

MY BEGINNINGS IN BUSINESS

1937 was an exciting year. I felt established and, most importantly, had some idea of what was and was not in demand. Before 1940, regional variations in style and the type of goods to be found in different localities, district to district, were still very apparent. Travelling north, Lancashire and Yorkshire still held quantities of ladder- and spindle-backed chairs, oak court cupboards and oak box-seat settles, as well as a much commoner and less wanted variety with fielded panel backs and chamfered or cabriole legs. These were still priced at under five pounds, and it was looked on as a kindness to buy them. In Somerset it was ash or elm topped farmhouse tables, and oak or elm bacon cupboard settles that could not be found elsewhere. In East Anglia, wooden dip seat chairs of country Sheraton type, that were always a little too low in the leg, were to be found in a multiplicity of woods. Also wooden wag on the wall clocks, of Black Forest origin, which the English, always bad at language and unable to say *Deutsch*, call Dutch. These I know were peddled all over England, but more appeared to remain in East Anglia than elsewhere, as did the small brass frame prints of which there is now a considerable collection in the National Trust property, Snowhill Manor, Worcestershire.

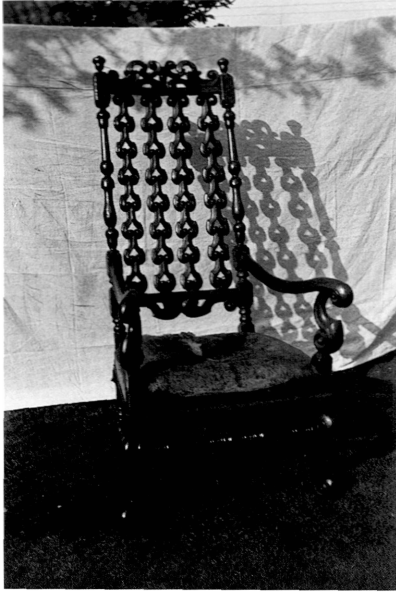
It was early in 1937 that I made my first contact with Mr Pollard, a dealer in Cirencester, to discover that he had previously been manager to 'The Old Times Furnishing Company' in London, a business that terminated due to the slump. This firm, whose advertisements can be seen in old copies of the *Connoisseur* magazine and other periodicals, would furnish a room with genuine antiques for what now appear suprisingly low prices. For example, a dining room complete with long-case clock, dresser, gateleg table, set of rush-seat chairs etc, would cost around fifty pounds.

My Yorkshire uncle had by now established contact with a scrap metal merchant in Lancaster, who was putting cast iron hearth ornaments on one side for him. Large punch or lion doorstops cost us sixpence each, and the small dogs and figures were from a halfpenny to threepence each. These my uncle cleaned and painted. It was not the price, but the sheer quantity available which, looking back, now seems so surprising. Although I never liked these, they certainly showed very much more than a hundred percent profit when sold. In March 1937, an auction at Ashton Keynes yielded some fifty lots of ceramics, which was, I think, the collection or accumulation of a one time dealer who was also the local postmaster. I knew I should have bought more of it. It was towards the end of April 1937, that I undertook another serious buying tour, this time to the West Country. Stopping in Yeovil, I found it was market day which was just coming to an end. On a second-hand agricultural dealer's stall, I spotted a set of six antique iron garden chairs, which he sold me for thirty two shillings and sixpence, saying that they had come out of a shed with other items he was buying on a large estate in Dorset. I bought the chairs, ran to the nearest stationer's shop, bought a packet of luggage labels, addressed them to myself, and, tying them on the chairs, took them to the local railway station. Two days later they all arrived in Burford. It is now hard to recollect how rail was the usual form of transport those days, apart from a regular carrier service by road to London. Almost immediately I

