BURFORD

Reaching Burford we were struck by the beauty of the tree-lined hill, stretching down to the opening High Street with country beyond. Parking the car, we went to the shop of Mr Bowerman, looked at a chair, which I didn't like, and purchased for the sum of fifty shillings a four-poster bed which he undertook to store. When months later I asked him to deliver it to me across the road he did so, but never loved me, realising I was setting up in opposition.

After lunch and a terrific thunder storm we started walking around the town and half way up the hill on the east side, saw a notice 'House for Sale' . By this time we were fairly well accustomed house viewers, so slipping across the road to a butcher's shop, I collected the key. We went in, and looked round an old and potentially possible house to live in, but which would not in fact be big enough for business. It is interesting to note that in 1932 the butcher had purchased the property for two hundred and fifty pounds and modernised it single handed, installing a bathroom with a door but no ventilation. He had also made various other so-called improvements, and was asking the not inconsiderable price of five hundred and fifty pounds for it. After returning the key we drove on to Bristol where my uncle enquired how our house-hunting was getting on. When we mentioned Burford, he said, 'Oh it is a wonderful town; I used to stay at The Lamb and fish the river. It is just the place for you'. So a few days later we returned to Burford, put up at the Highway Hotel, and each day collected the key of Hill House, deciding that with suitable building in the garden it might make a possible home and shop. By this time we had seen a sign in Sheep Street for a firm of architects. Going to the door, we were told that he only came on Saturdays, but old Mrs Titcombe said, 'Oh you will like him, he couldn't be nicer; not if he were me own son', and on this recommendation we asked him to call on us the following Saturday. We then summoned my uncle from Yorkshire, having more or less decided that Hill House, Burford, with alterations and additions, was where we ought to live.

It was a Friday night, and, telling Miss Sellers, the proprietress of the Highway Hotel, why we were in Burford and why we were booking a room for my uncle, she said, 'Hill House isn't nearly large enough for you; you must buy the premises next door to us'. We replied that they were not for sale, but she said, 'They are, but they don't want anyone to know'. We went into the double-bow-fronted shop and found a number of people inside buying boots and shoes, the shop being a curious combination of boots, shoes, china, glassware and sundries. Behind the counter to the left were two forbidding old ladies, who at once demanded to know what we wanted. My mother asked if we might look round, and slowly selected some unpleasant pieces of modern china, waiting for the shop to empty. When it did, my mother said, 'I suppose I have got to buy these, but we hear that you want to sell this property, but I am sure you don't'. Memory is never quite reliable, but it seems to me one of them leapt the counter, seized my mother by the arm and dragged her through a door. The next moment the same thing was done to me, and we found ourselves in a room at the back, looking out to our great surprise at an Elizabethan courtyard with an archway leading to the garden beyond.

They then explained to us that they were very anxious to sell the house, but a terrible thing had happened. Someone wanted to buy it, partially demolish it and turn it into a cinema, which they told us they knew was the work of the devil, they being Plymouth Brethren. I think at that moment my mother excelled herself. Without batting an eyelid she said, 'We are not Brethren, but we are I think the next best thing, we are Quakers'. Immediately, we were taken upstairs to be shown around the house which appeared to be in virtually untouched eighteenth-century state, including the paintwork, and with only one electric light.

The Miss Sharps' father, a grazier farmer, had purchased the property in about 1880, moving from what is now Gatwick Airport, and although the house was in spotless condition, nothing in the way of repainting or upkeep had been done. Every room opened out of another one, and when, after the third room we went into, the far door slowly closed, I began to wonder what was happening. It was quite a still night and there were no draughts enough to make doors move. I discovered some months later that there was a third Miss Sharp who had lived as a recluse for the previous twenty years, and she was trying to hear everything that occurred. The next day, when the architect and my uncle arrived, although Hill House was shown to them, we told them that the house we really wanted was next door to the Highway Hotel. We all walked round it again, and it seemed ideal in every way.

The house had been built by Simon Wisdom, the leading Burfordian, in 1555, according to dates later discovered. In 1720, the house had been altered and refronted with five tall windows on the first floor, but it was still basically built round an Elizabethan courtyard with earlier details buried beneath. There was a long garden, and on the right a two storey barn which the Sharps had previously used as a mattress factory and cobbler's shop. Prior to this it had been where most of the Victorian furniture in the area had been made. Down the garden was a lean-to shed, which was later to be demolished, not by me, but by the railway company. I was making my first export packing case in the shed, went off for the day, and the railway company arrived to collect it and found the case I had made was very much larger than the door. On my return, not only the case but the shed had vanished. Further down the garden were the old stables, and then a lawn on which, in the 1840s, the local saw pit had been. Beyond that was an old wood shed which was useful for storing timber and packing cases. The garden had had very little upkeep and appeared to be one vast strawberry bed. After our arrival, when we were organising the garden, the strawberries went, and, curiously, I was never able to grow them again successfully. Within four days of our first seeing the house and having to submit a second offer for it, we found ourselves owners, but were not to obtain possession until 1 January 1936. Russell Cox the architect made detailed drawings and I can remember meeting him in Kidderminster to discuss details. At our meeting in a Kidderminster hotel, the hour was three o'clock and we ordered tea. I can remember it was served in a coffee pot, not a happy combination. We were not to see the house empty until 1936. That autumn we called only once with a view to purchasing certain fitments, a kitchen dresser and some cupboards in the sheds, but did not attend the auction sale that took place shortly before Christmas 1935. Standing on the top landing however was an eighteenth-century needlework pole screen which I had admired, and had tried to

