THE 1950s

On the 2nd January 1950 I found myself visiting Mr Pullen, the dealer at Ramsbury near Hungerford. Whether this was a chance call or whether he had summoned me, I am uncertain, but from him I was able to buy a lead figure of a shepherd boy together with the original dog, for a sum of twenty six pounds. The figure was unfortunately missing the legs, but had, I think, come from a local mansion, very likely Ramsbury Abbey. On the steep staircase up to Pullen's store hung quantities of framed pictures mostly priced at less than a pound, and with their cost boldly chalked on the glass. It is a pity that I did not look at or examine one marked at seven shillings and sixpence which went on hanging there for years until the death of Mr Pullen, when it was found to be a French Impressionist work.

I saw a fair amount of Leonard Crow of Tewkesbury, although I never really knew him well. He was a keen ceramic dealer, none too popular in the trade, as he was such a difficult buyer. On the 6th February I called on Mrs Johnson, the widow of a doctor in Burton-on-Trent, who wanted to sell her collection of antiques. She had approached her local bank manager as to a reliable antique dealer, he in turn asked his clerk, who had worked with me during the war, and my name was passed to Mrs Johnson. I remember having tea with her and travelling back by train, bringing with me two items I had bought, one a rather primitive bird cage, which all my fellow passengers enquired if I had made. Having seen so many things at the house I liked, I wrote to her, making offers for separate categories of goods such as furniture, pictures, ceramic, metalwork. In this way, after her acceptance of my offers, some four hundred items were acquired. By and large, this was not as exciting a buy as may now seem. However, I do well remember arriving just ahead of my van to pack all my purchases to find several pairs of oriental vases, for which I had made substantial offers, were nowhere to be seen. Asking Mrs Johnson she said 'Oh yes, I think you will find those behind the kitchen door'. Rather naughtily, she had removed a number of things which were on my list and for which I had already paid. However, by the end of the day, I can remember her offering me free of charge garden frames, a small greenhouse and other items for which, sadly, there was no room on the van.

On 13 March 1950 I bought from Nigel Neatby, the dealer at Cullompton, a Cromwellian armchair, still with some of the original hide on it. He told me that he had spent considerable time buying this, as it had been thrown on to the bonfire of the house in which an auction sale was taking place, and he had had to wait until the end of the sale to buy it. An oak settle with curved top rack, now at Swarthmoor Hall, Ulverston, Cumbria, cost a mere seven pounds ten shillings, from Manley, the dealer in Crewkerne.

Just a week later I was able to buy privately from a mansion a few miles from Burford, a cream lacquer Charles II cabinet, minus its doors and stand. I was sent to look at it in a barn which turned out to be filled with other good things. It is interesting to note that I sold this to dealers from Italy, who some little time later told me that they had had it restored, that it had been photographed and was now illustrated in an important book on Italian furniture. I said 'It was missing the doors'. They replied casually, 'Oh was it? Well, you know what we did, we took off the two ends of the cabinet, made those into doors, removed the back and lacquered it, making the ends of the cabinet, and now the

only part of the chest that is not original - and no one will know - will be the back which we put in'. I wonder where that cabinet is now.

For some reason I was unable to attend a sale of Messrs Bruton Knowles, the Gloucester auctioneers, held in Gloucester on the 18th April. I sent my uncle to it, as among items that I had viewed was a small brass lantern clock, inscribed with the maker's name 'Tamkin, Bedford, Fecit', which I believed might possibly be the work of Thomas Tomkin. Spelling in the seventeenth century not being as reliable as it is today, several versions of his name are known to exist. I can't remember what price I told my uncle to bid up to, but at twenty pounds it was knocked down to him. Tom Burne of Rous Lench had left a commission of exactly this sum, but as my uncle was there in person bidding, the auctioneers felt that it would be very much easier if he bought it and took it away, rather than their having to deliver the clock to Evesham. When I sold this clock in 1980, it made five thousand five hundred pounds, and I am still of the belief it was by Thomas Tomkin, before he had become famous and moved to London. The same sale saw the purchase of a blue dash tulip charger for a mere two pounds, which I sold to my friend Wing Commander Golding Barrett for four. What is now forgotten is the tremendous quantity of really worthwhile interesting goods available on the market at this time.

The 19th April found me and my mother at an auction at Hilton House, Bridgnorth. The owner of the goods was an old lady in her nineties, with whom my mother had made friends during the sale. She was told that when the owner had married, some seventy five years before, she and her husband, being interested in old things, had made many purchases. It was with tremendous regret that I was out-bid and did not buy a Chippendale period doctor's couch, covered in its original hide leather, something that I have never seen since. But for ninety five pounds, I was able to buy a Jacobean hide covered oak framed settee, the best example I have ever seen, later selling this to Mary Bellis for one hundred and fifty pounds. From this same sale I also bought an unusual Jacobean oak chest of six drawers with moulded fronts.