sold the chairs at a satisfactory profit to a local resident, who asked for them to be cleaned and painted green. While doing this they were spotted by Mrs Cox, then in partnership with Mr Pearson in London, who were top interior decorators. She greatly wished to buy the set, but found she was too late. Shortly after this, my first buyer called and said would I mind very much if she did not purchase the chairs, as she was in some financial difficulties. I willingly let her out of the bargain, telephoned Mrs Cox, this time offering the chairs for thrice my previous asking price. She snapped them up, and asked if I would please paint the chairs white, for which she would pay, and we had to repaint the chairs a second time. I remember that the green paint took a lot of covering. When the chairs reached London they were seen by a French collector, who recognised them as identical to some shown in an early print of the Tuilleries Gardens, and it was there that they eventually found their way, possibly having been sold at the time of the French Revolution. Stories such as this must be plentiful, but they are so seldom recorded. Looking back now, I greatly regret that I seldom took photographs of items that passed through my hands. But the general daily pressure of shopkeeping allowed little time for such activities and even more regrettably my frequent non-acceptance of invitations to visit customers in their homes was also due to this.

As an example of how low prices were, on March 20, 1936, Malcolm Franklin of Chicago, then buying for the shop of Carson, Pirie, Scott, purchased a yew tree wood Windsor wheelback arm chair and a set of eight Regency mahogany chairs for eighteen guineas, and a primitive portrait of a little girl for fifteen shillings, a portrait that, fifty years later, would certainly have been worth a four figure sum. Countess Munster was already buying on behalf of Sybil Colefax Ltd of Bruton Street, London, and was, I think, my first contact with this firm before I got to know John Fowler. Did I influence his taste, or did he influence me?

The auction sale at Edgeworth Manor, near Stroud in Gloucestershire, which took place on the 10 May 1937, a year after my opening, is indicative of the low prices then prevailing. It had been the home of two brothers, both great collectors, who must I think have done most of their buying during the 1900-1920 period. I note that I was able to purchase a *Cuir Bouilli* leather box, (a Spanish leather casket with cut-in decoration of about 1600), for a one pound bid, and lacquered cabinets on stands for six pounds and four pounds each; all this against trade competition. This gives an idea of how things then were. It was from this sale I bought a Charles II tall backed ebonised armchair. It was really a superb example, selected by me from a row of somewhat similar chairs lining an upstairs corridor, and cost seventeen pounds, quite a lot of money in those days. I had to wait six months for it to sell, when two unknown customers arrived, one of them purchasing it, and said, 'We would like to take it away immediately, and will send you a cheque; will that be all right'. I said that it would, and then wondered whether it would be. After his chauffeur had loaded the chair into their car, feeling a little uneasy, I ran out and took the number. However, forty-eight hours later I received a letter from the Foreign Office, enclosing the cheque, and found that my customer had been Malcolm MacDonald, son of our one time Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald. His companion, Sir Esmond Ovey, who on this same occasion



25. Ebonised chair, c1680. Bought at auction in Gloucestershire in 1938 for £18.



26. Virginal, by Thomas Body c1662. Bought from a Co. Durham country house sale.

bought a tapestry from me, was, after the war, to become a regular customer and real friend, after the death of his wife, who was Argentinian. She had had a wonderful time when Sir Esmond, who was one of our leading Ambassadors, had been posted to Moscow, as for the first time in her life she no longer had to be chaperoned everywhere. When she died, I think he became extremely lonely, and my mother and I were fairly often invited to his home at Culham Manor, near Oxford.

Cheltenham was a very active antiques centre with many small shops but no particular large ones, excluding perhaps Isher, who was one of the leading metalwork dealers. He operated from premises behind the High Street. It is always to my regret that Isher and I did not get to know each other better. It was some time before I realised that he did a lot of business with the Bowerman Shop in Burford High Street, who said that they would do no more business with him if he visited my shop; so on his rare visits, he always slipped in by the back gate. At this time, Phillips of Hitchin, whom I considered one of the country's best furniture dealers, was able to sell me a cricket table with a burr wood walnut top of wonderful dark patination for four pounds, which I sold on to a Harrogate dealer for a small profit sometime later. I was also buying from William Rixon, an important and forceful dealer in Dunstable. It now strikes me as odd what importance at this time was attached to items such as silvered glass, really little more than fairground ornaments, which always sold readily, and the tremendous sudden demand there was for glass obelisks. These were both passing fashions. Mr Levy of the Caledonian Market continued to keep up a small steady flow of turned *lignum vitae* wood string boxes for me at around five or six shillings each, most of which passed on from me to Alfred Bullard, the London dealer from Park Row, whose premises in Philadelphia were well known. After acquiring them, he had short turned columns mounted on the tops, thereby turning them into electric table lamps.