purchase from the Miss Sharps, but they told me their father had bought it some forty or fifty years before and they felt they ought to keep it. However, arriving at Burford on the 1st January 1936, a note was waiting for me saying they didn't feel it would be happy in its new home in Brighton, which was where the Miss Sharps were moving, and I might buy it. That afternoon, standing at the window of the Highway Hotel, we suddenly saw the three Miss Sharps hastening across the road to the solicitor's in Sheep Street, and, after counting to fifty, my mother hurried along, came back with the key, and the property was ours. The time was about 3.30pm, it was getting dark, and this was our first sight of the house empty. I think we were both appalled to find the sad condition of the walls in many of the rooms now the furniture had gone. In the usual eighteenth-century manner, the rough stone walls had had wooden battens nailed on to them, across which had been stretched hessian canvas and, on top of this was stuck wallpaper. In a more important house it would have been tapestry. Going into the showroom, wallpaper seemed to be hanging in shreds from the wall. I can remember tearing off an armful of it, putting it in the grate, setting fire to it and having my first sight of the downstairs room that was to become my main future showroom and where, later, stripping paint off the oak panelling, I was to discover the initials of Simon Wisdom, the original owner, and the date 1555. The next day the local workforce of some forty men moved in to start work on the house. Many of them would have been standing idle in the builder's yard, so scarce was work. Jobs such as electricity and plumbing were, I know, sub-contracted by the local builder. The men had to work with the aid of candles in bottles up to ten o'clock each night, so as to finish work by our specified completion date of the 1st April.

During those first three months of 1936, we were staying with my uncle near Bristol, and each Saturday we came over in the car to see how work was progressing, usually arriving just before mid-day when the workman stopped for the weekend. Among many things we asked to be done was the removal of eighteenth-century putty-coloured paintwork from the moulded oak beams in what was to be the showroom. This work had almost been done, but just as I walked in the last three feet of paint was being stripped off, and I saw momentarily the original Elizabethan polychrome decoration of white, black and red stripes spattered with gold stars. The moral of this is that one should be with workmen all the time.

Those three months were very busy ones for me. I had already bought a stock book inside which, in free moments, I was putting details of my stock in trade. I had begun to assemble goods that I had bought over the last two or three years, and stored some in my uncle's garage, some with relatives in East Anglia, some that I had bought at a Warner family sale only a few weeks earlier in Hoddesdon, many things in Somerset and my main consignments lying up in Yorkshire. Sharples, a firm of furniture removers in Lancaster, came out to Bentham to give me a quote for moving my Yorkshire accumulations of the previous six years. Their original quote was for getting everything south in two vans. In fact, they under-estimated so badly that over the next few weeks it took six vans to shift everything, but there was no extra charge on the figure given to me.

I can remember the loading up of those first two vans, and their leaving Yorkshire at 4.30pm. I left a little bit later, driving south as far as Whitchurch, Shropshire, where the

following morning I collected chairs that I had bought from old Mr Burgess, the local dealer. Just before getting into Worcester I overtook the vans, giving them a wave, and so on to Burford. It was a Wednesday, and, driving over the bridge at the bottom of the town, it is now amazing to realise the only sign of life was one old man and a dog. Stopping at the Post Office half way up the hill, I sent a telegram to Yorkshire to announce my safe arrival, and for the first time entered what I could now call my shop. I was shocked to discover that although a promise had been given that it would be ready, half the floor was up, and the carpenters were still hammering at the oak floorboards which they had previously found in the house, and had brought to make staging in the window. Miraculously, when the furniture vans arrived one and a half hours later, the shop floor was down and everything ready. My name had not yet been written in gold letters above the windows, but this was to happen a week or two later.

Before 1940, Burford was a very different place from today. It was completely self-contained, offering almost all useful facilities. There was a saddler, who would repair one's luggage and a draper who would supply lino, carpet and lay them. There was a metalworker and one large building firm, Messrs Pethers, whose premises in the High Street we got to know well, as they did the work on our shop and home. Those visiting Burford mostly came for their complete holiday, whereas now those (staying) in Burford hotels are generally here for only one night. One result of this was one got to know visitors to Burford quite intimately. If they were interested in antiques they would come to the shop several times and one would have the opportunity of talking with them. The bus service was in many ways better than that of today. A bus ran from Cheltenham Station up and over the Cotswolds, through Northleach and Burford and so on, via Witney, to Oxford station and connections with the main trains to London and elsewhere. Catching the nine o'clock bus half way up the High Street, it would take one to Oxford station to a train, and so to London. One usually walked out into the sunshine in the middle of the High Street to talk to one's friends, also waiting for the bus. Should a car come up or down the hill it went round you, and you didn't run away from the vehicle: how different from today!

Just to make one realise how different life was, I was told by a one time member of Burford Primary School that if children behaved particularly badly, they would be given twopence, and sent to Mrs Smith's shop in the High Street to buy a cane with which punishment would be inflicted. Mrs Smith would stand inside the door saying, 'Hey! it's you again. Do you think this one will do? No, it's not snappy enough'. The poor victim would collect the cane, and then have to walk down the High Street carrying it, with all their friends and neighbours saying, 'Aye, he's in for it again'. This was more salutary than the reprimand you got later. This story dates from the early 1920s and must have gone back for a very, very much longer period.

I can remember the day in 1936 - it must have been very soon after my opening - when a horse and trap came down Sheep Street, stopped on the corner by the chemist shop, and a tall woman called out to a passer by, 'Hold my horse'. Across the road she came with a wad of paper in her hand which she plonked down on a table, saying 'I will allow you to give these away'. This was Mrs Clutton-Brock of Chastleton House, Oxfordshire, the property now run by the National Trust, but of which she was the then owner. The

papers she left were inviting one to go and look round the house at a charge of two shillings and sixpence. Every year the same procedure happened, and it is interesting to note that her means of transport was still a horse and trap. There was so little traffic in Burford High Street that it was perfectly safe to leave it standing on the corner of Sheep Street which is now an almost impossible crossing point due to car traffic. An annual meet of the hounds outside the Bull Inn in the High Street continued until around 1950.

Perhaps a brief description of the premises where I began trading would be useful. The shop dominated the front of the house. It was probably built in 1722, with a central door, two bay windows and a door at either side. However, as it seemed essential to have an entrance hall to the dwelling section of our home, I started with the shop incorporating only one bay window with a small side window. In the beginning I had no office; this I was to evolve later. Behind it was the showroom, with the date 1555 and the initials of Simon Wisdom above the door. If customers wanted to see more stock, they were led out into the courtyard under the arch, and so into the barn, where there was a downstairs room. Up an L-shaped staircase was the large upstairs showroom, north facing, in which the Victorian furniture of the area had been made some one hundred years earlier, and which on my first sight still had in it mattress-making equipment and hoists.

