inc. Photographic Archive and Business Records*.⁵³ The date of the description suggests that it was written by Albert Caressa. Pierre Fau was the son of Eugène Fau, a collector to whom (in 1865) Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume had offered his *Le Messie* violin for 10,000 francs; Eugène Fau declined to buy the violin.

1937: Pierre Fau, à Mazamet

Basse de A. Stradivarius, vers 1705

Gros trou de ver à l'éclisse de la main, non-rebouché; la tête a été cassée, bien réparée; fond et éclisses en peuplier, beau vernis rouge; vu la basse en 1929; demandait 1 million; possède un alto superbe de Goffriller, vernis rouge vif; le croit de del Gesù; demandait 500,000^f, vaut 30,000. Inst^{ts} achetés autrefois chez J. B. Vuillaume.

1937: Pierre Fau, from Mazamet [southern France]

Antonio Stradivari cello, around 1705

A large worm track in the rib of the hand [upper right when viewed from the front], not plugged [i.e. not excavated and filled with a wood insert]. The head has been broken [but] well repaired. The back plate and the ribs are made of poplar wood. Beautiful red varnish. We saw the cello in 1929; [Pierre Fau] wanted 1 million [*French francs*] for it.

He has a superb viola by [Matteo] Goffriller, the varnish bright red; [He] thinks it is by *del Gesù*; he wanted 500,000 *francs* for it; it is worth 30,000.⁵⁴

These instruments bought in the past from J B Vuillaume.

It would seem that Albert Caressa was mistrustful of the cello's label, simply offering 'around 1705' as the date when the cello was made.

Four details within Caressa's descriptive text are of importance:

1. the non-repaired worm track in the treble-side upper rib, 'in the rib of the hand' (cf. p. 14 of this account)

⁵² Alessandra Barabaschi (Thöne, Vol. II, p. 288) states that the 'Castelbarco, Fau' cello 'c.1707-10' was bought by Vuillaume at the 1862 auction, 'apparently for the sum of £115, although the Hill brothers, who recorded the results of the auction, listed this amount as having been paid for a cello with the improbable date 1687.' Why a cello dated 1687 (made when Stradivari was approximately 38 years of age) should be 'improbable' is not explained.

⁵³ *The sales ledgers 1845-1938*, Box 55, Folder 2, p. 126; National Museum of American History (Archives Center), Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, USA. The present author's 300-page transcription and translation of the ledgers (with an historical commentary on each instrument) is accessible from www.themessiahviolin.uk.

⁵⁴ The Goffriller viola is almost certainly that which was sold by J-B Vuillaume to Eugène Fau in 1874, the instrument falsely identified by Vuillaume as a unique Guarneri *del Gesù* viola; the price paid by Fau was 4,000 francs. The viola had been falsified by John Lott (see J Dilworth, 'Faking it', *The Strad*, September 2002, pp. 968-975).

2. the well-repaired breakage in the head (cf. p. 14)
3. the specification that the *Fau* cello's back plate and ribs were made of poplar wood
4. the identification of the cello's 'beautiful red varnish'.

From the Jost Thöne photograph (Thöne, Vol. II, p. 297) there are very faint signs of what *may* be an unrepaired worm track in the upper rib on the treble side. From the photographs on pp. 298 and 299 it can clearly be seen that the outer ring of wood at the semicircular bottom edge of the rear of the peg-box has been replaced but whether this repair can be associated with the repair to 'the head' as identified by Albert Caressa is uncertain. The two-piece back plate of the present-day *Fau* cello is made from plain wood which displays only a few longitudinal grain lines. The cello's varnish is deep-red/brown, especially intense on the back plate.

Was Caressa's 1937 description written because Pierre Fau (perhaps with one eye on political and military events in Germany) had brought his cello to Paris for a second time, hoping to sell it for a huge sum of money – money which, unlike a cello, could be hidden away from inquisitive eyes and marauding hands? The tone of Caressa's description suggests that he did not buy Pierre Fau's cello; such a refusal might explain why the cello, in 1939, was apparently in the hands of Alfred and Pierre Vidoudez, father (1879-1943) and son (1907-1994), violin-makers and dealers in Geneva.