It was in June 1937, that I must have made an early start, and called on Mr Scammel, a dealer of Upton Scudamore, whom I later considered to be an arch villain, and asked him if he ever found any early linenfold carved furniture. He told me he had been offered just such an item the previous week, but did not buy it as it was of pine not oak, but gave me the name and address of the owner, and so began perhaps one of my first treasure hunts, or rather follow-ups of a reported item. I drove on to Wincanton, there to find that Mr Matthews, who had the chest, was a plumber, had discovered it in the attic of a house when he was fitting a new water tank, and had, I think, taken it in exchange for his work. Anyway, he sold it to me for eighty five shillings, and this was the first early linenfold item I acquired. I ended up buying yet another Adam & Eve blue dash Delft charger from him for two pounds two shillings and sixpence, not at that period looked upon as particularly rare or desirable, but which would now fetch a four figure sum. I was so pleased with my linenfold chest, I decided I would keep it, but first display it in the shop just as a show-off, believing no one would buy it for what I considered to be my exorbitant asking price. However someone did and off it went. During the following week I became more and more upset about this, finally writing to the buyer asking if he would be prepared to sell it back to me at cost plus carriage. He kindly said that he would be happy for me to have it back if I liked it so much. This chest in many ways is unique, being panelled on all four

sides, and, although the original top is admittedly of pine, the sides are made of cedar wood, the scent of which is still apparent.

I think pre-1940, very many people coming into the shop would say, 'I am looking for a wedding present; what do you suggest?' Thinking back, I am interested to realise that my first usual suggestion was a *lignum vitae* string box - probably ex-Caledonian Market - or, if an inexpensive item was wanted, a Robert Morden county map taken by me from a copy of *Camden's Britannia*. Myself and my uncle, in our free time, frequently painted them up to make them look more decorative. If something more tangible was needed, there were three possibilities. One was an oval topped office-type stool, with wooden legs and a handgrip in the top; these made ideal small coffee tables. Around 1936, many people were becoming aware of their usefulness, and they were already getting difficult to find, but did in fact prove very saleable. Another possibility was a small oak, mahogany or fruit wood tripod table, but perhaps best of all was a square wash stand, which would have had a hole in the top to take a basin and an under-shelf, usually containing a drawer. For a small extra charge, we would have a piece of old mahogany fitted to the top, rather than removing the hole as so many customers would have preferred. It is now quite extraordinary to realise just how plentiful square and corner mahogany Sheraton period wash stands were, being found in every untouched house. They have now almost vanished from the market.

While brought up on the maxim that the customer is always right, I now know that they are usually wrong, particularly when describing their own property. The shop was very full one Saturday afternoon when a man asked if I would buy a tea caddy. 'What is it like?' I asked. 'It is very, very big', he replied. At that time, tea caddies of any kind were in small demand, and big nineteenth-century ones, probably of rosewood, were virtually unsaleable, so I declined. He was very persistent and asked how much I thought it might be worth. I think I said under £3. 'Well, won't you just look at it?', he said, 'I've got it in the boot of my car'. I walked out, the boot was opened and there was the smallest mahogany tapered leg wine cooler that I had ever seen. Perhaps I should add that I bought it, but paid a great deal more for it than I would for a tea caddy.

All auction sales of note were advertised weekly in both the Times and Telegraph newspapers, and early in 1938 it must have been from one of these adverts that I drove all the way down to Bradbourne near Sevenoaks. The house there seemed one of the most untouched mansions that I had ever been in up to that time, with no electric lighting and virtually no water in the house. The Adam chimney glass was still in position in one of the rooms as originally hung, and what intrigued me was that an eighteenth-century four-poster bed in a small upstairs bedroom had only been got in due to the doming of the ceiling. The items that interested me most were the tapestries, which must have hung in the house certainly from a late-seventeenth-century date, although they themselves were older. Being so far from home and meeting a friend who said he was going to the sale, I left commissions with him for them. The sale was conducted 13-15 June 1938 by Farebrother, Elliot and Co. and the giltwood looking glass was bought by the Victoria and Albert Museum, (W.66-1938).

