

STARTING AGAIN

In the late 1940s and early 50s, immense numbers of the plain three drawer dresser bases on chamfered or tapered legs, sometimes with matching plate racks, poured into the sale rooms along the Welsh border. At an average monthly Market Hall sale in Ludlow, 1947-50, there were likely to be ten or even more in any one sale, with prices ranging from four pounds ten shillings to under ten pounds each. Similar dressers in the late 1990s were valued from fifteen hundred to over two thousand pounds each. I soon learned the importance of bringing fresh goods from different areas into the Cotswolds. In Burford, one day in the 1920s, a party of men and horse drawn vehicles arrived, and it is recorded that no less than twenty oak panelled rooms left the town. The rooms and cottages they had come from were redecorated before the men of the family returned from work. Bolwell, who was a dealer in Chipping Norton around the year 1910, imported antique furniture from Middelburg in Holland, which he reputedly bought at a flat rate of five pounds per ton weight. This I am sure explains why, when I first came to Burford, so many of the larger mansions in the district had plain heavy oak armoires in their rooms. Following the war, weekly wages had undoubtedly risen. but a qualified secretary/typist working for the BBC in London, received six pounds ten shillings each. Thinking back to the year 1947, so far as buying is concerned, although I had little cash, I did achieve an almost perfect balance of goods coming from auction sales, privately and from fellow dealers. This was also a period of making a number of new customers, one of whom, Mrs Graham Greene, wife of the novelist and later a recognised world authority on dolls houses, bought her very first one from me.

It was common knowledge in the trade that, if you were looking for fine walnut furniture, Northamptonshire was where it was to be found, but why, I wonder, was it that so many of those mulberry bureaux or bureau bookcases, with pewter inlaid lines and sometimes bearing the maker's label of Coxed and Woster of London, turned up in greater quantities in the Herefordshire area than anywhere else? One I had came out of a cottage not far from Hereford, and many of the other known ones could be traced back to this district. They cannot, I think, all have come out of one mansion in this area, but that would be a possible explanation. I first got to know Mr and Mrs Pinto before their name became world famous for being the leading collectors of *treen*. The word *treen* covers all domestic utensils and small artefacts made from wood. Their collection, now the property of the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery is outstanding, and numerous books have been written about it. At the start they were prepared to buy any small wooden item of which they had no existing example.

It is interesting to see that in May 1947, not long after re-opening, I bought no less than seven tapestries in Sotheby's sale rooms in Bond Street, for a total of one hundred and seventy five pounds. I can remember a customer looking at a pair and asking if he might be allowed to unpick the bottom selvage, and doing so discovered that the original border of the tapestry had been turned in, and the weaver's mark was there. This made them very much more important than I had considered when pricing them. The purchase of these tapestries at Sotheby's was in separate lots, and five of them were still at very low prices. A Spanish coat of arms and a pastoral Brussels example cost

roughly the sum of fifty pounds each, and were sold by me to Captain Millais, grandson of the Victorian artist.

My first *Review & Policy Report* was typed in the autumn of 1947, just six months after the re-opening of the shop following the War. It was probably to keep my Yorkshire uncle in touch with things as he had given me so much advice in the early stages of the business, although never any financial support. Later, I found it helpful for my own planning and record and it soon became an annual event. In 1947 there were three good antique shops in Burford but little obvious competition. Small decorative china was in very great demand due to War restrictions still being in force, and no coloured decoration allowed. In November of that year, my friend Lawrence Darton arrived to join me in the business, but later than planned, and sadly not in time for the re-opening of the shop. I was by now aware that buying was key to the success of the business, and I needed more time for it. I planned to hold a stock of some two thousand items. We thought of a plan for advertising for goods, both in *Country Life* and the *Church Times*, particularly for textiles, in which I was very interested. It was interesting to note that all replies from *Country Life* asked for a reference, and details about the business before goods were sent to us, whereas parcels arrived from *Church Times* readers, saying, 'We have sent this collection of old antique costume to you; give us what you can. If it is of no use, please destroy'.

From, I suppose, late 1944 onwards, there had been opportunity for considerable thought about the business and its future development. Knowledge had been gained during my four years of trading, so my thinking towards re-opening the shop was quite different from that of 1936. Not a single doubt was in my mind, but that I wanted to be an antique dealer, and equally, but more surprisingly, not a doubt but that it would be a success. My mother no longer wished to play an active part in its running, and I knew I was in her debt for a few thousand pounds regarding her financing of my wartime purchases. During this time our home had been let. I had worked out the balance of various categories of goods I wished to stock, including antiquarian books, the special interest of Lawrence Darton. These proved successful once the shop had re-opened, but soon had to be discontinued, as we found they took too long to handle. My dream idea of separate rooms or departments devoted to different groups such as pictures, ceramics or dolls never really materialised, in part due to lack of finance, but equally lack of space.

Early in 1946, to my surprise, I found myself acting as team leader to one of two Quaker Relief Teams in Holland, based between Nijmegen and Arnhem. Most of the team's active work had been done during the months prior to my arrival. In May that year I was back in London, and within a few weeks de-mobbed. I was not the only one to find the return to civilian life difficult, and started with a short holiday break at Sheringham on the Norfolk Coast, partly in order to get to know that area. However, after a few days I saw a notice in *The Times* of an auction sale at Moccas Court, Herefordshire. This house had been considered by me for evacuation purposes in 1940, and the house and its contents had haunted me though the previous few years. Within hours, I was on my way to Hereford by train. The sale was conducted between 16–19 July 1946 by Russell, Baldwin and Bright, Leominster.

This meant that my return to my home roof was from an auction sale, and not from

relief work. Within a very short time, Kenneth Earley, a skilled carpenter, whose father had done all my pre-war repair work on furniture, joined me, and we started on the vast task of sorting out the stacked shop and showrooms, and the enlargement of the premises, even though timber and other materials were rationed, or in very short supply.

Fifteen months were to elapse before my next report, written in January 1949. Nearly all our pre-war stock had now sold and most had shown a very high profit. Compared with 1947 there was noticeably less money about, and the market for furnishing antiques had to a very great extent dropped away. In 1948 I note that overhead expenses of the business were approximately two thousand pounds. My motor car, a Morris 25 Tourer, had covered some five thousand eight hundred and fifty six miles and expenses amounted to one hundred and fifty four pounds. In July that year Mrs Talbot, a widow of a vicar, joined the firm as secretary and helper. She knew something about antiques as her father had been a one time partner in the once famous London firm of Law, Fulson and Cole, he having specialised in the making of inventories of country house collections. In the December of that year, my over-flow storage space, in the butcher's barn next door was discontinued, but it is interesting to realise that at the time of re-opening I had something in excess of five hundred chairs stored there, although there was no great security. I also achieved membership of the British Antique Dealers' Association, something that I had never sought personally, but was pushed into by Alfred Bullard, the London dealer of Park Row and Philadelphia.