In 1940 Alfred Vidoudez published a brochure (of which only 200 copies were printed): '*Un Violoncelle de Stradivarius*'. There are photographs of the front plate, bass-side ribs, back plate, and bass-side *f*-hole of a cello; the instrument shown is that which is now known as the *Fau* (cf. Thöne, Vol. II, pp. 288-299).

The brochure's Foreword paraphrases the Hills' *Antonio Stradivari* text with regard to the superiority of Stradivari celli above all others, and continues:

A happy combination of circumstances brought to our 'maison' during 1939 one of these instruments, created by the grandmaster of Cremona.

The main text of the (unpaginated) brochure begins:

The Stradivari cello which is the subject of this notice carries a label dated 1697.⁵⁵ It is one of a group of twenty celli mentioned in the Hill book (p. 135)⁵⁶ as representing the most typical specimens [...].

On p. 129 of their monograph (1902 first edition) the Hills write:

Of the twenty known examples [of celli dated between 1707 and 1730], the majority are notable instruments. Among the foremost stand (1) the "Duport", dated 1711, (2) the "Batta", 1714, and (3) the "Piatti", 1720. The others are those in the possession of –
4. M. Fau, *ex Castelbarco*, falsely dated 1697, approximately 1707-10
[...].

Alfred Vidoudez can only identify his 1697 cello as 'one of a group of twenty celli' – celli which are all dated between 1707 and 1730 – by identifying his cello as that which is itemised by the Hills as the 'Fau, *ex Castelbarco*' and by taking advantage of the Hills' revised date of 'approximately 1707-10'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Vidoudez does not suggest that the label's numerals have been altered from '1687' (i.e. the date specified for the '*reddish brown*' cello which was Lot 28 at the 1862 auction); cf. Doring's comment: 'the label [...] altered to read 1697' (see p. 16 of this account).

⁵⁶ (i.e. p. 135 of the 1907 French edition of the Hills' monograph)

⁵⁷ If, following the Hills' opinion, the *Fau* cello was made between 1707 and 1710 (approximately) it is difficult to understand why anyone would alter (or replace) the original label to show '1697'; no commercial advantage could possibly

Vidoudez presents a contradictory commentary in which his cello apparently dates not only from the end of the 'large instruments' period but also dates from the later period which is characterised by the 'perfect examples' of Stradivari's smaller cello design. Vidoudez does not acknowledge any discrepancy between the physicality of the cello about which he is writing and its label-date:

This date of 1697, and in particular the instrument to which we are devoting these lines, appears to us to mark (one or two exceptions aside) the period of the abandonment of the large instruments by the master and the starting point for those celli which make up this collection of [1707-1730] masterpieces. The modelling of these instruments represents the perfect example of the cello in all respects.

Vidoudez does not explain why Stradivari, if he made the future *Fau* cello in 1697, apparently did not produce similarly-sized celli (using the same mould) during the subsequent ten years. The Hills (*op. cit.*, p. 124) write of this period: 'The years between 1701 and 1707 are blank as far as violoncellos are concerned, not a single specimen being known to us.'

Vidoudez proposes the following justifications for his historical opinion (as quoted above):

1. the 'authority' of Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume; '*nous nous appuyons tout d'abord sur l'autorité de Vuillaume*' ('we ourselves rely, above all else, on the authority of Vuillaume')
2. the 'Amatisé' character of the head of the *Fau* (but there is no photograph of the head included in the brochure); for photographs see Thöne, Vol. II, pp. 290, 298, and 299
3. the 'Amatisé' character of the *f*-holes
4. the identical materials used in the *Fau* and in another cello which Vuillaume also dated to 1697.