The night before the sale, just as I was going to bed, I had a premonition that something had gone wrong with my arrangements, so I got up very early and motored

down to Kent again, reaching Dorking in time for breakfast, and arriving at the sale just as it was starting, with no sign of my friend. Soon after, the tapestries came up, and it now seems amazing that I was able to buy the Elizabethan panel, *The Judgement of Solomon*, for five pounds; another larger panel with Roman figures for six pounds; yet another for five pounds fifteen shillings, and the fourth, a brilliant panel (though a bad subject of a man falling on to his own sword) complete with original borders, cost seven pounds ten shillings. It is interesting to note that many years later the last panel, which I had sold to Mr Baron Ash of Packwood House, was one of the few tapestries he did not make over with Packwood to the National Trust, and kept with him in his moated home, Wingfield Castle, near Diss. After his death this came up for sale at Christies, when it fetched some twelve hundred and fifty pounds. I can still remember my utter delight in buying these tapestries, and for what appeared to be very low prices. This was a really quite important country house auction, but tapestries were in such small esteem at this time that no one, least of all the London textile trade, were interested in them. My first panel was purchased for twenty five pounds by Sir Esmond Ovey for his home at Culham Manor near Oxford, but after his death I re-purchased it again at his auction and it is now at Swarthmoor Hall at Ulverston in Cumbria. Two of the other panels I fear, may have been destroyed during the London Blitz.

It was just three days later that I again made a very early start in that wonderful twenty five horse power Morris Touring car, acquired soon after my arrival in Burford, travelling down to Portisham House on the coast in Dorset, not very far from Dorchester. Portisham was the one time home of the Hardy family, one of whose members, 'Kiss me Hardy', had been a friend of Nelson's. I hadn't viewed this sale, but knew that old costumes in quantity were to be offered, and this is another sale that I will always look back on with pleasure. The weather was tremendously hot, so the auctioneer wisely decided that all selling should take place on the lawn under a vast spreading cedar tree. Two or three 'Stop me and buy one' ice-cream tricycles moved round, selling ices to the audience. Only myself and one other young man were even remotely interested in the costumes, and bid against each other for every lot as it came up, including late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century underwear, to the delight and amusement of the local ladies. Some of what I purchased included Admiral Hardy's silk stockings in quantity, which I sold to Charles Wade, and these now form part of the Snowhill Costume Collection which is now stored at Berrington Hall, the National Trust property near Leominster, Herefordshire. One of the rarest items was an eighteenth-century man's white linen shooting coat and waistcoat, also sold to Snowhill Manor, which had deep poacher-type pockets, and is something that I have never seen the like of again. There were quantities of women's silk travelling cloaks with hoods, which had wonderful coloured contrasting silk linings. Of these, I only bought a few, including one brown cloak with contrasting yellow and green bandings. Two folding green *calash* bonnets, such as were worn by women travelling on coaches to keep dust and glare from their eyes, cost five shillings. This was one of the finest collections of costumes in its original setting that I have ever found at auction.

In a small separate building in the grounds of Portisham House was a billiard room, the walls of which were lined floor to ceiling with glazed front cases of stuffed birds and

animals. I think I must have been the only bidder for this lot, buying everything - if I remember rightly - for ten shillings, including a stuffed white gazelle with a chain of office round its neck, and a hanging armorial. But the item I really wanted was a model room complete with doors, windows and curtains, and miniature furniture populated with stuffed cats and kittens of every conceivable size and age; the baby playing with a model rocking horse, a butler carrying in a 'Silver Tray' with a letter bearing a Penny Red stamp postmarked 1845, which, from the point of view of costume must have been when the whole thing was made. All my customers who saw it either loved or hated it in equal proportions, but it was still in stock when I re-opened again after the war in 1947, and many people shuddered at the thought of it. All the cases - which I didn't want - I gave away to local people to build garden frames and greenhouses with the glass. Transport would have been too difficult to arrange. A few weeks later, in mid July, a sale took place at 69 The Close, Salisbury, with a variety of splendid things. Why, oh why, did I sell the leather covered, brass studded trunk dated 1631, which bore the initials of Charles I? I was talked into selling it to someone after the sale for a profit of only a few pounds on the eleven pounds that it had cost me, and I still regret it.