I am interested to recall my note that 'About two hundred inexpensive items should be stocked for sale over the summer months. Price under ten shillings per article'. A reserve fund of about one thousand pounds was required for wages and such in time of recession. Remember my capital was very small at this time and to achieve this we had to try to reduce the size of stock from two thousand to twelve hundred items only, thereby releasing capital. One hundred and sixty pounds each month were taken from our gross profits to be set aside for the purchase of Tax Reserve Certificates. In June 1949 I was asked to partially furnish with antiques Charney Manor, a Quaker Conference Centre opening near Oxford, and I can remember supplying a large iron bound German Westphalian chest which I had previously purchased from the Priory, Burford. This was reputed to be the original 'Mistletoe Bow' chest from Minster Lovell, where, on a mediaeval wedding day they played hide and seek. The bride vanished, never to be seen again for years and years, until the day when upstairs an oak chest was opened, and there she was found lying inside. All large chests and coffers in the Cotswold area tend to carry this story.

In the Autumn of 1948, my South African cousin, who was here as a teacher, had introduced me to one of her South African friends, Ruth Hurcombe, a botanist, who was herself working on research at the John Innes Institute. On our second meeting I recall taking her to the Victoria and Albert Museum, when she told me that she wished she had studied art rather than botany at university in Johannesburg. Within a few months, we were engaged, and were married at the end of April 1949. No doubt due to this, and then to our visit to South Africa late that Autumn - a visit that stretched into 1950 - no report was written until the Autumn of 1951. In this I was able to say, 'Our stock is more varied and interesting than that found in many provincial antique businesses'. Frank Williams

had opened his shop in Burford before my return, and this, after my re-opening, made four antique shops in the town, the first indication as to what an antiques centre Burford was to become. On the 12th January 1951 our son Simon was born.

It was in late November 1949, some seven months after our wedding, that Ruth and I left Burford to catch the Warwick Castle Union/Castle boat to Southampton for our three weeks voyage to Durban, South Africa for my first meeting with her family. This was to be my first experience of a long sea voyage. Remember that there were no air flights at this period. We left my mother in charge of the house, and Lawrence Darton the shop, which I tried to leave well stocked. After consultation with my Yorkshire uncle, I had acquired stock with part of the reserve fund that I had begun to build up. We were away for three months, during which time I was to get to know, though only slightly, Durban, Maritzburg and Johannesburg, where I attended a Quaker conference, and was smuggled into and out of Soweto hiding under a rug in the back of a car, when returning an African delegate to his home. It was on New Year's Day 1950, when exploring Johannesburg on my own, that looking through a closed antique shop window I was surprised to see on the floor a pair of English porcelain wine coolers, which I had purchased some months earlier from the auction sale at Leyland Hall, Lancashire. I had sold them to a Bristol dealer whose brother's shop I was then standing outside.

Then came the three days' journey by the so-called luxury coach, provided by my mother-in-law, from Durban to Cape Town, down the Garden Route. Some fifty miles of this road had not yet been built, and we bumped over the true soil of Africa. It was from a Durban antique shop that I purchased a collection of late-nineteenth-century dolls, some of which were dressed in 1890 tennis costume, and a mechanical walking doll which cost six pounds. On these I made a sixty pound profit on my return home. Sadly, and I have always regretted this, I did not attempt to buy the large automaton under a glass shade that I saw in the window of a barber's shop in a small town between Johannesburg and Maritzburg after our car had broken down. The car was full, it wasn't mine, and the automaton was large, but I can still remember it. I managed to view a private house auction sale in Cape Town, of a collector, later to find much of the furniture sold for very much less than it would have done in England.

While in Cape Town I made contact with David Heeler, the then leading dealer to whom, over the next year or two I exported various items. A cable received from my Mother while in South Africa, reported the death of Mr Wall of Burford who had owned the Old Rope Walk. This enabled me to reply asking that the old business books of the firm, covering the previous two hundred years, should be preserved, and so through me they found their way into the Bodlean Library in Oxford. I also asked that the Wall family set of yew wood wheel-back chairs be purchased for me. All of these events kept me on the job while away. Then, on our voyage home, the boat stopped at Tenerife for a few hours and, allowed ashore to wander around the town, I discovered a pair of carved wood angels in a small antique shop. Sadly, I had taken little money with me and so was unable to buy them, but stopping for food before returning to the boat, I found many of our fellow passengers all in the same cafe. Handing my hat round, I collected enough for the figures. As I was running up the hill, I could see the antique shop owner putting up the shutters. I arrived in a panting condition with money in hand and

managed to purchase them. Mistakenly, I sold them soon after our return home.

It would have been under protest that I accompanied my mother one Sunday afternoon to have tea with Burford's oldest inhabitant, who was in her late nineties, and also had a visitor much of the same age. How important it can be to hand round the bread and butter nicely, as on her return home, she reported to a friend on the excellent antique dealer she had met. Three years later, when the lady had died, a letter arrived from the deceased's friend asking me to call the following Wednesday at exactly three minutes to eleven, at a house in North Oxfordshire. It was a double fronted house with a flight of stone steps on a rising village street. My wife and I were let in by a parlour maid and led upstairs to a drawing room, which had everything in it covered in dust sheets. A few minutes later the elderly owner bustled in, thanked us for coming, asked us to look round and, if there was anything I would like to buy, please let her know. She said she was sure that whatever I offered would be acceptable. I then pointed out that we could see nothing because of the dust sheets. She told us to take them off, and hurried away.

Removing the dust sheets, we found ourselves in a virtually untouched early-nineteenth-century drawing room. The tallest item in the room proved to be a Queen Anne walnut sunburst tallboy with original brass handles. On opening the drawers, we found them filled with textiles, samplers, silhouettes and family items covering very many generations. The whole room was filled with desirable items and it was hard to know where to begin. The house remained silent. Exactly an hour and a half later the door opened and in came the elderly owner 'Now have you found anything you would like to buy', she asked. I suppose I replied that I would like the lot. 'But what will you take today' she said. 'You do realise you must be out of the house by 12.50pm'. A cheque was written hurriedly, my offers being accepted, and with only a few minutes to go, we hurried off, and were told that we should come again at the same time on the following day. I replied that I could not manage that, but would come the day after. 'Be sure to come at exactly three minutes to eleven', she said. So began what I suppose was one of my best private buys ever, stretching over a period of weeks. Every time we had to be there at precisely 10.57, and away by 12.50. There was so much, that we were never able to look at the contents of the tallboy. In the end I was allowed to remove it, complete with contents, to sort at my leisure, and to make an offer that seemed fair for everything. It was some months later we discovered the story behind this house. The owner had a mentally afflicted sister who, just after eleven o'clock each morning, walked along the landing outside the drawing room, and at exactly one o'clock, was taken down to the dining room for lunch. Her older sister did not want her to know that the house was slowly being disbanded before she went into hospital, and the sister taken into sheltered housing.