I had no shop-keeping experience, except in Spring Street, Paddington, and almost immediately realised how very different provincial and London trading was going to be. However, on that exciting Wednesday in Easter week 1936 at 9.30am, I opened my door, and my first customer was Miss Wesley-Reed, an elderly lady who had been a very faithful attendant at all Fred Wilson's lectures at the Victoria and Albert Museum, where we had got to know each other. She had travelled down to Burford specially to see my start. Not very much happened that morning, but in came one local who wanted me to go and look at a chair, which I did that very afternoon. Perhaps I had carefully chosen Wednesday, Burford's early closing day, as an easy half-day start. He lived a mile away in Fulbrook, and on my arrival that afternoon I was led to a stone-built shed, where a large Victorian armchair was produced. In those days this was of no commercial interest and virtually unsaleable, so I turned it down. Today, no doubt, it would be illustrated in an auction sale catalogue. Perseverance is, I suppose, all-important in life. It must have been at least fifteen years later that the new owners of that cottage summoned me to look at goods that they wished to sell. Again I was led down the same garden path to the same shed and the goods produced were again of no interest to me.

Opportunity knocked yet again some twenty years later, and what I bought then, a vast painted lining for a tent, is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum Indian Section, the property of the nation. The story behind it is quite interesting. In about the year 1890 the Victoria and Albert Museum decided that their Indian section was very short of exhibits, and they sent their curator representative to India for a period of five years to collect items of importance for them. Although his budget was not of great size, he bought very successfully. When the money began to run out, he started buying on his own account, and, on his return to England about the year 1900, kindly loaned the Museum what he had bought with his own cash as well as what he had bought officially. His goods were on exhibition for many years, but when the Museum was being reorganised in the 1920s, items on loan were returned to owners. The owner who

8. Bowerman's antique shop, on the opposite side of Burford High Street from RW. Photograph taken about 1920

9. Cellar of Roger Warner's Burford shop, showing a typical range of vernacular furniture and late mediaeval objects.

received the Indian tent lining was not interested in it. Following a death in the family it had been passed on, and so came into a somewhat damp garden shed in Fulbrook. I was delighted to be able to acquire it.

The domestic furniture from our flat in Bournemouth had been in store, and only reached Burford forty eight hours before I opened the shop. Looking back, it seems curious not to have allowed more time to settle down, not only into our home, but into the area. However, Easter week was thought a good time for a business to open. The same day Burford's first Arts and Crafts shop, called *The Gay Adventure*, opened some four doors above me, and our joint arrivals were, I believe, the first new businesses into the town for something over thirty years. The next day I managed to sell a number of items, one to a dealer who by chance was passing through Burford and came from Cambridge. Easter Saturday dawned with the most awful weather; the wind howled, rain lashed, hail fell and there was even a little snow. There were many visitors in Burford and the one thing they were seeking was shelter, and so some one hundred and twenty people poured through the shop that day. My London aunt, who was initially somewhat disapproving of my going into trade, was sent out by 10 o'clock to get change. On her return she started showing customers around just as my mother was doing, something she was to continue to do for the next three or four years. What now surprises me is how quickly I became established and had a regular circle of customers. The dealer from Cambridge came back the following week, as well as March Brown, a dealer from Ripley in Surrey, and they were probably my first true trade customers. In the following week some thirty five items sold, many of them at what now seem ridiculously low prices, Chinese Lowestoft saucers, (probably damaged) for a shilling, and a pair of Chinese porcelain *Famille Rose* plates for seven shillings and sixpence. Already a steady stream of trading had begun, with thirty six items sold in the following week, including a gateleg table fitted with a drawer for eight pounds, but few names of individual buyers were recorded, something that only occurred if goods had to be delivered or were paid for by cheque. Mrs Cox, a dealer from Solihull, Birmingham, and mother of our archivist, bought a wooden butter bowl of very deep shape for two pounds, and I think that almost everyone who came returned and became regular customers.

Thinking back to March 1936 and our arrival into Burford, I am amazed how little I really knew of the whole district, not only of Burford itself, but the immediate Cotswold surroundings. Partly, I suppose, due to the arranging of my future shop, and general activities of moving in to a new home, there seemed little opportunity to explore. However Mrs Gretton, who lived in a house called *Calendars* in Sheep Street, was a friend of my Somerset aunt, and was extraordinarily kind in throwing parties for us to meet not only other Burford inhabitants, but those living in the immediate vicinity, and this I think gave us a very good initial opening. Mrs Gretton, an historian and author, was a great character. She loved throwing parties but had very little money. Within a few weeks of my arrival, fairly regularly, I would receive a note: 'Come round at once, I need twenty pounds. Choose which ever chair you like in the hall, leave the money on the dish you will find on the bottom step of the staircase'. The first time this happened I hastened round, the door was ajar, and there, arranged round the wall, was a selection of chairs of many kinds. As I was looking at them I suddenly realised someone was looking at

me, and raising my eyes, there was Mrs Gretton standing on the top step of the staircase, her arms to her side, eyes shut, waiting to hear the clink of coin into the bottom dish, and so I hastily went away with two chairs.

On one occasion Mrs Gretton was giving a large and distinguished party, including Walter De la Mare, but it appeared I was to finance it. I was given the free run of the house to buy anything I liked, with the provision that nothing would be moved until after the party. Among the items I remember selecting was a good hanging glass candle lantern of inverted bowl shape, dating from the late eighteenth century, with its original ormolu ring and candle holder. This was something that I had not seen in the north of England, but before 1940 they were reasonably common in the Burford area. I can remember one in a smaller house in Charlbury, and others in the Witney area, hanging where they had always been. Mrs Gretton's example hung low, near a window, and I remember as an invited guest spending most of the evening standing beneath it, hoping that no one would get near enough to damage it, when I should have been talking to Walter De La Mare or his son Richard. Mrs Gretton had been in Burford for a considerable time, was well known and told us that we, newcomers, would be looked upon as foreigners for at least twenty five years. In fact we found the town extraordinarily kind to newcomers.