Vidoudez proposes that the reason why both celli have the same label-date but are of different sizes and proportions is because Stradivari, in 1697, was experimenting to see if he could achieve improved sonority and projection from a smaller, more user-friendly cello, i.e. a type of cello which could play an active and soloistic part in performances rather than just being a reinforcement for Baroque bass lines already played by the left hand of a keyboard player. It was for reasons of comparison that Stradivari used the same wood for the back plate and the ribs of both celli. Vidoudez describes the tonal qualities of the *Fau* cello as '*égalité, mordant, plénitude et noblesse du timbre qui est particulièrement émouvant.*'

Into this tangled historical environment one can insert the following text from the Hill brothers:

If we give credence to the following statement of our ancestor, Lockey Hill, Stradivari as early as 1690 made an instrument [cello] of the smaller pattern. He [Lockey Hill] left on record that Frederick William, King of Prussia, who played the violoncello and was a pupil of Duport *ainé*, consigned for sale to Betts, of the Royal Exchange [London], in the year 1806 a Stradivari cello. That it was an instrument of the first rank is evidenced by the fact that Betts requested Lockey Hill to take the necessary patterns and make some copies of it. These patterns are still in our possession, and the outline bears an inscription in Lockey Hill's writing: "King of Prussia's Stradivarius, 1690." It seems that the price asked – £500 – was a prohibitive one, and Betts, failing to find a customer, returned the instrument to its Royal owner. Whether or not Lockey Hill correctly recorded the date is the pith of the whole matter. Such an instrument, so dated, is quite opposed to our experience. We may add that all efforts on our part to trace its present whereabouts have hitherto proved unavailing.⁵⁸

result. At no point in his booklet does Vidoudez specifically mention the name 'Fau' (an omission also noted by Ernest Doring in *How many Strads?*, p. 132).

⁵⁸ Hill (*op. cit.*) p. 126.

'Duport *ainé*' ('Duport the elder') was Jean-Pierre Duport (1741-1818) who, in 1773, entered the service of Frederick the Great (1712-1786; King of Prussia 1740-1786). Jean-Pierre subsequently became the cello teacher to Frederick's nephew, Prince Friedrich Wilhelm (1744-1797; King of Prussia 1786-1797). The King of Prussia in 1806 was Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770-1840).

If Lockey Hill's inscription is believed (and it is difficult to imagine that he saw, for example, a label-date of '1708', but wrote down '1690') then the possibility exists that 'smaller-pattern' celli were being built in the Stradivari workshop long before the end of the seventeenth century. The aforementioned proposition – that the P&S 1687 cello was of 'normal' dimensions and proportions – thus acquires some support.

To return to the Vidoudez brochure: Alfred states that Count César de Castelbarco owned 'several quartets' made by various luthiers, as well as five violins, a viola, 'and these two celli, [all] made by Stradivari.'

As we have seen, the two celli were part of the collection of Count César de Castelbarco, Italian nobleman, one of the most experienced enthusiasts of his time [...].

In 1862, the Count – anxious to sell his collection before his death – sent his instruments to London, in that same year, to be auctioned.

Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume came specially from Paris to assist at this sale from which he returned to France with the best pieces and, notably, the two celli.⁵⁹ In 1863 Vuillaume sold the cello of large size to an Italian music-enthusiast, Signor Egidio Fabbri, who kept the cello until the day when his daughter married the Marquis de Piccolellis, a cellist, who thus became the proud owner. At the death of the Marquis (1928) the instrument passed to the hands of Messrs. Hill & Sons who, in turn, sold it in 1930 to Mr J. C. Freeman, the Manager of Wurlitzer & Co. in New York.⁶⁰ Subsequently the cello was acquired by Mrs M. J. Witthall [*sic*] and donated to the Library of Congress at Washington – surely its final resting place.

At this point Vidoudez includes a footnote:

The Marquis de Piccolellis was the son of the author of the oft-cited book on *lutherie*, "Liutai Antichi e Moderni". The notes relating to the Piccolellis-Fabbri cello were kindly communicated to us by our colleague J. C. Freeman who received them from our common friend Alfred Hill whose father assisted at the Castelbarco auction in 1862.

This movement of historical information, from London to New York, and from New York to Geneva, begins to take on the character of a game of Chinese whispers.

It is noticeable that Alfred Vidoudez's description of Count Castelbarco, his mis-identification of the life-span of the Count, his statement that Vuillaume was present at the 1862 auction, and his statement that Vuillaume purchased 'the best pieces' – all of this information very closely echoes that which is contained in Alfred Hill's 8th May 1931 letter to J C Freeman regarding the *Castelbarco* violin, as well as the information contained in Alfred Hill's 5th January 1934 letter to Louis Krasner regarding the *Castelbarco* cello. The Tarisio.com/Cozio Archive website for the *Fau* cello (ID 41465) cites, in its 'Certificates & Documents', a 1939 letter from W. E. Hill & Sons 'to Vidoudez', but, upon enquiry, the present author was informed that Tarisio.com 'do not have a copy of this letter.'