The only item that I wanted but was not allowed to buy, was a set of Chippendale dining room chairs, of mid-eighteenth century date. My offer for these was not accepted, because, as I was later to find out, they were to be sat on at the last lunch before the ambulance and car arrived to take the sisters to their new homes. Unknown to me the remaining items in the house all came up for auction in Oxford, where the Chippendale chairs sold for less than I had offered.

Speaking of Chippendale chairs, a few years earlier, in 1946, I was staying at the home of a doctor in Utrecht in Holland. His English was rusty, and my Dutch language nil.

After breakfast one day, he asked me to come up to his study and see his set of 'Chippendale-Chasers'. 'I bought them in Cambridge many years ago, they are very good', he said. Upstairs I went, believing I was going to see a set of Chippendale chairs, but, upon entering the study, no chairs were to be seen. My host pointed excitedly at the wall on which were a set of reproduction steeplechase prints.

1950-51 proved a most satisfactory trading year but total sales of twenty thousand pounds annually was still to be achieved. In April 1951 my friend Lawrence Darton sadly decided to return to teaching after three and a half years with me. That autumn in September, our capital amounted to four thousand five hundred and seventeen pounds, eight shillings and ninepence, which included profits of one thousand, three hundred and forty five pounds re-invested. Certainly, so far as I was concerned, the years 1950-60 were eventful ones, starting with the birth of our son early in 1951 and our two daughters in 1954 and 1959. There was also the death of my Guildford Uncle Marcus in 1954. He was a bachelor, and the youngest son of Metford Warner. On retirement he had moved to Guildford. Among items he had inherited from his father were a near pair of small oil paintings, one of which Metford Warner had purchased at the Grosvenor Galleries. He had then asked the artist, Albert Moore, to paint another close matching picture that was exhibited at the Academy later that year. On the death of Metford Warner, they appear as 'Pair oil paintings, 30/-' on his probate valuation. When they were loaned to the Victoria and Albert Museum following my uncle's death, they suggested an insurance value of four hundred and fifty pounds. For many years they hung in the top floor Primary Gallery of Twentieth Century Art, not far from a case with Sowerby Elliston glass, for some of which my maternal grandfather had been responsible. Time, taste and fashion are extraordinary things, but when these two pictures were removed from the museum, no longer on public display, and finally sold years later, they fetched a figure of a little over one hundred thousand pounds.

Ruth and I were back in Burford from South Africa early in March 1950, little knowing that the ten years ahead would be looked back on - some forty years later - as one of the great buying times, both from the point of view of low prices, and the strong possibility of making major finds. Certainly looking at my Day Books, covering the 1950/60 period, one needs to add an '0' to all figures - cost, selling price and profit - for them to make any sense whatsoever. In spite of the fact that so many of the things that I was buying had come from fellow dealers, the quality of much of what we sold can best be gauged from our customers who bought them, many of whom were leading dealers of the period, both in London, the Provinces and in America. There was also an interesting cross section of English collectors. There was John Fardon of Birmingham, the leading collector of early oak, Cecile Hammel with costumes, Dr Cunningham - also a costume collector, Tom Burne of Rous Lench House near Evesham, Charles Wade, Snowhill Manor and The Rev 'Teapot' Sharp. Mr Jacoby, the lace and sampler collector, also is listed among our numerous customers. I was also purchasing items from Mary Bellis of Hungerford, John Clifford of the Dower House, Newbury, although both were usually buying from me.

It was soon after my arrival back in Burford that a rare event took place - two auction sales in the town on the same day. One was of the remaining items of the Old Rope Walk,

Burford, while the other was across the road at the home of Sir Nelson Ryecroft. The Wall Rope Factory had been active many years before, when it was a common sight to see a boy walking backwards across the road twisting rope as he went, no doubt holding up the meagre traffic going up Burford Hill. Among the items being offered at the home of Sir Nelson Ryecroft was a French bureau plat. Although this did not interest me personally, I was given a very substantial commission to purchase on behalf of a London dealer who had viewed the sale. Although I did manage to buy it, competition proved much more severe than I had expected, as the auctioneer had also been given a high price by the very brother of the man who had left his commission with me. How the brothers got on together later remains unknown.

I also noticed the virtual disappearance of the junk/antique shops of the pre-1940 period. About this time I recorded that: 'Pictures are returning to fashion and the purchase of them at low prices say under ten pounds each seems an excellent idea. Wood carvings as compared to other decorative items appear too cheap. Oak is once more beginning to come into fashion'. I also noted in a letter to my uncle the poor level of stock in all the shops that I visited. Around this period it is interesting to note how many homes had sets or odd pieces of Celadon green Japanese enamelled pottery, all of which had appeared and been purchased in the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition. Brass muffineers and pepperpots were still easily available at prices such as twelve shillings and sixpence or fifteen shillings each from most provincial shops. Dutch brass tobacco boxes with engraved lids were valued at one pound each. But it was in April 1950 that I was offered some five hundred pieces of white Parian Ware pottery, from shelves erected around the garage of a house near Henley. I had no great taste for Parian but had never seen such a large collection together before. Later, I discovered that this was the largest accumulation made by anyone up to that date. The collector, a doctor, had suddenly died, and his daughter had to clear it. Getting it home I put it in my attic, carrying it up the narrow stairs, and some years later I had to carry it down when selling it as a lot for a mere five hundred pounds, probably the present day value for a single rarer piece.

In May 1950 a bacon cupboard settle came from a Bridgewater shop for four pounds. I could still buy a Victorian whatnot in an Exmouth shop for five pounds, and sell it a few days later to a Warwickshire dealer for thirteen pounds ten shillings. This is an indication that the West Country was still very productive of goods, and more could be seen in two days of travelling there than was the case with shops in the North of England. How enjoyable it was visiting the shops in and around Budleigh Salterton which always seemed to have fresh stock, most of which was coming in from private sources. Between May 1950 and the end of that year, over two thousand items were purchased by me.

Another good customer was Charles Toller, who had a small shop in St Christopher's Place, London. He was a great friend of John Judkin, later to be a prime mover in the setting up the American Museum in Great Britain, at Claverton Manor near Bath. Before the war he was living in New York, and although injured by the time of the War, he came back to England and worked with the Quaker Friends Relief Organisation for the duration of the War. It was he who encouraged me to rent a St Christopher's Place shop for twenty five shillings weekly, but I had too many commitments already.