Then, just a week later, there was a sale of the remaining effects of my great cousin Alice Abbot, who lived south of Reading, having moved herself there during the War; I had earlier sold on her behalf the collection of letters written to her grandfather, Benjamin Abbot, by Michael Faraday. I think I was prevented getting to the sale due to a bad cold. I had certainly not viewed it. However, I sent commissions, and the following day went to collect what had been bought. Among the items wanted was a small portrait of his daughter as a little girl, painted by Stacey Marks. This I had failed to find in the catalogue and was surprised to see lying, minus a frame, in a fireplace up in one of the bedrooms. Asking the sale porter what it was doing there, he said 'Oh, it was part of a mixed lot, the buyer just wanted the frame. Do you want the picture? You can have it for ten shillings'.

On the 3rd July I bought a pair of Jerusalem garters, dated 1678, from my secretary, Mrs Talbot, who had had them from her father. These garters we sold to the Victoria and Albert Museum, and some months later bought another pair. It is no longer generally known that one of the tourist items brought back from visits to Jerusalem in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were garters to give your lady friends. These always bore a date and the name 'Jerusalem' on them. I think it is worth noting how many

pottery money boxes in the form of fruit, usually apples, were still to be found in shops, usually of a rather junky nature, throughout the country. These I am sure were of Scottish origin.

In 1951 our customers included Angel, the leading dealer of Bath; Mannheim, the London ceramic dealer; Mrs Graham Greene; Stanley Fisher, the expert in blue and white porcelain; the Dower House, Newbury; and Days Library of Mount Street, London, who amongst other items, purchased a Noah's Ark with two hundred animals for only seventeen pounds, the fashion for these not having started, together with much printed ephemera. Louis Lipski, later to become famous as the leading expert on English Delft pottery, became a customer and friend. I can remember selling him a Delft blue and white pot which came from a Wiltshire country house. He firmly maintained that it was Frankfurt, while I was equally certain it was Bristol Delft. It was a number of years later, late one evening, that the front door bell rang. It was pouring with rain, and there, standing on the step outside, was Louis Lipski, looking his usually bedraggled self in a particularly dirty raincoat, rain pouring from his hat. 'No, I won't come in' he said; 'I have just been digging in Bristol, and we found lots and lots of pieces like that pot you sold me. You said it was Bristol, I said it was Frankfurt. No, I won't come in, but I thought you ought to know. I've diverted twenty five miles to tell you. Goodnight'. And he was gone.

It was on the 28 July 1951 that I sold a Toft type platter, to Tom Burne of Rous Lench for fifty two pounds ten shillings. This at the auction on 1 July 1986 sold for five thousand five hundred pounds. Tilley's, the leading ceramic dealers in London, were again fairly regular purchasers. In November, I sold to Charles Wade the oil portrait of Henry VIII on an oak panel that now hangs in the main hall of Snowshill Manor, the National Trust property near Broadway, Worcestershire. This I had purchased some weeks earlier at an extraordinary sale taking place outside Newbury, a mansion filled with pictures, the staircase of which was lined with rows and rows of portraits of every kind. The picture trade from London and elsewhere were there in force, but, as is invariably the case, there were a number of lots in which no one was interested. Sitting close to the auctioneer was a figure who would say 'One pound, one pound', and frequently the lot would be knocked down to him for three or four pounds, no-one else wanting what was on offer.

It was therefore no great surprise that when the first of three small portraits of a Negro's head was offered, the auctioneer asked for a bid. It was a hot afternoon, one pound was offered by the individual at his feet which the auctioneer took, and, after a few more bids, the portrait was knocked down to him for a sum of around ten pounds. Suddenly a surge of activity was heard at the back of the sale room. When the next near identical lot came up, bidding started at one hundred pounds, it and the remaining two pictures selling for several thousand pounds each. It turned out that they were all Van Dyck sketches.

After Charles Wade had made Snowshill Manor over to the National Trust, he called on us on his way down to Southampton to catch a boat to St Kitts, his island in the West Indies. I can remember his spending another one thousand five hundred pounds with me, which included that portrait of Henry VIII, telling me to take it over and deliver it to the

National Trust the next day. Snowshill at that time was just so full of goods that when I arrived about a dozen people were trying to move stuff to make room to get into the main section of the house. I think myself - and Henry VIII - were both very nearly lynched in the courtyard for bringing another load of items that they had nowhere to place.

From my day-books, 1951 appears to have been a dull year compared with 1950. I am not quite clear how many customers I may have lost during it, but when in Yorkshire, I bought in York a quantity of antique wine bottles sealed and dated around 1810, many of which still contained their original contents. These were fairly eagerly snapped up by many of my customers, but it was noticeable that those who bought full bottles never came back to me. In 1951, the name of George Considine, a dealer from Boston, USA, first becomes apparent. He had never been to Burford before, and the day of his arrival was early closing day, with most antique shops shut, including mine. I can remember returning about seven o'clock one night to find an urgent message for me to ring him up at a Burford hotel, and some few minutes later he came in to the shop. He was so impressed by my stock that he arranged to spend the night in the town and to come back the following morning. From then on, over a number of years we usually had two if not three visits annually from him, with sales of around five hundred pounds each time.