By this time I had learned the wisdom of marking prices in my auction sale catalogues in code, but was not yet too proficient with it. Just as this auction began, I was approached by a dealer from Cheltenham whom I knew slightly, and who I knew was a member of the ring. He asked me to meet him in the garden, and as I was not interested in any of the first lots, I followed him out and down the long garden, at the bottom of which was the river. He continued walking for some time, and I decided that perhaps the ring had decided to throw me in the river for the duration of the sale. Suddenly he stopped, pulled me to the side and explained that he had commissions for various things which he was anxious should not go through the ring settlement, and would I bid for him? I agreed to do this and after a short interval went back to the house. It was when I got back and saw my prices in code that the trouble started. I had scribbled down his prices in a hurry but was not as certain of my secret code as I should be. Were some of the figures in tens or hundreds of pounds? Fortunately no problem arose, as the items wanted all came at very reasonable sums, but I had a nasty half hour. Many of my longer buying tours at this time were done with Ian Floyd, whose dealing had started from his bed-sitting room in the Kings Road, Chelsea. By this time, he had graduated to a house in Petworth, Sussex, before emigrating to California, where he opened a shop, for which I was later to do some buying.

Professor Wace, whom I had met when studying at the Victoria and Albert Museum, was now attached to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. I can remember him calling one day, and asking if I ever came across seventeenth-century chests or boxes with their original block-printed lining papers. Remarkably, I was able to produce no less than six such items immediately from stock, to his pleasure and surprise.

In August 1938, travelling north, I made contact with a shop in Wigan, Messrs Shergolds, export wholesale antique dealers. I bought six old brass shoe horns and twelve brass hot iron stands for a total of thirty shillings the lot. I also bought six broad arm yew tree wood armchairs at a mere fifteen pounds the set, but I only made a five pound profit on them.

At the time of this visit it is interesting to recollect that they had a team of girls who were matching cut-glass bottles to plated cruet stands, and other lasses matching stoppers. At intervals, men would come in with sacks full of cruet stands and parts, the result of their day's gleaning. Just on occasion a rare item might be found here, such as the seventeenth-century *lignum vitae* wood mortar lying under a table, which was of no interest to them, not matching up with other things in stock. The whole Lytham area back from Liverpool, as well as that city itself, appeared to be full of potentially interesting or semi-antique items.

It is now generally forgotten just how plentiful were warming pans with turned wooden handles prior to 1940 in the industrial north, costing on average fifteen shillings each. When these were brought south, they sold for a ten shillings profit. Curiously, after the war, this profit went the other way, possibly due to the fact that northern housewives were willing to polish, unlike the average southerner! The reason for there being such vast quantities in the north was that a couple spending a full five pounds furnishing their back-to-back home, were given one by the shop they patronised. This explains why they generally showed no signs of use.

It was not very often that I travelled west of Exeter, due I think to lack of time as much as anything else. But further westward were the Jackson family in Penzance, whom I visited twice. Then there was the Halsey family, who operated from Boffins Boft on the South Coast. Their card said 'You must visit Boffin's Boft', and this brought them many visitors seeking food or drink, who on arrival were surprised to find themselves in an antique shop. If they said 'We thought you were a pub', drink was offered, or if they said, 'We thought you were a restaurant', food was served, but somehow always when they left they had bought antiques. Exeter was dominated by the shop of Sellick's, opposite the Cathedral, who supplied many good things. Freddy Smith, with whom I had little contact, must have also played an important part in the west country trade. Another branch of the Sellick family bought and sold from Ford House, Newton Abbot, a visit I always enjoyed. In Honiton was Noël Butler who had started his business in Bristol. Leggs of Dorchester, Dorset, were always a useful call, he I believe at this time, being a buyer for a larger West End store. Also by this time, Bullivant of Cromer had moved to Minehead. The whole Devon area was productive of goods of every kind, while in general I found that a journey further westwards yielded far too little for the mileage covered. Budleigh Salterton on the South Coast was somewhere I always did well. There was of course a network of shops and traders elsewhere, but I am only mentioning those with whom I had definite contact, although not always as a customer.