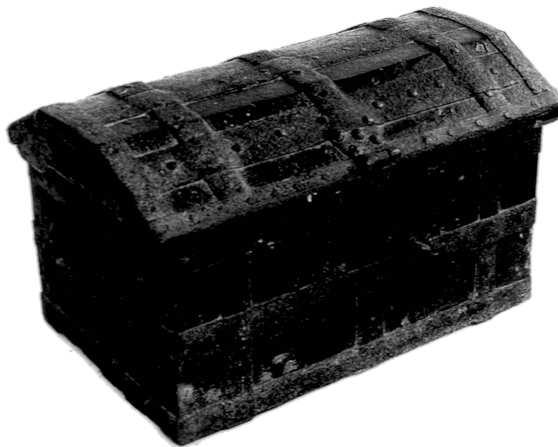
Charles Wade, owner of Snowhill Manor, was now a regular customer. *Gloria Antica*,



30. 'Cat' or plate/bowl stand, used at the hearth-side in the eighteenth century.
© Leeds Museums and Galleries
(Temple Newsam House)



31. Dug out chair made for Humphrey and Eleanor Senhouse of Netherhall, Cumberland c1696, elm.
© Leeds Museums and Galleries
(Temple Newsam House)

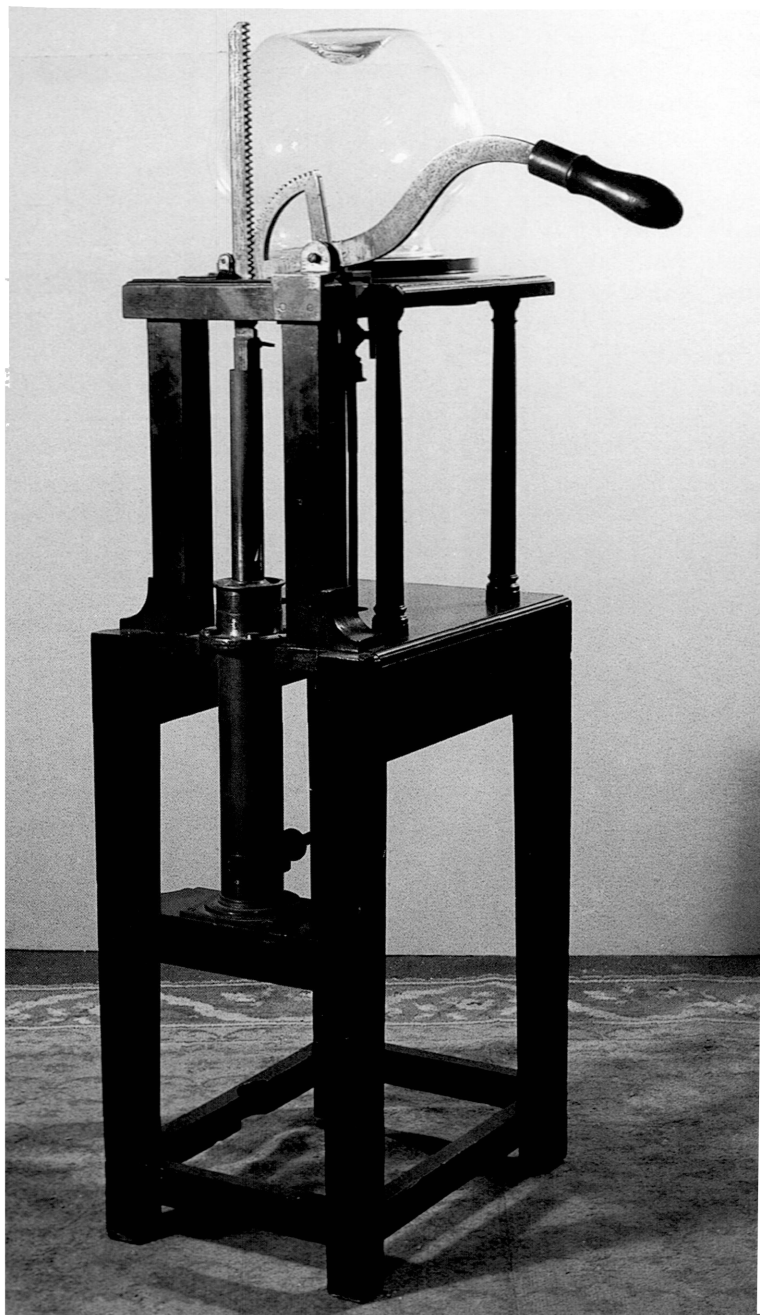


32. Iron-bound trunk, oak. Bought from the Burrows Collection, Scarborough, North Yorkshire.



33. Bacon settle from Crewkerne, Somerset, oak. This example of the west of England type does not have the usual overhanging top section and is designed to stand against a wall.

Courtesy of Gabriel Olive



34. Vacuum pump, eighteenth century. Bought in 1938 for £45.

that interesting shop in Brompton Road, came perhaps every four to six weeks, every Saturday shortly before lunch. Canon Smythe, Vicar of St Margaret's, Westminster, was a frequent customer and I was at this time selling to the Museum of History and Science, Oxford, including a wonderful electrical Wymshurst machine, in a mahogany case, with model rooms that could be blown up when sufficiently primed with gunpowder, the hinged walls falling outward. They also bought from me a Victorian paper fire balloon which had come from that cache of interesting things at Brinkley, near Newmarket. I was already sufficiently interested in the history of furniture to buy a pair of gentleman's mahogany wardrobes from a sale in Shropshire, one of which bore a maker's label, although at that date there were few buyers for such things. Christopher Fry had become a regular customer, so much so that some four or five years later my young son, then aged three or four, looking into an Oxford shop window remarked, 'Dadda like that', and when his grandmother said, 'But what will he do with it?' was told: 'Sell to Christopher Fry'. At intervals I was finding it necessary to do off-loading of unsold goods to auctions, not so much to raise money, but to make space for new items coming into stock. But this period is particularly remarkable for the sheer quantity of small items available and the many buyers for them.

Mr Colt, of Colt Wooden Houses, was already a customer, his main interest being in keyboard instruments. We were selling regularly to the General Trading Company of Sloane Street, London, to Morton Lee, to Norman Adams, Oliver of Guildford and at fairly regular intervals had visits from Kenneth Harris, the American friend of Lord Faringdon who lived at Buscot Park. One of Lord Faringdon's duties was the entertainment of problem or difficult overseas visitors at week-ends when they had come as part of political delegations, and I wish I had made a list of all those brought through the shop by Lord Faringdon on a Saturday afternoon between two and three o'clock, and how bored many of them were with what they saw.