Felix Green, another American dealer operating from California, we also got to know well, and were interested in his buying - or rather selling - methods. On each item that he bought, he immediately tied a three-part label and wrote in code the selling price. Returning to California, he would rent a dockside warehouse and bring in a flock of sales girls. He and his wife having unpacked the containers, they would arrange the goods in rows and on a certain day open his door to the interior decorating trade. They would rush in, and, if they wanted anything, would pull off section one of the label, carry it to the sales desk, and remove the goods at their convenience. That evening Felix Green and his wife would go round removing the first part of all the labels on the remaining goods. The following day, the doors would be opened to the antique trade, who would pull the second part of the labels off anything they wanted, showing that they had bought it. On the third day, section two of the labels having been taken off, the doors would be opened to the Californian public who would usually buy the remainder of the goods. His write-up profits were tremendous, but so were the shipping costs at that time.

Ethel Harris of Chicago, operating as The Caledonian Market Inc., had also become a regular customer, and we became so well known to her that even in the 1990s, Christmas cards arrived from the firm. Henry Sutch, the Berwick Street dealer, was a regular customer. In May, I was asked to supply furnishings for Swarthmoor Hall, a house at Ulverston in Cumbria which was shortly to become open to the public. Swarthmoor Hall is looked upon as the birth place of Quakerism, and that year it had just come back into ownership of the Religious Society of Friends, prior to an international conference.

The year 1952 started with a new stock book, Stock Book No8, of double size thickness, which carried on until the end of the year 1953. The first two thousand items in this stock book had been transferred from earlier books, thus saving much handling of records, where daily entries of items sold were marked off. And although later stock books, over the next few years, were of this large size and thickness, it was I now know

a mistake, as they proved too bulky and heavy for easy use. During 1952, 2,450 items were sold for a total of fifteen thousand five hundred pounds and two thousand one hundred and fifty eight pounds items were purchased at a total cost of ten thousand two hundred pounds. The gross profit on the year being six thousand seven hundred and forty five pounds.

In February 1952, another buying expedition to Edinburgh and the north took place, during which some three hundred and sixty items were purchased. In Edinburgh it is interesting to note that three pairs of pottery cockerels cost seventy shillings a pair. On this North Country visit Trevor Lee, the dealer in Kendal, known to his colleagues as Clever Lee, and never my most popular supplier, was visited. From Laycock of Skipton came the dated mortar, inscribed *Joel Savill 1678*, now at Swarthmoor Hall, which cost twenty pounds. When in Scotland I visited the shops in Glasgow in my usual way for half a day, and from Alexander, who was primarily a wholesale antique dealer, I was able to buy a Scottish cylindrical-fronted, fluted, long case clock, quite unwanted at this time, for five pounds, which I subsequently sold for ten pounds, but which would fetch four figure sums in the 1990s. At this time no one liked these clocks, which usually had a painted circular dial. I liked the shape of the half cylindrical fluted column case which I have always found interesting. At this time Moss Harris of London were disposing of their early oak, much of which had been stored in cellars and some of which no doubt had been for theatrical hire. I think I made a great mistake by not becoming a regular customer there.

The oil painting now to be seen over the fireplace in the hall at Swarthmoor Hall, Ulverston, was purchased by me at one of a series of auction sales, selling up the remaining stock in trade and clearing the stocks of 'Granny', that is Mr & Mrs Harmer-Brown, who had a shop by the bridge in Witney and also one at Moreton-in-Marsh. I think it was from the second sale that this painting came, at a cost price of eight pounds ten shillings. Since then it should be remembered that it has been professionally cleaned, but nevertheless, a good indication of just how cheap oil paintings were.

During March, no less than thirty eight dolls came into stock from various sources. Item 2827 in my sales record was a wooden doll, sold me by Mr Vaux of Ilchester, Somerset, and now in the Castle Museum at York. It again gives an indication of the tremendous change in prices over the years. This doll was bought by me on the 29 March 1951. I don't think young Vaux had any particular regard for me, and I can remember his saying, 'I have got something here funny enough even for you', pressing the doll into my hands and demanding fifteen pounds for her. I kept her with enjoyment for very many years. She was of George III date, in absolutely immaculate untouched condition, and when sold in 1984 fetched a little over ten thousand pounds, bought by the Castle Museum, York, where she is on display. Sometime later, visiting York, I went to look at her. She was in a case at the end of a long corridor passageway, and so excited was she to see me, she immediately fell off her stand!

Among our many American customers, regular ones were the two Keyman brothers who operated from New York. On my one and only visit to that city, I remember visiting them and their warehouse store room. Among the items to be seen there was a grand piano, made by Broadwood, which I wish I had been able to find before it left England.