Some years later, in Christmas week, I was invited to a mansion near Devizes, and was asked to spend £500 on almost any items in the house, but told that I could not move them until after the 3rd of January. It turned out I was financing the annual New Year's Eve party, where the owner thought a new red carpet would look good in the passage ways. Sadly, it and the party were flooded with water when it began to rain that night, as the roof gutterings had never been cleared. I am sure that my payment could have been put to better use, but also I wish I still had the items then acquired, including a topographical picture by Tillemans.

It must have been in 1938 that Mrs Gretton decided to have a Burford Arts Treasure Exhibition as part of the annual Arts and Craft Exhibition, which was quite a feature of summer life. I can remember driving around the town with her, in our old Morris 25hp open touring car, going into houses which I had not yet been into, and collecting such things as a William and Mary looking glass, or the Town Maces which came out of a box underneath the local Doctor Cheatle's bed, now in the Tolsey Museum in Burford. The mirror came from the shop and home of Mrs Smith, who ran a stationers-cum-sweetmeat shop on the west side off Burford High Street. Many years later I began to receive notes from Mrs Smith to the effect, 'I've had a letter from my niece in London, not a very nice girl, you'd better come down and see me at 6 o'clock'. And when I would arrive, she would say, 'I've heard from me niece, not a nice girl, I don't want her to have all this stuff, what will you take today Mr Warner?'. The contents of the house included interesting antiques that had been in the Smith family for many generations. Mr Smith, who had been the local carpenter and undertaker, had died in 1910. It was after I bought nearly everything I wanted in the downstairs room, that I said to Mrs Smith one day, 'Can't we go upstairs?' and she said, 'Oh, Mr Warner, I wouldn't let you do that', and I said, 'Why ever not?'. She said, 'Me dear husband died in 1910, and you know I've never found time to tidy up. All these wars, all these wars you know'. After a little persuasion we opened a door and upstairs we went. Sure enough she never had had time to tidy up,

and in the workshop everything was under layers of dust. But the unfinished coffin that Mr Smith had been working on in 1910 was still on the workbench, furniture was still untouched as it had lain, and among those items I was able to buy, was the eighteenth-century mahogany framed lathe, which is now part of the Pinto Collection in Birmingham Art Gallery and Museum. It was some time later, following the death of Mrs Smith, that I was able to purchase the old pine shop counter in which was her cash drawer, and from which change was always so slow to come. The reason for this was a flow of post cards celebrating military manoeuvres in the area early in the century, which swept forward every time the drawer was opened. The final auction sale produced many rolls of green cloth (moreen, a worsted cloth with a waved finish) that had lain unused for the previous one hundred and eighty years, and of which green was a hitherto unknown colour. The bulk of what I acquired went to Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, and a matching paint was made for them, and is still popular in America.

I must have been well grounded during my time at the Victoria and Albert Museum on standard furniture and other objects, as somehow I have always been able to recognise the unusual and one-off example of anything ranging from a chair to a piece of pottery or needlework. I also learnt how important it was to know one's stock, and not to lose a customer, as I once did. One day an unknown lady was looking round, saw a red leather case, and asked, 'What's that?'. 'Oh, there is a document inside of no particular interest', I replied. She pulled it out, looked at it, stamped her foot and said, 'It's creating my Grandfather a Baronet'. She bought it, but I never saw her again. Mrs Rowells, who ran one of the two antique shops that were in Burford when I first came, was of high Gypsy background, and it was only after her marriage that she started living under a roof rather than in a van. When caravans came through the town, the occupants curtsied to her, because she was so high up in the Gypsy hierarchy. Although Burford didn't curtsey, they did stand to attention every year at Armistice time when she set off with a wreath walking up the High Street to lay it on the Burford War Memorial for her son. Mrs Rowells' husband was the local chimney sweep, a sure way of getting into homes and being able sometimes to buy antiques. His round of work covered quite a wide area, stretching northwards as far as Shipton-under-Wychwood, the nearest railway station. At the end of the day's work, having perhaps earned seven shillings and sixpence, his normal practice would be to go to the station and spend five shillings of this on buying coal which he would load into his cart. When he got back to Burford, he could sell this, making a very small additional profit on his day's work.

1936 was really the bottom of the slump. There was severe unemployment in the town. Usually a group of unemployed people stood on the corner of Witney Street hoping someone might come along wanting an odd job man, either as a beater for the shoot on Saturday, or to help with clearing ground. And many people found it hard to buy that extra loaf of bread. Compared with now, the town of Burford was in what I suppose is best called a very untouched or rather delapidated condition. Everyone knew that every house in Burford High Street had changed hands during the previous hundred years or so for a hundred pounds or less. Nearly all the properties were still in their mediaeval state of having long tenements at the back of them. Adjoining our property to the north was a butcher's yard and a row of cottages. These were demolished the very

day that our furniture was being moved. Really, behind the scenes of the very charming semi-untouched scene Burford High Street then presented, were largely slum conditions. I have already said how little time my mother and I had had exploring the immediate surroundings of Burford, and the moment that the shop had opened, I suppose I got even busier so that in a way, it was only when I was summoned to a house to look at something, or perhaps deliver an item of furniture, that I got to know the immediate surroundings in any very close degree. Though a number of people had country cottages in the immediate area of Burford, the real influx of such newcomers occurred after 1950.

Swinbrook, three miles away, was dominated by the Redesdale family, who had only ten years earlier, in about 1926, built themselves a large mansion at the top of Swinbrook, having moved from Asthall Manor. It was not long after my opening that Saturdays often produced that bevy of Redesdale daughters, who became avid buyers of antique Victorian clothing. It was to my great embarrassment, as they put on a semi-striptease act while trying them on and waited to see at what point I would fly. It was probably 1938 when the morning paper reported that the police had had to break up a fascist rally in Hyde Park, and rescue Unity Mitford. Two hours later my shop door opened, and there they all were. 'Poor Unity', they said, 'We've brought her along to buy a dress to cheer her up'. There was Unity with a black eye, and in a fairly beaten-up state, not, I felt, really wanting to be cheered.