Something to note is that most customers, once they had come to us, came back again and again, including Jeremy and Leonard Knight, both leading figures in the London trade. Colefax and Fowler, the West End decorating firm, were regular customers as well as Arditti and Mayorcas, textile dealers. It was about this time that an Oxford dealer told me that he was one day visited by an old woman who said she had a bungalow of old furniture she wished to sell. An appointment was made, and on arrival at a riverside bungalow, not far from Henley, he was amazed to find the building stacked with furniture of the highest quality. Apparently all of it had come from a flat in London, which the one time housekeeper of the owner had been told to evacuate to his country retreat at the time of the London blitz. On his death, he left the bungalow and contents to her. She had no interest in it, but among it were Chippendale serpentine fronted chests of drawers as well as many other items of importance.

It was mid-June when I viewed and attended an auction sale at a house called The Knoll, Abingdon, near to the old railway station. In a strange way this was probably as enjoyable a viewing as any I can ever remember. While there was nothing remarkable in the house, its general atmosphere and the contents were in great accord with me, and I still enjoy the framed sheet of mediaeval illumination that I purchased. Also, I cannot recollect ever again finding a mahogany kneehole bureau of circa 1770. This cost fifty

one pounds, later sold to a Midland dealer at a twenty one pound profit. A note made in June expresses surprise at my many sorties for goods, which shows the sheer quantity of items available. The same applied to Sotheby's of Bond Street, where I purchased a carved wood figure of an angel for a mere three pounds, and what appeared to be a Florentine sixteenth-century carved wood group of Nessus from the collection of Henry Harris for twenty six pounds, both prices well below what I felt I would offer if they had come from private sources. Probably I should have bought more in the London sale rooms, as Frank Williams, another Burford dealer was doing, but I was achieving a reputation for 'fresh goods' not previously seen by the London trade, and time was always a problem. However, at the Antique Fair at Grosvenor House in June 1950 I purchased from Messrs Pratt and Son of Brompton Road, a Chippendale mahogany vacuum pump complete with original glass bowl for what seems now the ridiculously low sum of thirty eight pounds, but in fact this took a long time to sell.

I had given help to the inheritors of Broughton Castle, the new Lord Saye and Sele, who had previously lived near Bibury and had been one of my customers and friends. Following two unexpected deaths, he and his wife inherited this castle together with the title, and were faced with the job of sorting it. The premises had been commandeered during much of the War, when the Egyptian Mummy Collection was, I believe, secretly stored in the Great Hall. Up in the attics were piles of what in those days one looked on as Victorian rubbish, and I firmly advised that all the Victorian chamber ware and other such items should go to sale rooms in Banbury, to be sold by Midland Marts who had wooden hutments down near the station. Nothing of interest, to my knowledge, was sent to the sale, but on the morning of it I suddenly got a strong feeling that I ought to be in Banbury, and getting the car, drove over there at speed to find the sale some two thirds advanced. On a high shelf, running along the length of the hut, were piles and piles of Victorian chamber ware, but, on the top of one, precariously perched, stood a mediaeval jug, which I had never previously seen. The toilet ware was being sold in very large lots to clear it, and I was forced to buy quantities of this which I had no use for. I believe I bribed local housewives - at the rate of half a crown a go - to remove chamber pots and wash basins. Today, these would all be highly desirable. The jug turned out to be English, of thirteenth-century date, and had, some time around 1900, been found in the moat of Broughton Castle, in perfect condition because it had been dropped into water rather than buried. It was later exhibited in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Rear Admiral Sir Lionel Preston, who had by this stage become a dealer, summoned me to meet him in London one day. An appointment was made for about two o'clock at the Army and Navy Club in Pall Mall. I can remember him opening a briefcase and bringing out a pair of William and Mary period wooden headed dolls in original costume, and the shocked amazement when other members of his club came through after lunch to find us playing dolls in front of the fire. Whether he lost his membership over this, I am not quite sure, but the dolls proved of great importance, finding their way from me to Mrs Early of Witney, the blanket heiress, at that time one of England's leading doll collectors. Some considerable time after her death, the family sent these dolls to auction, where one of them fetched around sixty thousand pounds.

The Misses Potts of Preston were again one of my useful sources of supply - two more

than middle aged sisters, who bought and sold interesting items. Up in the Preston area wax dolls in ornamented cases were often to be found. Such an example is still to be seen in the museum in Preston. They were, I am now sure, displayed in grocer's shops towards Christmas, and whoever acquired enough coupons would win the doll. They were often kept as ornaments in small back-to-back homes. In Preston, I could buy New Hall cream jugs at £1 each, from Mr Parker, who twice a week would have a stall on Preston Market and had a small shop on the main north road leading out of the town. He loved his ceramics and I remember being invited home to tea by him on one occasion, and his opening a built-in cupboard to the left of the fireplace and pulling out his favourite examples. These would not be for sale.

On trips north including visits to Whitehaven, my friend Vincent Kelly would mutter as one went round and selected a New Hall jug, or a Blue and White Beaker, 'another little jug, another little jug'. On the 5th July, visiting Crookson, who was the leading dealer in Kendal, I was able to buy one of the only two true 'Gothic' throne type chairs I have ever had, which eventually I sold to Tom Burn of Rous Lench Court near Evesham. It was the sheer quantity of small items of quality and interest available at this time that now seems so amazing. On the 27th and 28th July a sale took place at Harleford Manor, standing on the bank of the Thames, which one sees on the rail journey from Oxford to Paddington Station. There I bought a tall oval topped mahogany stool; perhaps intended for a child, as there were holes in two of the legs in which a foot rest can be made. This with much of the other furniture was not perhaps in what would be described as superb condition, because the one time owner used to have fits, when she would seize items of furniture, run down to the river bank and hurl them in. The butler would sprint across the lawns, and, with a pole, fish them out as they floated down the river.

At this distance of time it is hard to gauge just how much time I divided between the shop and outside buying, but certainly much overtime was spent with rearranging the stock during the evenings. Perhaps lack of funds prevented my building up serious collections of different items, but my stock-piling plan was already in force, and over the years proved invaluable, and in the long run a wonderful investment, once prices in the antique trade began to rise. As fresh items came into stock, I endeavoured to peel off perhaps a quarter, packing them away so that should ill-health or weather prevent my getting out, if a regular customer arrived, something fresh could be produced.