Other interesting items acquired around this date were the two carved wood coats of arms of the Calthorpe family, which came from an auction sale at Elvetham Hall at Hartley Wintney in Hampshire. When purchased these cost thirty pounds for the two. I immediately sold one of them, with perhaps some mild regret, keeping my favourite. They covered two separate generations of the family and had hung from the Minstrels' Gallery in the Great Hall at Elvetham Hall. They were not mentioned in the catalogue, and when the contents of the Hall were being sold, I can remember calling out to the auctioneer, 'What about the two coats of arms?' He immediately gave them an 'A' number and it was in this way that I acquired them. The coat of arms I sold went to private customers in the West Country. A year or two later, when they were moving, they kindly offered it back to me, on condition that it should stay with the companion panel.

What interesting auction sales there were around this time. The Gloucestershire farm cart, found standing in a barn at Eastleach near Fairford, cost the sum of six pounds fifteen shillings. As I recollect, I sold the cart to the Museum of Rural Life at Reading *in situ*. They were able to find the original carter who had many, many years before driven it, and, with tears in his eyes, he drove it for the last time to the station at Fairford, and thence it went by rail down to Reading.

It was one of our local neighbours who insisted that I should travel down to Cornwall in 1952 for the auction sale of the estate of his old deceased aunt. It was only on the receipt of the catalogue - which over the next ten days became my bedside reading - that I became sufficiently excited to catch a train and travel down to Ilfracombe. From there I found my way to the view at Trebarfoote Manor, a house down a very narrow road, almost on the cliff tops on the divide between Cornwall and Devon. Our neighbour's old aunt had been a star of the Edwardian music hall stage, and had gifts of every kind showered on her by admirers. Later, during world tours, she was often pursued by her admirers, and again gifts were showered on her. However, over the years she developed what perhaps can best be called mild religious mania, and started buying carved wood figures, church reading desks and items of that description. The war had made her remove all items from her London house, which explained the cramped conditions at Trebarfoote.

The painted case harpsichord, wanted by no-one, I was able to buy at a cost of a mere four pounds (although it was made by the firm of Ruckers of Amsterdam). On my return to Burford, I sold it to Legge of Cirencester, then perhaps one of the more important antique keyboard instrument dealers. He paid me seventy five pounds for it, and managed to get it back into something like its original state, as, over the years, the keyboard had been increased in size by almost a third, making the object fairly ungainly. This can now be seen at Fenton House Musical Museum in Hampstead. There was also a small wing shape spinet which I bought, made by the firm of Longman and Broderick of London, and which cost twenty five pounds.

What a year it was for important auctions. On the 14th July, was the auction sale at Fawley Court near Henley-on-Thames, conducted by Messrs. Messenger, May, Baverstock of Godalming, Surrey. Almost at the start of the sale I was able to buy a pair of cylindrical pedestals with painted urns with gilt ormolu handles, for two hundred and thirty five pounds. This was a very large sum for anything in those days, and particularly

for me, but I was aware of their importance, and perhaps only got them for this price because the auction was at such an early stage. I subsequently sold them on to Messrs Mallets of Bond Street, and they are now the property of the National Trust. A photograph in *Illustrated Magazine* featured me loading them into my car (Figure 56). Again that same year, in September, an auction took place at Wardour Castle, Wiltshire, held by Messrs. Woolley and Wallis of Salisbury, Wiltshire. I had already been in the house and seen the few remaining objects, being asked by the agent to make an offer for them. I wish my offer had been accepted, as in fact the total realisation of the auction came to only a trifle more than I had offered, and this only because I had overlooked the fact that a certain set of French chairs were signed with the maker's name.

In the Victoria and Albert Museum there is an unusual work box made in the shape of a house. It is veneered with engraved ivory, and may have been made in British India. Our son must have been about ten months old when we decided on a short break and took him off for his first real holiday, staying in a boarding house in Boscombe, near Bournemouth. After lunch one day, after Ruth went for a rest, I pushed off with my son in his pram to get him to sleep, and wended my way to Boscombe Arcade, by which time he had fallen asleep satisfactorily. Looking in to a semi-antique/semi-junk shop window, I saw this box, so leaving the pram I went in, negotiated and bought it. A few moments later as it seemed, I came out to find a group of angry women standing round the pram saying 'Whose child is this? Whose child is this?', and my poor son yelling and crying, probably with surprise at all the strange faces, rather than my having left him as I thought, asleep.

I find a note that in 1952 it appears that I was able to buy better, more interesting items during the second half of that year. Certainly on the 16 October I bought a number of items from an auction at Cusworth Hall, Doncaster, which I shall look back on as one of the most important sales ever attended by me. The auctioneers were the Leeds firm of Hollis and Webb and the sale was held between 14–23 October 1952. Cusworth, the home of the Wrightson family, had only been visited annually for a few weeks of each year, over a period stretching back to, I think, the mid-eighteenth-century. During the war it had been commandeered by the army. This explained, on my arrival, being amazed to find in the almost treeless coppice behind the house eighteenth century leather fire buckets, hanging from the tree branches, evidently having been used as a latrine.