Perhaps what is hard to realise is that Burford had been a tourist attraction as early as 1900, even at that stage selling china bearing the legend 'A Present From Burford' . The established antiques shop, Mr Bowerman's, had been opened in 1870. Mr Bowerman's father had come from Germany and began selling cheap printed cottons door to door, but basing himself on Burford. On his rounds, sometimes a cottager would be unable to pay for the cloth, but would agree a swap for an old plate or ornament. So he started building up a stock of antiques, finding these relatively easy to sell. Fairly soon he was joined in business by his brother, quite a high ranking German university professor, interested in old books, which again he started buying in the greater Cotswold area, and I believe shipping back to Germany. Looking at a photograph of the Bowerman shop, taken in the early 1900s (Figure 8), it is interesting to see the type of furniture then being handled, and again it reminds one of how much in my earlier dealing days was always in need of greater or lesser repair. I suppose it is now relatively rare to find an antique chair minus a leg, but very easy to find many so-called antiques in a heavily restored condition. Certainly two thirds of all the furniture I bought in my early days needed repairs of some kind, in particular, the replacement of brass handles.

Perhaps Mr Bowerman's skilled operation of knocking on cottage doors in the greater Burford area is worth noting. Having bought something, instead of taking it immediately home, he would carry it down the street a few doors and would say, 'I've just bought this chair, and wonder if you would be so kind as to store it for me for a week, I don't think I can manage to get it home today. I'll pay you threepence for storage' (some times it might be as much as sixpence). And almost invariably they were willing to store the item or furniture or whatever it was. But when a week later he called for it, somehow or other Mr Bowerman always managed to get into the house or cottage, often enabling him to buy something else, which again would be moved down the street or a little further away.

What now surprises me is how rapidly myself and the shop became known locally. Within a year I was asked to loan items to an exhibition in Oxford organised by the Women's Institute Association. Around Burford was a number of large country houses and normally at week-end house parties, those assembled were likely to come in and visit me. Prior to the War, there were admittedly many fewer antique shops around the country than there are today. Perhaps mine was a little more interesting than many. Sadly, I've always been more interested in objects than in people and too often didn't really know whom I was talking to, or being visited by. But sometimes contacts through a customer would lead to their introducing me to a possible seller of goods, and it was through this that I built up a particularly good network of private buying which served me so well over the years.

Over the years, although I cannot say that I have been into every house in Burford, I suppose I have been in to a great number of them, often clearing out four-poster beds. This included parts from the attics of the Old Swan Inn, clearing out four-poster bed parts and other junk from the attics of The Bull Hotel, and doing this in almost all the public buildings in Burford. The overall impression gained was that the town going back certainly into the eighteenth-century, had been very impoverished and the quality of goods was of a fairly low standard, much of it I expect having been made locally. It is interesting to remember that only some hundred and eighty years earlier, anyone in Burford wanting a spade had to get themselves to Stow-on-the-Wold, ten miles north of Burford, this being as far as deliveries from the industrial Midlands came. Even up to 1938, the main road from Burford to Stow-on-the-Wold was single track much of the way, and if a car came in the other direction, one or other of you had to crawl into the verge. Then, as it seemed almost overnight, the road was widened, wide verges made on one side of the road, all in the knowledge that war was likely to break out. Should invasion take place, the fleeing population of London would head towards Wales, walking on the left-hand side of the Stow road, as the British Armed Forces would be pouring down the newly-made road in the opposite direction.

Burford was scheduled as a one-night stop for refugees and I can remember a survey being done in the old Quaker Meeting House in Burford for the storage of food to meet this emergency, although in fact this never took place. Perhaps one should also remember that prior to the War there was no Estate Agent in Burford. The nearest local agents were either in Witney, or Stow-on-the-Wold, where the firm of Taylor & Fletcher, who were nominally cattle auctioneers, also handled property and, periodically, sales of furnishings and effects. Curiously the population figures of Burford have changed very little over the last two hundred years. Admittedly a great deal of new building has been done in the town, but far fewer people live in each house, and it is now hard to recollect how many people lived in the tenements behind shops or business premises in Burford High Street, virtually out of sight.

My initial stock consisted of some eight hundred odd items. Three hundred were furniture or woodwork, some two hundred ceramics or glass, and one hundred and twenty metal work with various other categories. Most of these items had been acquired over the previous six years at a total cost of five hundred and sixty. The most expensive item was a superb eighteenth-century grand piano with what I consider to be a unique

detail of an Adam-style carved stretcher. Many of the items in stock I would not now purchase, but at that time I had no idea whatsoever as to what would sell or appeal to a country clientele. Many of the things had been purchased purely on account of low price, such as old police truncheons at sixpence each, and quantities of Victorian cross-stitch embroidery squares, which cost threepence each in a street market near Victoria Station in London. An admittedly plain but sound eighteenth-century oak bible box which cost four shillings and sixpence remained unsold with me for eighteen months before selling without profit. Around this time a fine Chippendale period upholstered seat and back chair, still in its original blue damask covering, had cost two pounds in a Sussex shop, while a walnut country made Chippendale chair with its original hide loose drop-in seat was two pounds ten from a dealer in Whitchurch, Shropshire. Cash was in very short supply everywhere.

While there was nothing to be ashamed of about my initial stock, it did include a reproduction Charles II walnut day bed and a walnut William and Mary table of doubtful age, as well as a Sampson reproduction of so-called Chelsea plate which had cost me twelve shillings, all of which I had bought hopefully as being genuine, but was now offering for what they were. Looking back, my stock at the start lacked excitement or items of individual character, but it is worth noting that the Chelsea reproduction plate took me four years to sell at its original cost price. I did however sell what I believed to be a sixteenth-century Spanish earthenware charger, but which later turned out, very much to the buyer's advantage, to be a particularly important example of semi-modern studio pottery. Another of my mistakes was to believe a very charming set of portraits by John Downman were originals, but these turned out to be prints. They were in part compensated for by the original Hoppner water-colour purchased at a sale at Patterdale Hall in the Lake District a few years earlier. What an amazing auction that was, containing the remains of what must have been a very important ceramic collection. It gave me the opportunity of acquiring my first Hispano-Moresque pottery and a fifteenth century Persian Islamic blue and white bowl, also damaged but of good appearance. In the autumn of 1935, there was an auction at Skipton in Yorkshire of the stock of a firm called Proctors. At this sale I bought two yew wood Windsor chairs of the somewhat heavy north country type for one pound each and others of a better type for one pound seven shillings and sixpence only. The shop Proctor's was later to become that of Fred Laycock, one of my favourite suppliers, until sadly it was closed by his nephew many years later.