In the centre of Tiverton I found a one time stately redbrick house, its garden now a yard, piled with rubbish and goods for sale. They were stacked everywhere. In fact the house was so full that to squeeze up the staircase was difficult. My impression was that perhaps some twenty five years earlier, it had been an antique shop of some importance, but no longer so. Enquiring about the price of an oil portrait, hanging with many others in a ground floor painted panelled room, I was told to my great surprise, ten thousand pounds. Then pointing to another I said, 'And how much is that?', and they again said, 'ten thousand pounds'. I must have displayed my surprise

as it was a period when oil portraits were in no demand. The owners then said, 'It's like this; many, many years ago an expert was here and valued one picture at ten thousand pounds, but we don't know which one it was. So we price all our pictures at this figure'. I wonder if it ever did sell. Many years later, trying to relocate the premises I found it had gone, but there must have been a clearance auction sale.

A story I have always enjoyed is about Bert Isher, the metalwork expert dealer of Cheltenham. One of his customers called fairly frequently, always saying, 'Anything fresh?', but on hearing nothing new had come in, walked away. Isher, knowing he was due to call again, loaded up his van with old stock and drove it round the block. The customer arrived as usual, met Bert's secretary and asked 'Anything fresh?', to be told the news that he was due back shortly with a load. Shortly after, in walked Isher. 'Bought anything?' asked the customer. 'Well, the van seems full, I have just brought it round to the door', said Bert. And a deal was struck for the entire load. Another story concerned the time when Isher travelled eastwards to buy, and a dealer from Haslemere decided the West Country was where goods were in quantity. After a hard day's buying, they both stopped for a meal on the edge of Salisbury Plain. At about ten o'clock that night each saw the other's van approaching, piled high with furniture. They stopped their vehicles on different sides of the road. 'Had a good day?' said Isher. 'Marvellous, and how have you done?' enquired the Haslemere dealer. 'Oh, wonderful' said Isher. Shortly after, the two loads were each transferred into the other's car, and the goods from the East went Eastwards and the goods from the West went to Cheltenham.

Further west at Plympton, near Plymouth, lived Reg and Muriel Andrade, who set up business there around 1910, in part, I believe, to meet debts left by Reg's father. Their premises was a row of terraced houses. In one of their ceramic rooms the floor level had risen some eighteen inches due to the amount of broken china and porcelain on the floor. Visits here were always a pleasure, and, to say the least, were unusual. As customers came in they were led through to the living room, sat on a bench against the wall, and, as a customer left, everyone slid along one seat drinking cups of tea while they waited. Reg would then conduct you round the premises one at a time. I remember on my first visit, buying very cheaply rolls of eighteenth-century Chinese wallpaper which were stacked on a mantelpiece in an upstairs room.

Perhaps one of the most important contacts I had in the West Country was at Hatherleigh on the edge of the moors above Bideford, where Mr Scammell ran his establishment. I think it was around the year 1918 that he moved there with very little capital, and was approached by a dealer from Barnstaple wanting Queen Anne walnut bureaux, for which he was prepared to pay the sum of twenty pounds, subject to their being of good colour and having all the original brass handles on them. Scammell at the time had one helper, but would in the mornings set off alone on a bicycle and only get back at four o'clock, when his assistant would get out the car and they would go and collect the bureaux found by Scammell during the day. If the dealer who wanted them did not arrive within the month, Scammell could not go out again, having spent all his capital, so plentiful were they.

On one of my visits I was very surprised to find the Scammell premises occupied by some eight or ten girls all in overalls, sorting iron trammel hooks and tying them up

into bundles of ten. These were the long ratchet hooks put in the chimneys of farms, cottages and mansions on which the cooking pots would hang, and their height could be altered to get them near or far from the flame. Scammell had decided that these were one of the few things still left in great quantity, and had all the Gypsies in the area collecting the hooks, for which he paid a flat rate of half a crown each. After sorting, they were priced at five pounds for a bundle of ten, subject to one buying not less than ten bundles. I can remember - mistakenly as it proved - buying some three hundred of these. The weight was staggering, the dust and rust immense, and, with the exception of a few outstanding examples amongst my lot, I found them very difficult to sell. In the end some two hundred were purchased by one of my Swiss customers, and used to decorate the wall of a restaurant somewhere half way up Mont Blanc.