Ruth and I, leaving our son with my mother, had motored up and were only able to attend three out of the five or six day auction sale. Staying in a hotel in Doncaster, I discovered that approximately two hundred and fifty dealers were also there, that they had taken an accountant with them, hired the Ballroom, and were holding a knock-out ring settlement each evening. This made relationships a little stressed, as I was known to be a non-supporter of the ring, not in terms of finance, but for knowing a little bit more than they would like about some of the goods offered.

Also staying in the hotel was a curious woman, wearing a semi-ecclesiastical garb, with a large chain and crucifix round her neck and pale blue wrap-around garments, who turned out to be the beneficiary and last remaining member of the Wrightson family. The story went that around 1900 the Mrs Wrightson of the day had thrown a party, during which she produced an unknown son and heir from the kitchen regions of the

house. Before the party was over, it is stated that he had kicked his mother down the steps, later taking unto himself a whole bevy of local damsels. When the house was visited by distant relations, namely the Sitwell family after the war, the doors were opened and dogs were set on them, with jeering faces at many of the upstairs windows. I am not certain if it was the sister of this son, or whether it was a cousin who was staying at the hotel. She had decided to try and atone for his mis-doings, and was in the process of restoring the private chapel, having brought over a number of Italian work people to improve and restore mosaiics and wall paintings. Her presence made for a slightly strained atmosphere in the hotel dining room each morning.

Now to the sale itself. Prices were just so ridiculously low it is almost impossible now to study the catalogue and get any real meaning from it. I do know that the set of needlework covered chairs, of which photographs exist, were standing on the top floor landing, virtually with rain dripping on to them, and that off the chest of drawers in some of the top floor bedrooms, I picked up unopened bundles of London newspapers, dating back to the 1800 period, which had been thrown from the coach to the Lodge Keeper. Elsewhere I have given further details of this sale and what I was able to buy, but it is worth noting that the small tapestry that hung between the windows in one of the bedrooms, was seen by me subsequently hanging on the staircase of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre at Stratford Upon Avon. It must have been of Soho manufacture, and featured a figure accompanied by a Shakespearean quote about Harry Hotspur.

Within three weeks of the Cusworth sale, I was endeavouring to buy wallpaper hanging on the walls of the Gothic-revived wing of the house at Eastleach near Fairford, which had been seen by the trade at the time of an auction in the house, but which the auctioneer insisted could not be sold now that the property was coming up for auction. I was only able to look at it through broken panes in the window, but decided it was of real importance, and that I should have it. Believing the house might be wanted by no-one, I thought it would be worth buying the house, having it as our second home, in part for the sake of the Chinese paper, which would go some way towards paying for it. However, when the entire estate was offered in one lot, the auctioneers not expecting it to sell, the local farmer bought it. Waiting for him to sign the necessary purchase documents I slipped round and asked if I might buy the paper hanging in the big derelict room. He said 'Paper, I've seen no paper. Ring me up tonight'. That evening I had to attend a meeting in Burford, and it must have been after ten o'clock that I got home to find that he had rang up wanting me to ring him, by which time he had an opportunity to look at it. He enquired how much I would offer, I named my price, he said 'It's yours, but you must be mad!' Within forty eight hours I went off together with my workshop helper, a quantity of wooden broom handles and instructions from the Victoria and Albert Museum as how best to get it off the wall. Eventually getting in to the locked room we discovered it was appallingly damp, the paper barely hanging on to the wall. With great difficulty we managed to hold it to the wall and roll it off the walls intact. A fairly dormant swarm of bees was in a nest near the window, and fortunately it was a cold day. By the time we had finished, fairly dense, fog was coming down. I drove home in excitement with the paper, which on description I had already sold to one of my favourite American dealers, George Considine. It was just after nine o'clock the next

morning, that the telephone rang. It was Amos Phillips, the Hitchin dealer, enquiring how much I wanted for the paper. I said 'But however did you know that I had bought it?' 'I had a friend, my spy, keeping an eye on the house and as soon as they saw you arrive, they let me know. How much do you want?'. And I can remember how disappointed he was to hear that I had already sold it.

Cusworth Hall and the Chinese wallpaper would have been a good end for year 1952, if it had not been for the sale on the 24th November at Clyne Castle near Swansea. I remember motoring down to the view late one evening, in appalling rain and next morning going to the house full of fascinating items. Very sadly I was unable to attend the sale and will always regret this, due to the fact that my brother and sister-in -law from South Africa were just leaving us and it seemed important to get them down to their boat at Southampton by car. However, I left commissions and manage to obtain a number of items.