Perhaps one category of small significance, but on which I seemed to have a local monopoly, were the so-called green glass dumps made in the St Helen's glassworks area of Lancashire. Small ones might be in the form of ink wells or paper weights, and the larger ones were doorstops. Many of these I found I could buy for a shilling each, and was selling them for five times this sum with ease. Within three weeks of opening I left Burford for a day in London, again visiting the Caledonian market, and among items purchased was a leather fire bucket for seven shillings and sixpence, a small wax doll for twelve shillings and sixpence and a seventeenth century Flemish carved wood figure for seventeen shillings and sixpence. A carved wood figure of an eagle only cost four shillings, pewter egg cups one shilling each, and some polychrome Delft tiles cost a mere

sixpence each. These appeared to be the sort of prices prevailing at that time, and although it would appear that so much of what I sold was at too low a price, I think I was in step with the market generally. One has got to remember that the local agricultural wage at this time was somewhere around two pounds a week, and experienced shorthand typists felt they were doing well for three pounds ten shillings.

This was the period when Foster's Salerooms in Pall Mall was still operating in London, and for an investment of five guineas I bought fourteen large Hispano-Moresque plates, one of which was perfect, the others with small cracks or faults and two Isnik, what were then called Rhodian plates, for three pounds ten. Exactly one month after opening I attended my first auction sale in the Burford area, which was in a small house in the Market Square at Chipping Norton, ten miles away. I bought an oval Sheraton mahogany toilet mirror for two pounds, and a Chippendale period mulberry tea caddy for twelve shillings and sixpence; these against all the dealers present who were meeting me for the first time, and who were surprised when I refused to join their local ring and settlement. This I consistently refused to do, and have never taken part in one in spite of numerous visits by members of the trade pleading with me to join them. I think my feeling on this is that initially it is a banding together to do an owner down on the fair price of their goods; the argument on the other side being that dealers should not have to, by bidding up and up, give away their accumulated knowledge of values. I remember one dealer on one occasion, almost with tears in his eyes, saying would I please join them if they promised to clean up the ring first.

Attendance at this sale, however, brought me in touch with a wide cross section of the more active members of the antique trade in the Cotswold area. This was dominated by Mr Goodban from Oxford, and Mr & Mrs Harmer Brown, then established at Long Compton, and with considerable taste and financial backing. Mr Harmer Brown, having won on the Irish Sweepstake, gave up his business as an ironmaster in the Birmingham area and started to do what he had always wanted. Other dealers met at that time were Shirley Brown from Treddington and Mr Eborall, who then lived at Henley-in-Arden, both of whom were to become regular weekly customers. I suppose it was only as goods became scarcer that dealers tended to keep to themselves to an ever increasing extent. In my early days, when going away buying, I generally had a companion with me. This was sometimes my cousin's husband, Robin Eden, who had started an antique shop in Wiltshire, sometimes my friend Wing Commander Golding-Barrett, known to everybody as GB, or my American contact from California, Ian Floyd. During my early journeyings there was enough for each of us to buy, but later on perhaps only one item of importance would turn up during the day, and who should have it became a problem, and solo travelling started.

This reminds me of the occasion, while travelling with Robin Eden, I bought for a pound what I thought of as an old wooden penny whistle, but which eventually turned out to be an early recorder. That evening, looking at our purchases, I showed him this and he said , 'But you can't blow, you know I play these things', and, as I knew he could, I let him buy it from me for its cost price of one pound. He enjoyed it for some months before putting it away in his desk drawer. Some years elapsed before he read in the paper that the Japanese were buying woodwind instruments extensively, and showing it to

Sotheby's Salerooms they said that it was quite a valuable and early instrument, for which they might get around four thousand pounds. Sadly, however, it didn't sell, and it came back to him and was returned to his desk drawer, where it remained for another ten or twelve years. Then, once again reading how active the Japanese buyers were becoming, with their interest not only in woodwind but also stringed instruments, he again put it into another Sotheby's sale, when it fetched fourteen thousand pounds, of which I sadly never saw a penny.

We got to know Mr Eborall fairly well over the years. Among the stories he told me was that as a lad of about eleven, he had been sent by dealers from Worcester late one evening up to a farm house on Clee Hill near Ludlow. There, out in a shed, was a very early oak cupboard which the antique trade had been trying to buy for many years, and which the farmer refused to sell as it was being used as a rabbit hutch. The day before Eborall's visit, dealers from Worcester had called, and found that there was only one rabbit in the hutch. Following Eborall's night call with perhaps a little poison, dealers again arrived, asked to buy the cupboard, the farmer again refusing on the grounds that it was in use. They said, 'But the rabbit's dead', and there inside the hutch was found one dead rabbit. One hour later the desired oak cupboard was thrown on to a cart, and so down to Worcester where it was seen by Amyas Phillips, the dealer at Hitchin, whose customer eventually gave it to the Victoria and Albert Museum, where it is now known as Prince Arthur's cupboard (W.15-1912). It was given to the museum by Robert L. Mond of Sevenoaks, Kent, via the National Art Collection Fund.

I had viewed a private house sale in Cheltenham, where the one item I really desired was early Jacobean green crewel-work hangings on the walls of one room. Being unable to go to the sale, I sent my mother who bid for the lot, finding the opposition came from Mr Eborall, our regular weekly customer. She eventually outbid him, and immediately, going across, said to him, 'Oh Mr Eborall, on your way home, you will be going near Burford. Do you think you would be kind enough to bring the curtains', and left him with the job of getting them down and delivering them. I think he was shocked by the whole event, but it did make for good private relationships, and as an outcome of this, he invited us back to his home in Henley-in-Arden. There we met his daughter Bluebell, who was born with Down's Syndrome. She was the joy of his life, and I think that everything he did was for her.