It was on 3 July 1950 I visited the Salt Brothers of Buxton. Although this was not my first visit to them, perhaps a record of this firm - now largely forgotten - is needed. In the earlier part of the century their premises was known, in antique circles, as 'The Gothic Factory', and much old antique looking, but perhaps doubtful, early oak poured out through the workshop doors. One example of their work I can still recollect standing on the landing of the Showroom upstairs. It was a carved oak continental type buffet of fine quality but probably made in the early 1920s. Adjoining the antique shop round the corner was a mens' outfitters and tailors, also run by one of the sons of old Mr Salt, and on his death the antique shop was left to one son, and the outfitters to the other. It was perhaps unfortunate that these bequests were left to the wrong sons. The antique dealer had no real interest in the trade, and a visit to his shop was too often a waste of time. Visiting the outfitters next door was a different story. It was a virtually dead, derelict

establishment so far as outfitting was concerned, but there was always a warm welcome from the second Mr Salt. Being taken upstairs, many excellent small items or ceramics would be available for purchase, as he attended auctions over a wide area, and had an excellent eye for ceramics, enamels and needlework. On this visit, a Battersea enamel box, 'Remember him who gives this trifle', cost price twenty five shillings, a Chelsea plate five pounds ten and a Staffordshire pottery ball with numbers, twelve shillings and sixpence, were among the items acquired. A visit to this establishment was always a pleasure and was a good start to lead on into Lancashire and the possibilities of Preston.

Prior to 1940, when passing through Warrington or Wigan around midday or five in the afternoon, a never-to-be-forgotten sight was the waves of cotton factory mill girls, still wearing their traditional shawls and clogs. I suppose that one was aware that such a sight would not carry on much longer.

Crossing the Manchester Ship Canal, and often having to wait for the swing bridge to be got back into position after the passing of a boat, one came to Preston. The Ship Canal was one of my real geographical divides, and it is interesting to remember how relatively seldom walnut chairs were to be found north of this area, but were often offered in the Mold, North Wales and Knutsford areas. I am thinking both of walnut spoon-back chairs and veneered splat examples. Both in Knutsford and North Wales there were a number of dealers who particularly liked these chairs. Was it that they went to them, or that these chairs were a local product of the area? I have never been quite sure of this. It was fairly easy to find what are now called Welsh farmhouse chairs, but which I have always termed 'Yeoman' chairs. This is, I think, a good, robust term for those chairs often made of just two pieces of wood, one a curved member making the arm bow, with several stick uprights to hold it in position and as legs.

Returning to my July 1950 trip, two days after being in Buxton I was in Carlisle, and among other purchases, bought three Bear Baiting Jugs for twenty five pounds the lot. A library step table which I bought for fifteen pounds, I later sold to the Dower House, Newbury for thirty eight pounds. Much purchased at this time more than doubled in price over cost when brought south, something much less easily done by the 1990s. From Carlisle I found my way to Aspatria not far from the coastline of the Solway Firth, where the notorious Mrs Allen had her shop, home and store sheds. To my surprise I see she visited Burford on one or two occasions over the next few years, but I think I must have always been away. One of my greatest regrets is that I had never found my way to Aspatria before the War, and so never met the much revered Mr Allen, who I believe was one of Edward Neil's regular monthly calls. Mr Allen had died only a short time before my first visit, and, according to local gossip, only made one major mistake in life, and that was marrying Mrs Allen, who was a more than averagely forceful personality. She was, I was told, of Gypsy stock, but a Roman Catholic, a fairly rare combination.

Once I remember visiting her with my Mother, and after the usual cups of tea, cakes and sandwiches, I began to walk round her home where almost anything could be bought. Talking to my Mother, Mrs Allen said she had just returned from a pilgrimage to Lourdes, and would like my mother to go upstairs with her to her bedroom. To get upstairs was always something of a problem, as the staircase - which was wide and highly polished, as was everything in her home - had only one hand rail. At each side of

the bottom step was a large Staffordshire pottery dog. The second step had two pairs of dogs, the third three dogs and so on, with an ever greater number of Staffordshire figures as one proceeded upwards, and the hand rail an ever increasing stretch away. The top step only had about fifteen inches of clear space for walking through. However my mother got up safely, and Mrs Allen said she had bottled Holy Water from Lourdes and wished to anoint my mother. Hearing this my Mother said 'Don't waste it on me, I'm not a Catholic'. 'Not a Catholic', cried Mrs Allen, 'Take this!' and poured half a bottle of cold water down my mother's back. I only knew of the event after we had driven away and she developed a bad cold.

From Aspatria, a short drive got me to Whitehaven, where I was able to buy some fifty five items, the most expensive costing fifteen pounds for a set of six and one chairs. A pair of knife boxes cost eight pounds ten. This same day's travel enabled calls to be made at Keswick, Grasmere, Ambleside and Windermere, where I was still in touch with Miss Dawes, of the Lonsdale Gallery. She was one of a large family of sisters whose father had been a local (Lakeland) artist of some note, but little financial success, and had died young. Miss Dawes had therefore been forced into turning her father's gallery, basically a tin clad building, into an antique shop, and had become the chief silver buyer of the district, together with Miss Rickerby of Carlisle. Silver in those days was usually sold by weight, and at many auctions I have seen these two women battling over an item, bidding rising a penny a time until a figure for an ounce could be achieved. Georgian silver tea jugs and tea sets seemed at that time to have been ridiculously low priced, and those acquired by Miss Dawes usually went into her great safes, and did not reappear until many years later.

I remember once visiting the Laycock branch shop in Keighley and not buying a most unusual set of low back yew wood arm chairs, which I probably would have done if Mr Laycock had himself been there. It was in his shop in Skipton that I grew to know him, and where in 1949 he gave my wife and myself a Sunderland pottery oval dish as a wedding present. Besides antique dealing, Frank Laycock was a farmer and if looks are anything to go by, appeared to be one, but he had a very good eye and a visit to his premises was always exciting. The tiny boxed-in office on the ground floor contained the *bombe* mahogany Chippendale wardrobe, which was firmly not for sale, (though years later to be sold by his nephew) and which he told me he had found at an auction on a hot day under trees at the edge of a lawn. I believe this sale was somewhere in East Anglia. At one time Frank Laycock travelled fairly widely to auctions outside his immediate home area of Skipton and I remember being told by an antique collecting member of the local police force how sometimes they would see each other late at night, when Frank Laycock had returned from a distant auction sometimes with little more than, say, an Elizabethan spoon to show for his days work, but it was from such contact the police officer became a collector himself. From a local newspaper obituary, I see that when Frank Laycock died in 1961-2 he left seventy thousand seven hundred pounds and after numerous bequests, the residue went to his nephew Herbert Laycock, whom I got to know well, and who I believe had helped his uncle for some time before his death and was to carry on the business.