Among the items I bought was the painted canvas frieze of children leading carts, in the form of a procession, which was hung very high up in the Great Hall. When Griffender, my carriers, went to move it, they rang me up and said, 'Do you really want it, it's ripe, plum ripe!'. What they meant was that dry rot had got into the stretchers and some of the canvas and it fell into fragments almost as you looked at it. However some yards of it were got down, and were subsequently restored by William Ware, later being sold by me to someone who had discovered its original Italian origin. I will always look on it as one of my more important art purchases. I also bought a made up four-poster bed, but incorporating a wonderful polychrome painted Royal coat of arms. This was later sold to S.W. Wolsey, the London Art dealers.

Another unusual item purchased around this time was a rare keyboard instrument called a Duo-Chord, sold by Sotheby's from a country house auction sale near Ware. The Duo-Chord had been made by Woffington of Dublin, the father, I think, of Peg Woffington, the eighteenth-century actress. It combined not only a harpsichord, but also the actions of a piano. It was not in good condition and it changed hands some two, if not three times after being sold by me before it was finally restored. A tremendous amount of time and money was spent on it, but it was probably a unique instrument.

Keil, the dealer of Broadway, Phillips of Hitchin, Beazor from Cambridge and S W Wolsey of London, were all regular customers, while among our private customers was Ralph Edwards, by this time head of the furniture department of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Perhaps his main interest and expertise was in conversation pictures, and I remember on one occasion taking such a picture to him for examination at the museum. He was a difficult chap, and as I walked in to his office he said, 'I'm just leaving, what did you bring me a picture for?'. 'Well, I thought you could tell me about it', I replied. 'Don't you know that I am the greatest expert on English conversation pictures; pick up that suitcase and we will talk as we go to the door'. I found myself rushing through the museum with him beside me telling me about the picture. However, over the years he proved a useful customer, helping me to sell chests to the Greenwich Maritime Museum to place in front of pictures they did not want the public to get too near. It was through Ralph Edwards that I sold a pastel by Hoare, the eighteenth century artist, of his son Prince Hoare, to the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is catalogue number P.57-1953.

One of those large gilt gesso *cassone* chests needs mention. This I bought several years before, but found completely unsaleable, eventually sending it to sale rooms in Cirencester with other surplus stock. No one was interested and as I believe the highest offer for it was five pounds, the auctioneers saw fit to buy it in on the owners' behalf. The very next morning a letter arrived from the Victoria and Albert Museum's woodwork department, from Ralph Edwards, saying could I arrange delivery of it to the Greenwich Maritime Museum, sending my account at its original marked figure of several hundred pounds.

A month later was the sale at Bloxham. After the sale was over, I was shown a very early, if not the earliest, anaesthetising machine which had not been included in the sale. I tried to purchase it on behalf of the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford, but, sadly, was unsuccessful.

All our American customers were recurring assets to the business, some coming once, some twice, some three or even four times a year in a very regular pattern, and often buying anything from fifty to two hundred items at a time. Frost and Reed, the picture firm in Bristol had begun bringing with them Raymond Button, one of their American clients who was anxious to buy objects in addition to the pictures which they supplied. That autumn Ruth and I paid our first visit to Venice at a time when our foreign travel allowance was only twenty pounds each, a useful reminder of how long wartime restrictions continued after the cessation of war. Count Orcelli from Florence some years later, was to buy a pair of Bassano school paintings which I bought in 1957 at the sale at Allensmoor Court near Hereford. I remember in one of the pictures there was a white horse standing in the foreground, while in the other a women was kneeling milking a cow. 'Which do you like best?' said Orcelli. 'The one with the horse' I replied. 'Oh, the English!' he said, 'always a horse, a horse, but to the Italians, a woman, any woman is better'.

Although not usually a good centre for buying, Leicester was interesting in having one trade establishment where there were always rows of seventeenth-century untouched oak panel chests available for a flat price of five pounds each. These made very good wedding presents, and I remember giving them to my cousins.

In the North, pottery char dishes cost twelve shillings and sixpence. Char, I think, are only found in Scottish lochs and North of England waters as they need fresh water and live at considerable depth. Potted char was a delicacy much esteemed by people living in the North West of England. Delft dishes decorated with fish can sometimes be found, as well as later printed examples.

Robert Thompson of Bradford, whose byline read 'Antiques and Semi-antiques', was a keen collector in his own right. In the back room behind the shop, in a large glazed fronted bookcase, his prize exhibit was a Leeds Pottery horse. One day, hastening through from the shop to this room, he found the window half open and his window cleaner leaning in cleaning the top panes of a sizeable window. 'Be careful', Robert Thompson said, 'You must be careful of the china'. He got the reply 'Oh those old crocks are not much good'. Robert Thompson said, 'What! look at that horse, it's wonderful'. 'Well' said the window cleaner, 'If you want another, there is a black one at the White Horse pub, down the road'. Robert Thompson rushed out, locking the shop door, and went down to the pub. There, on a high shelf behind the bar, was another

horse, which though originally white, was now black with a hundred and fifty years of beer, fumes and dust. He bought it, and many years later, when it appeared in a West End of London saleroom, it fetched, if I remember rightly, something approaching fifteen thousand pounds.