It's probably right at this stage to say something about my initial stock and its cost of five hundred and sixty odd pounds. This was made up from a legacy of three hundred and fourteen pounds, sale of shares of two hundred pounds, and personal savings and wages from my Spring Street, London, work and also stamp dealing. It would appear that I started with cash-in-hand of only thirty-five pounds. In view of this cash shortage, rapid turnover was of utmost priority and importance. During that first twelve months of trading, I purchased just under two thousand items, from places as scattered as London, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and Bristol, although the bulk came from an easy orbit around Burford. It should be remembered that the immediate surroundings were virtually unknown to me, and I seem to have explored in ever-widening circles, frequently on early-closing days, but also when attending auctions which would usually also include visits to shops in this area. Before coming to look at Burford, my only

experience of the Cotswolds had been a single night spent at Broadway, when motoring north from Bristol to Yorkshire. My first auction attendance took place on 7th May 1936 at Chipping Norton, as I have already mentioned, but thinking back, it is interesting to note that I made the mistake common to nearly all new dealers of never having given sufficient thought to the replacement of stock. My initial stock, gathered up over a period of some six years, with no real thought over the time spent on its acquisition, certainly gave me a wide variety of goods, but now, with the shop, time was of utmost importance, and a day in London was sometimes thought to be better than attendance at a small country auction.

I remember that Saturday night when two men came in, were interested in the Hispano-Moresque pottery that I had bought at Foster's Salerooms in Pall Mall, and I gave them a long talk about it, having just read a book on the subject. They went on and bought two tables, asking me to send them to London, and, when they gave the name and address, it turned out to be 'Sir John Hill, Director's House, British Museum'. Sir John was the author of the book, and I didn't quite know what to say. This was a lesson that I still had to learn, that although the shopkeeper may have his name above the door, he has no idea who he may be speaking to as a customer. It was some years ahead when a customer said she would like to bring her aunt with her when she next called. I agreed, and was surprised when she turned up as one of the retinue, auntie turning out to be Queen Mary, and my customer, the Duchess of Beaufort. It was some forty five years later that I had the experience of telling an elderly American couple that the chairs they were so admiring were very good but far too much money. The next day, when they returned to buy, not the chairs, but some other items they had looked at, and gave me their shipper's name, I was shocked to find that I was speaking to David Rockerfeller in person. During 1936, my first summer in Burford, among my customers were Lady Holland, Richard Delamere, Sir John Hill, March Brown, a dealer from Ripley, Surrey and the Dower House, Newbury. These all became regular customers and remained so for many years . There were also Judge Burgess, Mrs Westling, and the Vincent-Masseys. He subsequently became Governor General of Canada. It was Mrs Vincent-Massey who bought the marked Jennens and Bettridge black and gold papier mache tray for forty five shillings, which I had discovered in its original brown paper covering on the top shelf of an ironmongers' shop in the slum quayside district of Bristol, where it had remained unsold and in stock from at least 1850, and cost seven shillings and sixpence, its original price.

After some six weeks, fresh stock seemed essential, and one morning I set off driving eastwards to reach Reading. It must have been a sunny day, and I must have had the sun in my eyes, because from then on I decided that, whenever possible I would start off in the morning with the sun behind me and drive north or westwards, so as to have it again behind me on my return. After my visit to Reading, I continued the circuit round through Newbury, and so to Hungerford and home. That day in Hungerford included my first meeting with Mrs Bagshaw in her private home-cum-shop; she became a great personal friend over the years ahead. Through her I met Mr & Mr Jarvis, who had recently opened a cafe on the Great West Road, from which they also sold antique furniture.

It was six months later, at the very end of October, having acquired some fifteen

hundred fresh items of stock since my opening, that I left my mother in charge of the business and set off on my first real serious buying trip. This was to produce some two hundred items of fresh stock, and set the general pattern which was to be repeated two or three times annually over the next forty to fifty years, primarily governed by spending cash available and how much came in from private purchases or auctions. Autumn has always been my favourite time for buying; falling leaves covering the drive leading up to a mansion house sale and a chill in the air when inspecting goods laid out in the stable yard. To a degree, I suppose, there was also less pressure from the shop now that the summer season of visitors was over. I set off that 29 October on a ten day journey north, starting with calls at Worcester and Kidderminster. There, I visited that formidable old woman dealer Miss Millington who, years later, sheltered me one night during an air raid, when I was working in Birmingham and had got stranded in Kidderminster. I can remember her allowing me to doss down on her living room floor in my sleeping bag. Opposite where I was sleeping was a fine Jacobean oak cabinet chest which I tried to buy the following morning, but was told that it was not for sale. However, I was told that I could have first refusal if she ever did part with it. 'I won't forget', she said. And, wonderfully, she never did. A year or two later during the war a letter reached my mother, naming a price, which my mother accepted, only later to discover that Miss Millington had died the day following her letter. I kept this chest for years.

From Kidderminster I proceeded northwards, by Whitchurch to Preston, where I called on Edward Neal for the first time as an established fellow trader, buying fine yew tree wood Windsor arm chairs of the so-called saucer arm type for four pounds ten shillings each, with rail carriage at two shillings and sixpence added to that cost. In the 1990s I saw similar chairs priced at over one thousand pounds each. Then via Skipton to Kendal, Penrith, Carlisle and Keswick, Lancaster and Bentham. Then across to Darlington and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, where I was able to buy a set of Regency mahogany scimitar leg chairs that came out of a cellar beneath a basement for twelve pounds plus two pounds carriage. Also, a mahogany fret wall mirror of the type that has seemed to me to be peculiar to this north east area; the frame reeded, but with the usual fret sides and inset gilt eagle. Undoubtedly these are of early-nineteenth-century date, but they are basically in the style of the second half of the eighteenth century.

