

NOSTALGIA CORNER

REQUIEM FOR AN OLD VIOLIN MAKER

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These hills were not his hills, but for Wil Auchterlonie they became the hills of home.

He saw them first at the age of 22, a Scottish miner stepping into a new life as yet unaware of his gifted ear for sound.

He settled in Balgownie and three months later he married a girl he had met by chance aboard the ship which had brought him to Australia.

She had gone to greet an aunt arriving from Scotland; they found mutual ground for conversation, she was from his home place, Dunfermline, and living in Balgownie.

In the years that followed he built her a fine home in Para Street, Balgownie, worked in Corrimal and the old Mt Pleasant mines – and began carving violins.

He once estimated he had built 53 instruments altogether. He imported the timber from Switzerland and the German Tyrol, and during the war the curling Scottish voice swore that “Hitler may hack, wreck and destroy, but he will pass, and once again the forests of Tyrol will supply the world with wood for beautiful violins.

And so it happened.

Talking about Wil Auchterlonie yesterday his daughters said he had a pair of hands that could never be still. Even when retired, a dusted miner, the busy hands searched for creative work.

"He would spend months on one fiddle," his daughters recall. "He would fit the back on, and plane the wood, and keep planing until it satisfied him. If his ear detected a fault he would destroy it and start again."

Always he fitted the strings on a Sunday. Others saw this gentle act as Wil Auchterlonie's personal thanksgiving for his gifted ear and marvelous hands.

The Scotsman seldom spoke of his work, but among his keepsakes lies a letter from Verbruggen, whose quartet delighted Sydney from 1915 to 1922, inviting Wil Auchterlonie meet him at the Conservatorium to compare instruments.

Verbruggen had played one of the Scotsman's violins, and the quality of tone had impressed him so deeply that a meeting was arranged.

Wil Auchterlonie took the measurements of the Master's Stradivarius, a 5000 (sic) instrument which was on loan from the Belgian Government. Verbruggen offered to take the first violin he made after the encounter, but he died on a tour of New Zealand and America, and Wil Auchterlonie's daughter still has the instrument.

Her father told her the Master had commented that the fiddles he made would never find recognition in his own or his children's days but perhaps in his grand-children's day they would be sought after.

So it may be Wil Auchterlonie will never know. He died on 25th January 1965, at the age of 85, just three months after the death of his wife Elizabeth, and by co-incidence on the same day that the world was honouring the anniversary of the birth of a fellow countryman, Robbie Burns.

He is survived by four daughters and one son Mrs. A Denham, Mrs. M Naughton, Mrs. J Lane and Mr. W Auchterlonie.