From the amount of private buying I was doing in my home area at this time, I must to some extent have had something of a monopoly. It was in December that I bought my first antique pawnbroker's sign. From the 1950s onwards, pawnshops were closing down on all sides. The three ball signs were usually scrapped, but I can remember seeing a particularly good one outside a shop in Bury St Edmunds. On my next visit to the town it was still there, but the shop had closed and I could not find out from anyone where the owner might have gone. Mentioning this to a friend who was a probation officer, she said, 'Oh, I think perhaps I can help; the Pawnbroker's son got into some trouble recently and I was able to help. Do you really want the sign?'. So I said, 'Yes, very much', and some weeks later it arrived in Burford.

Early 1954 saw the birth of our daughter Susan, and, a week or two later, the death of my Guildford uncle, Marcus Warner, a small legacy from him providing a useful increase in our capital. It was that May, on a hot day, that I set off to the West Country. It was so hot that I travelled in my shirt sleeves, forty eight hours later returning through one of the most violent snow storms I can remember, which completely blocked roads over Salisbury Plain. In my car I had an item of French furniture, a small writing desk, stamped with what I understood to be the maker's name, 'Boudin', but who was in fact more a supplier of French furniture to the French aristocracy than an actual maker. This I was later to sell to Morton Lee. Around this period the Science Museum bought a large hour glass from me, coming from the sale at Little Sodbury Manor, the one time home of a titled Continental collector. Checking my daybook, I see that in that September, Roger Senhouse was one of my customers. I have only recently found this reference to him and wish that I had discovered this some years back when all my letters to him, when he was resident in Brighton, brought no reply. I was trying to obtain admittance to the rapidly ruining mansion at Maryport in Cumbria, seat of his family over many generations, and where I was told there was a collection of period clothing never seen by me, but now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

That October, the Associated Merchandising Corporation, one of our many American buying firms acquired from us a break-front bookcase for eighty five pounds, followed next month by some one hundred and twenty five items going to George Considine in the USA for five hundred and fifty five pounds. Hotspurs, Alexandra Podd and Mary Bellis were all my customers at this period and remained so for many years. At the year's end I bought from stock for myself some seven hundred items, including dolls. A review for the year 1954 notes gross sales of about sixteen thousand pounds, while since our re-opening in 1947 our total sales amounted to something over one hundred and nine thousand pounds. I see there is a quote saying, 'I am no longer being able to buy fine important lots at auction against the Trade'.

The steady nature of the business can be assessed with some two thousand two hundred items purchased in 1953, two thousand two hundred and forty three in 1954, and both years approximately the same number of items sold. Exports to the United

54. The dining hall at Swarthmoor Hall, Ulverston, North Lancashire. RW furnished this seventeenth-century Quaker retreat during the 1950s.

55. A bed chamber at Swarthmoor Hall.

Costly items were two Adam pedestals. Roger Warner went up from £5 to £225 for them

56. RW (left) and helper loading pedestals into the Morris at the Fawley Court sale, Henley-on-Thames, Buckinghamshire. Photograph from *Illustrated* magazine, 16 August, 1952

57. The restored dining room urns and pedestals from Fawley Court.

58. Roger and Ruth Warner's daughter Susan with a Dutch 'Gaper head' chemist's shop design.

59. Farm waggon, Gloucestershire, nineteenth century. Sold to the Museum of English Rural Life, Reading, Berkshire.
Courtesy of the Rural History Centre, University of Reading

States ran at four thousand two hundred pounds and the following year, four thousand two hundred and fifty, while sales to the continent in 1954 amounted to one thousand pounds only. A sudden spurt of business during the last three months of that year was noted by everyone in the trade. I also note the small number of articles of worthwhile interest that could now be sold for a pound each. Fourteen good auction sales were viewed or attended, the best all being in the Hereford to Shrewsbury area. I made three trips to the North of England and two into South Wales during that year.

My shortage of cash, I find, was due in part to repaying a loan of three hundred pounds, the purchase of a new Hillman motor car for eight hundred pounds, this covering thirty miles to the gallon as compared with the old twenty five horse Morris, which only did fifteen. House repairs amounted to nine hundred pounds. A thousand pounds of fresh capital were introduced into the business during 1954, from a legacy I received from my Warner bachelor uncle. David Marsh, another dealer, had opened a shop two doors below me and was followed the next year by the arrival of Zene Walker, with the result that there were three good antique shops in a row in Burford High Street, noted as one of the best roadscapes in Oxfordshire.

Our target sale figure of twenty thousand pounds was at last reached in 1955, but we showed some of our worst weekly sales ever since re-opening in 1947. In March, Miss Watkin, who lived locally, joined the firm in a part-time capacity and was to remain with me as a helper for the next thirty years. It was interesting to note that an estimated five thousand four hundred people came to the shop in the year, but an increasing number were non-buyers, viewers only. A total of three thousand two hundred and fifty items were purchased during this year, a year of great activity. I see one lot alone I sold consisted of forty eight brass toddy kettles. These brass toddy kettles were of the type that were so plentiful in the Edinburgh area. Every house must have had one during the second half of the nineteenth century, usually mounted on three or four small ball feet, with a brass or sometimes glass handle. They were squat, roundly formed, extremely decorative and very often showing no signs of use.