It was on that tour that I first met old Mrs Bushby, the local theatrical costumier in Carlisle. Hastening through the covered market I passed a stall of groceries, and was surprised to see that, standing on many of the tins and packages, were Staffordshire figures and other small antiques. I was told by the stall-holder that they belonged to his old mother, and I'd better go and call on her. It was here that, without my knowing, I missed what might have been a very major find. Living in the rooms above Mrs Bushby was her friend, a very elderly seamstress who, later, becoming too old to manage on her own, was moved to sheltered housing. Before leaving, she invited her friend Mrs Bushby to go upstairs to see if there was anything she'd like. Mrs Bushby said, 'No, I am sure you have nothing'. So everything went to the local auction sale where, to everyone's surprise, her very heavy, blackened bedspread fetched some hundreds of pounds, being found to be a small Gothic gold thread tapestry. But this I never saw.

During the next two years I gave myself a weekly payment from the business of five

pounds, rising to seven pounds in 1938, and ten pounds in 1939, but this was soon to be reduced after the declaration of war to five pounds again. Of this, three pounds went to my mother as my share of board and house expenses. Over this period, if trading justified, I took periodic lump sums from the business, for example one hundred and sixty pounds in 1937, largely, if not entirely, using it to purchase antique items from stock for my own private collection, my collecting instincts overriding my desire to deal. A sum of one or two pounds weekly was put aside for income tax. My shop cleaner and duster received five shillings weekly, and window cleaners one shilling and six pence a visit. While such figures are now meaningless, it should be noted that dinner, bed and breakfast at a good Bloomsbury hostel was only forty five shillings a week, and a telegram despatched from Burford to Yorkshire on my arrival in 1936, saying I had overtaken the furniture vans in Worcester, cost sixpence.

Curiously, I have always done well with clearances from dealers' stocks, whether buying a vast chest-full of brass candlesticks, as I once did at Whitehaven, or a stack of what on examination proved to be one hundred and twenty tripod tables, many with revolving birdcage tops, all at a flat rate of four and sixpence each. However it took us months to sort out this collection of tables as many of the tops were detachable, due to the birdcage action which allowed the top to revolve. One such bulk purchase was a packet of twenty Sun Fire Insurance marks, still in their untouched condition with original paper wrappings around them, which were discovered in a desk in a Whitchurch, Shropshire antique shop. They appeared to have come from the estate of a one time insurance agent. Then there was the hoard of green japanned and gilt tea canisters discovered in Lancashire and another curious cache of small printed booklets produced by Lewis Carroll on how to write a letter. These were sold as stamp cases but are now looked on as very rare. Lewis Carroll stamp cases, as I remember them, measured some three by two inches. There was a pocket in them for keeping postage stamps and then a short essay on how to write a letter. Sadly I never kept one of these, but must have had at least twenty if not more through my hands, found together in a drawer.

10. Umbrella stand from Mount Street Friends' Meeting House, York, c1825

11. Meeting bench from Witney Friends' Meeting House, Oxfordshire, c1690

12. Wing armchair with original needlework cover, 1750/60

13. Collection of knitting sheaths sold as treen ornaments, nineteenth century.

14. Beehive chair made of coiled straw bound with bramble peelings, raised on wooden battens, c1800. From Berkeley Castle, Severn Estuary, Gloucestershire.

15. Primitive birdcage in form of shopfronts, incorporating a pocket watch, c1820
Bought in Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire.

16. Dole cupboard, c1680. Bought from Mr Williamson of Guildford, Surrey.

17. Chest of drawers with panelled fronts, c1680, walnut. Contains original seventeenth-century lining paper.

18. Welsh stick-back chair, named a 'Yeoman' chair by RW. The arm bow is one massive piece of timber. Elm and oak.

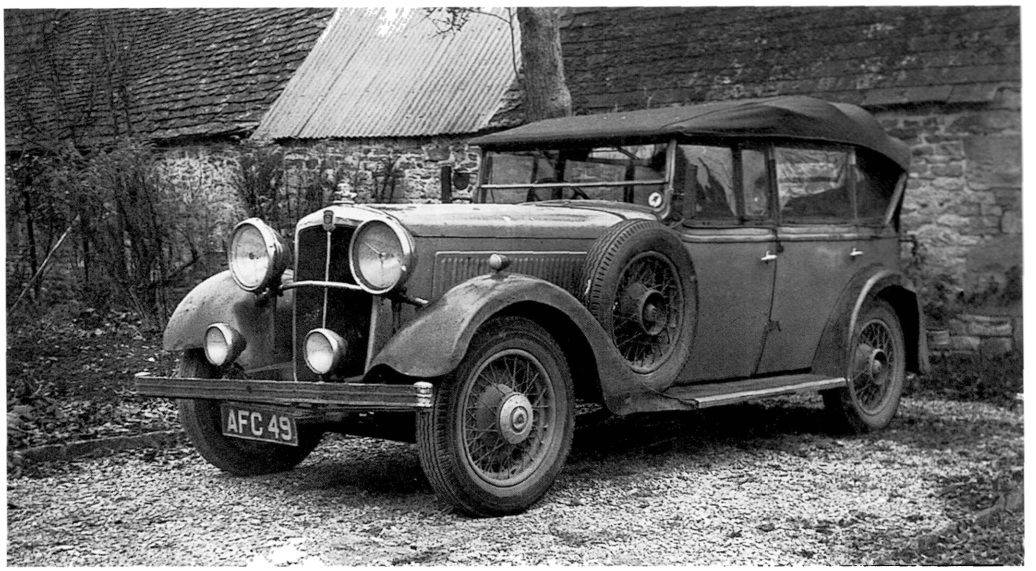
19. Triple rail stick-back chair, elm and oak with fruitwood spindles, traces of red paint on seat.

20. Rush seated splat-back chair of East Anglian type.

21. Spindle-back chair with low arms, elm with rush seat, from north west Lancashire. RW described this as a nursing chair.

22. Stick-back chair with pierced splat, Yorkshire. This has what RW calls 'saucer' arms.

23. Stick-back chair with crown motif, elm, beech and ash, legs and stretchers replaced.



24. RW's car, a Morris 25 horse power Open Tourer.
Bought shortly after his arrival in Burford.