Probably Scammell was one of the hardest working dealers I know, but in a way that was unlike any other. He collected old maps and guide books of the huge area of Devonshire, and wherever there was a sign of there having been a manor house or mansion, he would go there. In most cases there might be nothing more on the site than ruined stables or buildings connected to the estate, but that is where he found so much of his fascinating stock. I believe that much of Bert Isher's stock came from Scammell, and it is related that they were in touch by telephone nearly every evening. Although nearer home, it is probably worth mentioning that the Burtons, a newly married couple who had started a shop in Tetbury around 1937, were, like Scammell, always looking for undiscovered houses in which there might be antiques. On one of their trips into Wiltshire, they saw a farm house on the top of a hill, but could find no route up to it. Finally after several abortive attempts they abandoned their car, and walking across the fields and upwards, reached the farm, to find the farmer and his wife both naked, excepting for sacks over their heads with holes cut for their heads and arms. Asking them what they did they said, 'Oh we keep cows', and asked what they did with the milk were told, 'We feed the cows on the milk'. I can't complete this story, never having been told, but something wonderful did come out of that farmhouse.

I have always liked four-poster beds, and it was in 1933, following my advertisement in a Lancaster paper, that I had a reply from a Mr Sharp, of Market Square, Penrith, offering me three. So I set off in our open Morris touring car. I discovered that Mr Sharp was a dentist, and the address given was his surgery. When I arrived, he had a patient in the chair with her mouth gagged open, but I was warmly welcomed and led into a cupboard-like room behind, piled with oak four-poster bed parts and dust. While we examined these together, his patient, with numerous things sticking out of her mouth, made gurgling noises from the dentist's chair in the front room, while I haggled and finely struck a deal to buy the beds at a cost of seven shillings and sixpence each. Carried down, they filled the open touring car, and as the hood could not be raised, my return drive over Shap in pouring rain was not a very happy one.

Shortly before the war, Mr Quilter, a retired pub architect, bought the Bull Hotel in Burford, the only red brick building in the town. I can remember his first visit to me when he virtually demanded that I buy all the unwanted items in the Bull, promising however, to spend the money and much more with me, and become a good customer, as indeed he did over the next two years. It was a pity that in those days, nineteenth-

century four-poster beds were virtually unsaleable, as many came out of the attics of the Bull. I also bought some more from another inn, The Swan in Burford, some time later.

1938-39 was a curious period. The shop was now well established, but there were great pressures on me due to the number of auctions of every type then taking place. I suppose in part this was due to the ever increasing likelihood of war. This was vividly brought home when my mother and I were invited to visit the family home on the edge of Dartmoor of a Yorkshire friend whose mother had recently died, to see if there was anything of importance in the house. We set off for Okehampton on the 20 August 1939, to find a continuous line of traffic moving eastwards out of Devon and Cornwall due to the call up of all army reserves. Sadly, there was little in the house I wanted. However, anticipating future buying difficulties we extended our travels into a minor buying trip, and purchased some sixty items. The trip included calls in Exeter and Topsham, where old Mr Mingo, the one time saddler and part-time antique dealer, sold me a small wax bust of Queen Victoria under a glass dome. Some weeks later I was to sell this to Queen Mary on her first visit to my shop.

One thing that the rumours of war disrupted for me was a visit to the Irish Republic, where I had never been. The daughter of Katherine Tynan, the Irish author and poetess, was a friend of my mother's, and had suggested to her mother in Ireland that I be invited to visit her, and she would introduce me to numerous Irish country houses where the owners were all anxious to dispose of possessions. I believe this visit had been postponed from 1938, but was sadly never to take place. No doubt many exciting finds were missed, as Katherine Tynan was very popular at the time, and had free entry everywhere. War was declared in September 1939, and I was to experience my last nine months of shop-keeping before leaving Burford in June 1940. I did not return to trading there for some seven years, in fact a period nearly twice as long as the shop had been opened. I have often wondered how the shop would have developed if the war had never come.



27. Wall flap table, c 1800, mahogany.
Of type once found in London terraced house bedsits. From Euston Road, London.