Alfred Vidoudez writes:

⁵⁹ As already shown, the 1687 cello was bought by 'Bennett', the 1697 cello by 'Holloway'.

⁶⁰ But Alfred Hill states that, in 1930, he bought the cello from a member of the Fabbri family and in 1934 he sold it to Louis Krasner.

The [1697] cello which occupies us here [the future *Fau*] was passed in the same year, 1863, by the master luthier [Vuillaume] to a French music-lover and collector, this person also being the owner of several beautiful Cremonese instruments from which he was never separated. It was to this person⁶¹ that J-B Vuillaume offered, for 10,000 francs, the famous Stradivari [violin] dated 1716, known today by the name of "Le Messie", an instrument from the Master appearing amongst us in its brand-new condition.

Alfred Vidoudez then reproduces a three-page letter written by Vuillaume; the name of the intended recipient is not indicated but the date, 22nd April 1863, fits with the information (above) from Vidoudez regarding 'a French music-lover' and therefore it is all but certain that the letter was intended for Eugène Fau.⁶² Vidoudez introduces the reproduction with:

We reproduce below the interesting letter, dated 1863, in which J. B. Vuillaume has written his report on the two cellos, highlighting their merits and noting the interest they aroused among the artistes and music lovers of that period.⁶³

Monsieur,

I have moved quickly to respond to your letter of the 20th of this month; if, as I am hoping, the details I am about to give you about my two celli are those you desire you will have reason to benefit from this opportunity.

They are both entirely made by Stradivari and both date from 1697.⁶⁴

*The varnish on both celli is yellow-red, slightly brown.*⁶⁵ The larger one is [as] new, with no interior patching and no cracks apart from a small imperceptible break in the front plate at the left *f*-hole; [the break] is not at the sound-post nor at the bass-bar; it is hardly worth mentioning but I owe you the truth.

This is the only small thing [i.e. defect] that I could find while setting it up. Therefore, I have not had to do anything other than to put in a new bass-bar, fingerboard, pegs, and a bridge. The interior is superb and nothing has been altered.

The front plate is of the most beautiful spruce, beautiful arching, and the large thicknesses which are characteristic of the Master [i.e. Stradivari]. The back plate and the ribs are made from plain *albeira* wood, commonly but incorrectly called poplar or grey poplar [*'grisard'*]. The wood is neither one nor the other; *albeira* is harder and similar to maple in its sonorous qualities. This is the only aspect [of the cello] that leaves [anything] to be desired – this *albeira* wood is plain and not as attractive as flamed maple.

The back plate is in one piece, the scroll is also made with the same wood; all in all it is a beautiful instrument.

Length of the back plate: 774 millimetres [tape?]

Width of the lower bout: 460mm

Width of the upper bout: 360mm⁶⁶

Height of the ribs: 116mm

[Freely-vibrating] string length 711mm

As for the sound, it is superb; distinguished, clear, and very 'forward'. The 4th string [the C string] has tremendous power and a beautiful sonority. Tonally, I do not think that one could ask for anything more; moreover, it [the cello] is of excellent workmanship and appearance.

⁶¹ Eugène Fau.

⁶² The present author would like to thank Bastien Terraz for his help in translating Vuillaume's letter-text as well as other parts of the Vidoudez brochure.

⁶³ Alfred Vidoudez has clearly recognised the 'two celli' content of Vuillaume's letter but makes no attempt to associate the second half of the letter (rather than the first) with the instrument which he is publicising through his brochure.

⁶⁴ The underscores are as they appear in Vuillaume's document; Vuillaume emboldens the date numerals.

⁶⁵ Present author's italics.

⁶⁶ The Thöne measurements of the LoC *Castelbarco* cello – taken with callipers? – are: 772.1mm, 453.6mm, and 356.7mm.

The E and the F [below 'middle C'] require care to ring out [i.e. those pitches are 'wolf' notes] as is the case with all the best cellos.

The non-negotiable price is 8,000 francs.