His premises were those previously occupied by the antique dealing firm of Proctors,

whose closing down auction sale in 1935 had provided me with some of my initial stock. The premises lay just over the bridge on leaving Skipton for Settle and appeared to be a long one storey building, but due to the drop in levels down to the river, there was a lower back ground floor packed with stock, a yard with store rooms, sheds and garages again filled with goods, and a small workshop. I question if Herbert Laycock had the flair and eye of his uncle, although his knowledge was certainly equally good. He had, I believe, a problem in sorting up matters after his uncle's death, and a trickle of interesting items seemed to keep coming from barns or sheds on the family farm over a long period, as the stacked bulk stock in the shop and stores slowly declined. Sadly, I was never invited to the Laycock home where his collection of oak was kept, but was given reports about it from Mary Bellis, the oak furniture specialist of Hungerford, who acquired many items. I do, however, remember the early oak table base with three cross piece legs but minus a top which lay about the store for many years. It finally turned up complete with a top in the Tom Burne Rous Lench sale in London.

Buys from the Laycock establishment I will always remember are the pair of carved wood painted armorial animals that I spotted in the shop window on one visit; then, in 1952, the collection of Rhodian (now called Isnik) Turkish pottery that they had acquired from a castle in Northumberland, and which was sold to me as a collection. A single jug from this collection, that I had bought for myself, sold for some £1,250 in 1994, when the market for such items was, I am told, particularly depressed. The depth of stock in the Laycock establishment was one of its great attractions. Cooksons in the High Street of Kendal may have been a better firm, but all the items were well displayed, so it was much visited and often another buyer had already been and already purchased a coveted article. Sometimes, and this was its fascination, one was the first to see newly arrived stock. Mr Cookson was all too frequently away when I called and so I never got to know him in the way I had with Frank Laycock. However, I still recollect my first awareness of him at that auction at Temple Sowerby in 1932 near Penrith, where he bought the gilt wood William & Mary chair that I had set my heart on, and bid up to fifty pounds - my then total workable capital. At the same sale, it was he who bought the large white salt glazed tankard commemorating Admiral Vernon's victory at Porta Bella.

Calling on Mr Cookson on this occasion, I was able to purchase, for thirty two pounds ten shillings, one of the only two genuine English Gothic chairs I have ever handled. I sold it a month or two later to Tom Burn of Rous Lench, Evesham, for seventy five pounds. He appeared to have parted with it before the series of auction sales held after his death. The following day in Preston, I purchased from Laycock the largest Staffordshire group I have ever had, in the form of a slightly raised mound with every variety of farm animal on it. In Keighley, from the subsidiary Laycock shop, came a whale bone box with carved oak lid dated 1692 for fifteen shillings, which later sold to Mary Bellis of Hungerford. In the four days of this intensive travel, just over four hundred items were purchased, all being individually chosen and all with character.

Leonard Knight, the King Street, London dealer was a regular customer at this time. It now seems extraordinary that a full length oil painting of a boy on a panel, dated 1611, could be bought for fifteen pounds, and even more so that I would be prepared to sell it for only ten pounds more; or that an early wooden bicycle from the Worcester

trade would only cost ten pounds. So far as I can see, no thought was then being given to the fact that the supply of goods would one day diminish. Jacobean oak panel chests with carved friezes were still available for under ten pounds, but I did not act on the advice of Bert Wolsley, the London oak dealer, to buy all I could in untouched condition for under this sum and stock-pile them. Partly this was due to lack of cash, but equally lack of space, a fact that has affected so much buying by so many dealers.

Tenby, often called 'Little England beyond Wales', had John Craggs the dealer. He, in his day, before the 1920s slump, was the main supplier from the West of Wales to London dealers who travelled down by evening train especially to see him. Among items purchased from him that September was a fine mahogany brass bound plate bucket for thirty pounds, two painted Sheraton cupboards at ten pounds each, two mahogany brass bound octagonal wine coolers on stands at twenty five pounds each, a fragment of seventeenth-century tapestry at five pounds, an urn shaped knife box for three pounds and a six foot six oak enclosed dresser base for twenty pounds. There were also a number of interesting smaller items. Over the years I got to know John Craggs fairly well, and during this period he became increasingly difficult to deal with. The entrance to his shop door was usually blocked with a chair or screen and piles of books. He would wake in the morning and decide what cash he needed to take; say, two hundred pounds that day but no more. When he had ascertained who you were, you might be admitted, but you had no idea how much he wished to take that day. It was very difficult, enquiring the price of a wanted object, to know that if you bought say, a sideboard for two hundred pounds, whether you would be allowed to buy anything else. Sometimes you got the balance just right and were able to buy several items before his top figure was reached. Upstairs in his showroom I can still remember the green malachite ornaments standing on a beautifully ready set dining table, just as they had remained for the previous forty years. Although these prices sound so low, the profits taken on them were equally so.

Back in Ludlow, Shropshire, I see I purchased two octagonal wooden block chopping bowls. These are undoubtedly distinctive to the greater Worcestershire area, and appear to date from the second half of the nineteenth century, together with the half moon shape metal choppers that usually came with them. Around this period, cabinet makers and restorers were busy turning many bedside commodes made in the form of chests of drawers into actual chests of drawers.

In October 1950, I was invited by the Misses Riddle-Blunt of Mapledurham House, Reading, to go to lunch and see if there was anything that I wished to buy. Their mother having died, the property, being entailed, was going to a distant relative they had never met and they were having to move. Although I had met the three sisters some years before, I did not know them at all well, and I can remember, when the gong sounded and we went into the dining room, we passed the large dining table, and walked on some distance to a circular table at the far end of the room. After a Latin grace, sister number one rose to her feet, walked down the long room, and helped herself from the serving table at the far end. Then, sister number two got up and walked down the room and did likewise. In due course, as I had nothing, and nothing was said, I also rose to my feet and did the same thing. Sadly, going round the house, although there were many things I would have liked, I was told that most of them were entailed. I did in fact go to the final

auction sale and buy one or two interesting lots, including four student lamps for ten shillings, and a Jacobean oak four-poster bed for twenty nine pounds eight shillings which I sold later for eighty pounds. I appear never to have been able to resist buying beds.

On the 11th November that year, I was again up in Preston visiting my dealer friend Edward Neale, and it was interesting to note that thirty cast iron lion door stops cost a mere three shillings and sixpence each. Then two days later from Laycock in Skipton, I was able to buy two Delft blue dash tulip chargers for a mere ten pounds the two. In 1999 I believe I would be right in saying they would have been worth over five thousand pounds. It was also on the same occasion that having visited Vincent Kelly in Whitehaven I set off to walk across the Market Square, on the far side of which was a normally modern furniture shop, but which did, on occasion, have not only second-hand but antique things on offer. I remember a considerable crowd of people in the square, and I was accosted by a policeman who told me it would be unsafe for me to walk further as there was great political unrest and a confrontation between rival Unions was taking place. In those days Whitehaven was a very tough spot indeed, though it is hard now to realise, the same also applying to Workington further up the coast. It was difficult to imagine on this same visit to Whitehaven that I bought the accumulation of old candlesticks which had been thrown into a large chest at the back of a shop. I think there were about one hundred and fifty. The price was very low, but when I had finally got them home and sorted them, it turned out that nearly all of them were either non-matching pairs or had damage of some kind.

Over the years what proved quite an important call was on John Curbishly at Knutsford in Cheshire. His shop was a very junkety looking establishment, but he always had some interesting things. On occasion, one might be taken back with him to his sophisticated home where he had many wonderful things. He did much of his buying in North Wales.

The 6th December saw that large sale of bygonies taking place in Cheltenham, also the auction at Bradwell Grove House, near Burford, where I bought a set of standard weights and measures, engraved 'Government of the Transvaal'. These were interesting, bearing a date when there was no such Government of the Transvaal in being. Following photographs and letters I sold them to the Afrikaner Museum in Johannesburg. At that time, the economic situation in South Africa was such that there was a ban on import of such things as antiques, and I am told that a special act had to be passed to enable the museum to import them.



35/36/37/38. Childrens' department chairs and a pair of shop counter chairs, lower right.



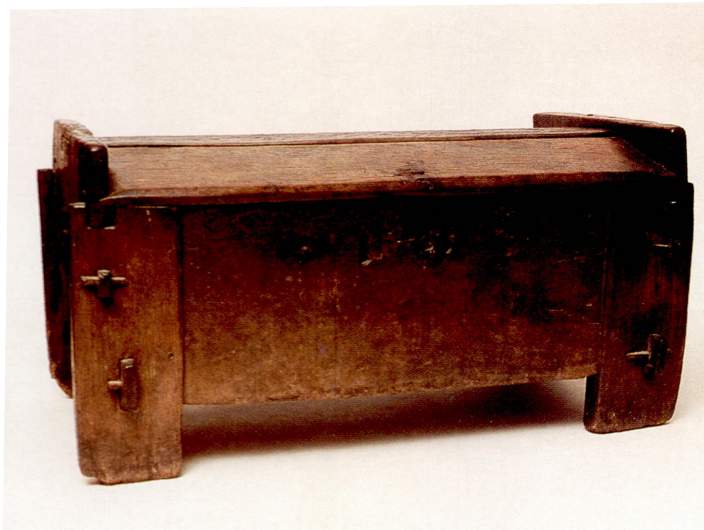
39. Child's department chair made to the specification of Dr. Astley Cooper, c1820. Original blue green paint. Bought from a country house sale in Worcestershire.



40. Potter's stool, eighteenth century, from the Coalport Pottery, Coalbrookdale, Shropshire.



41. Coffe from Kent or Sussex area, c1660, oak. This has an unusual profiled front panel.



42. Boarded ark, c1600, oak. This is of notably small proportions being thirty-one inches long.



43. Turned and blocked chair, early-eighteenth-century, Welsh. This is of interest because the back panel is carved from a single block, giving the impression of being framed.



44. Box armchair with drawer. Bought from a Shropshire country house sale.



45. Round drinking table from the Welsh borders. This was called a 'cricket' table by RW.



46. A collection of wooden clothes pegs, nineteenth century.



47. Dresser, eighteenth century, from Yorkshire. This is unusual in having a large hinged lid.



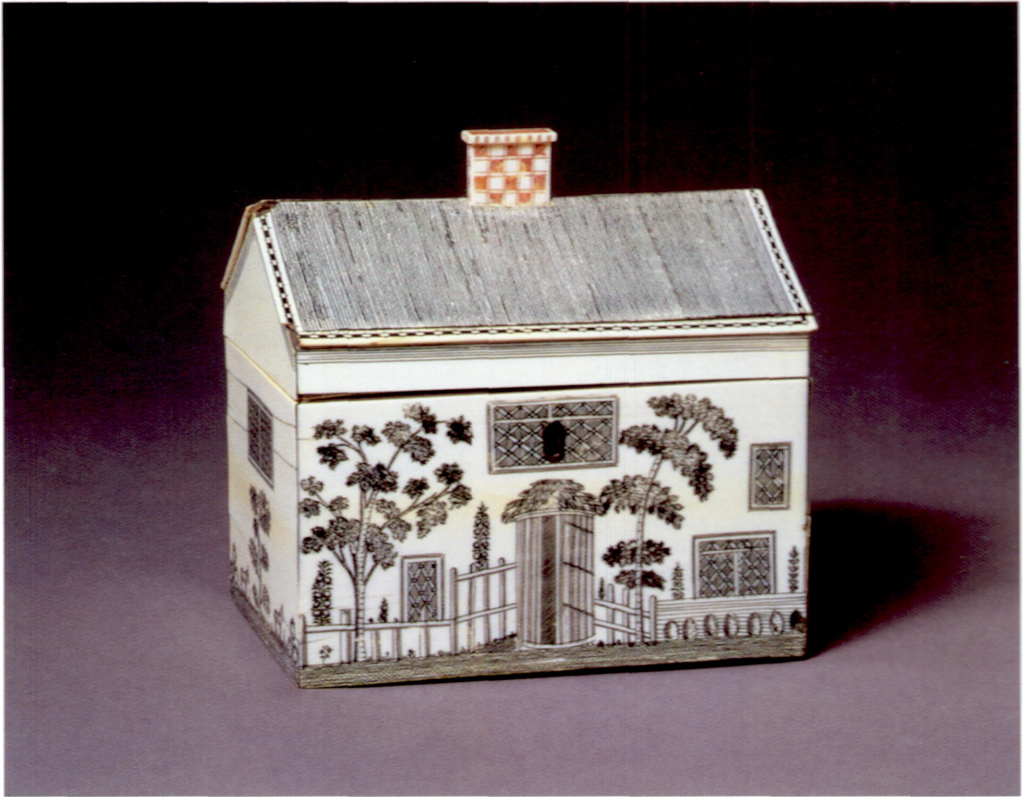
48. Spoon rack with profiled backboard, Welsh.



49. Oil portrait of Henry VIII. Sold to Charles Wade of Snowhill Manor, Gloucestershire.
Courtesy of the National Trust



50. Dole cupboard, sixteenth century, from a monastery outside Abingdon, Berkshire.



51. Workbox in the form of a house, Indian, c1800, ivory.
Trustees of the Victoria & Albert Museum



52. Chair jappers' guide in the form of a painted board. The pattern corresponds exactly with a design used by Gillow of Lancaster, eighteenth century.

Trustees of the Victoria & Albert Museum



53. Roger and Ruth Warners' son, Simon, aboard the Vosper's fairground roundabout (c1820-50) that was later sold to the Castle Museum, York.