Up to this point Vuillaume's text has focused on the larger of his two 1697 celli, not the smaller (the latter being the cello which is actually the subject of the Vidoudez brochure). It is by no means certain that Vuillaume's large 1697 cello is today's LoC *Castelbarco* cello: from his identification of just one flaw – a 'small imperceptible break' in the front-plate wood which was 'hardly worth mentioning' – it could be concluded that Vuillaume did not see a worm track which today is found in the upper-treble rib of the LoC cello, nor did he see an inserted segment in the outer rim of the scroll (bass side).⁶⁷

Vuillaume continues his letter with information about his smaller 1697 cello, also with 'yellow-red, slightly brown' varnish. Vuillaume's description identifies the cello as having front-plate growth rings which are wider in the centre and narrower at the flanks – exactly as found on the present-day *Fau* cello.⁶⁸ Vuillaume defines his cello as having a one-piece back plate (*le fond est uni*); the *Fau* cello's back plate is in two pieces. Vuillaume specifies the cello's basic measurements as UB 346mm, LB 446mm, and Length 761mm; Jost Thöne's equivalent measurements of the *Fau* cello are 341.5mm, 439.5mm, and 758mm.

Vuillaume concludes his letter:

That is all I can tell you about these two instruments, which were well-known in Milan where they had a great reputation, having been played many times at the *la Scala* theatre where they always created a powerful impression. [...] These two Stradivari celli were owned by a Milanese nobleman, Count César de Castelbarco, who was proud and honoured to own them [...].

Despite Vuillaume's identification of 'yellow-red, slightly brown' varnish on *both* of his 1697 celli Alfred Vidoudez concludes his 1940 brochure by referring to the 'magnificent plum-red' varnish found on the smaller 1697 cello. Vidoudez seemingly reconciles the discrepancy in colour by suggesting that Vuillaume was not as detailed in his description as he might have been:

We have nothing to add to the description given by the master luthier [i.e. Vuillaume] for the "Castelbarco" cello which we received in the condition in which it was sold [by Vuillaume]. It would, however, be remiss of us not to highlight in more detail than he [Vuillaume] has done, the beauty and quality of this inimitable Stradivarius varnish which is of a magnificent plum-red colour, with golden reflections; it is abundant and intact and covers the entire instrument. All that is missing is the gleam of maple wood for it to appear equal to the *Franchomme* cello, for which it [the *Fau*] is the model,⁶⁹ and which, under the Stradivarius-*Duport* label, is without doubt the most beautiful cello made by the Master of Cremona.

The Vidoudez brochure leaves confusion trailing in its wake, particularly through its usage of Vuillaume's letter, a letter which describes two celli yet is presented by Vidoudez as if it contained only one such description: *nous n'avons rien à ajouter à la description que donne le maître luthier de la basse "Castelbarco"*.

⁶⁷ It is possible that both of these 'features' have come about since 1863.

⁶⁸ Examination of the 15 Stradivari celli which are illustrated by Jost Thöne (Vols. I-IV), and which date from the period 1688-1732, reveals that the *Fau* cello is the only one with this 'reversed' arrangement of the front plate half-widths.

⁶⁹ Back-plate measurements of the *Fau* cello (Jost Thöne (2010), DVD) are: 341.5/227.5/439.5/758mm
Back-plate measurements of the 1711 *Duport* cello (Hill (1902), p. 298) are: 346.1/----- /441.3/758.8mm
Back-plate measurements of the 1710 *Gore-Booth* cello (*ibid.*) are: 346/ ----- /441.3/758.8mm
Back-plate measurements of the 1714 *Batta* cello (*ibid.*) are: 346/ ----- /441.3/755.6mm
Back-plate measurements of the 1720 *Piatti* cello (*ibid.*) are: 346/ ----- /438.1/758.8mm.

Only if one allocates the unrepaired worm-track and the scroll-edge insertion which are found on the present-day LoC cello to a date post-1863 can Vuillaume's 'yellow-red, slightly brown' cello, with nothing more than a 'small imperceptible break at the left *f*-hole', be associated with the cello which is in Washington DC, USA.

The uncertainty which surrounds the international movement of the Fabbri/Piccolellis cello might be resolved if access to the Hills' business records and diaries was permitted but such access is constantly refused.

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