The auction sale took place in this year of the remaining stock of old Mr Foxall of Ludlow, who had proved such a useful supplier to me in earlier times. Four tours north and one to the south west were made during the year. The business still continued on a very level keel as over the next four years the number of items sold was two thousand four hundred and fifty, two thousand two hundred, two thousand three hundred and thirty, and two thousand five hundred and forty. The new car was proving a success. A constant sum of approximately five hundred pounds seemed to be owed to us all the time. Due to the credit squeeze, a request came from our bank for our overdraught limit to be reduced from one thousand to seven hundred and fifty pounds. A list of monthly sales figures showed April as our busiest month, with sales of just under four thousand pounds, whereas May, June and December were all just over the two thousand pound mark. I made a note to myself, 'Avoid the purchase of furniture needing repair'. Discussion with my accountant took place on the merits of turning the business into a small limited company, something that I was personally against at this time.

My ledgers reveal that Howard Phillips, the specialist London glass dealer was buying from me. It is interesting to see how many pictures I was selling around this time, often

for sums more than I was charging for our better furniture. Dealers such as Walter Beaton from Dundee were coming down to buy from us, rather than my going north to buy from him. In April, John Straker with his wife and two daughters started buying furniture for their new home in the West Country at Ryecroft Hall. I remember his daughters, who were in their teens, getting bored, and so they were let loose on my chests and wardrobes of costumes, and there was continuous trying on of crinoline and other early dresses on the lawn. By this time I had established quite a reputation for, and certainly quite a stock of, costumes of all kinds. Travelling on top of a London bus up Oxford Street, I heard a couple talking about antiques. One said, 'It must be so. Roger Warner of Burford says so'. I hastily got up and left the bus.

It was in May 1955 that I sold my Meissen model of a lion in white porcelain modelled by Kändler and originally made for the Porcelain Palace in Dresden. It is perhaps worth telling the story of this. I had been to see a lesser country house sale not far from Burton-on-Trent where, in a conservatory, this lion - almost black in colour, damaged and in two parts - was lying on the floor together with a bundle of brooms and other items. I knew that I was unable to attend this sale the following day. I also knew as none too reliable the porters organising the auction. What commission was I to leave? I was sure in my own mind that the white porcelain lion was of Bow porcelain, but I had never seen a piece of Bow so large before. I realised that if I left a substantial commission, the auctioneer's porters would be alerted to its importance. After a great deal of thought I left a nominal bid of ten pounds on the lot hoping that no one else had seen it, but being fairly sure that if they had I would be out-bid very considerably. In the event I believe I got the lot for three pounds ten, including useful rakes and brooms, and within a year, after many washings with a hose pipe, it was included in a Sotheby's sale where it sold for five hundred and twenty pounds. The immediate result of this was that a perfect identical figure was sent in to Sotheby's by an owner in Denmark. I now know quite a lot about Kändler figures but have never had the opportunity of finding another of this size.

Around this period, Marjorie Dean, the dealer of Wivenhoe in Essex, became a regular customer. She had started with her husband, a local doctor, who used to be brought around with her on her buying expeditions. Her selling hinged on much advertising, being willing for a fixed sum to completely furnish a room, house or cottage with antique items. I have the impression that a really good level of items was being sold at this time, and our regular groups of customers, trade, private and those from America, were all recurring and slowly increasing in numbers. Over three thousand items were purchased and two thousand five hundred items sold in1955.

1956 proved an eventful year, starting with sales of various dolls' house furnishings and a dolls' house to Mrs Angus, whose collection of such things are now the property of the National Trust and on view in their house, Wallington Hall in Northumberland. Peter Wilson, Chairman of Sotheby's, brought Mrs Heinz (of the sauce family) to whom I sold several items. Dr Goodheart was buying samplers and the Hon Mrs Stonor of Stonor Park, Henley-on-Thames bought our seven gothic style chairs for ninety pounds. A few days later, Peggy Ashcroft was buying a patchwork bedspread from us, and the Ashmolean, a pair of Greek amphora vases, one of which was stamped not only with the

name of the vineyard, but the owner's name also.

This year showed the best results ever obtained during the month of January. February, however, was very bad due to the severe snow and impossible road conditions. Total purchases amounted to thirteen thousand three hundred pounds, just six hundred pounds less than the previous year, although sales were only five hundred pounds up on the previous year, and gross profits some two hundred less, this shows our very even level of trading, with a total of two thousand two hundred and ten items sold, and two thousand items purchased. November/December saw the Suez crisis but this didn't appear to have any immediate effect on our sales. Petrol rationing was re-introduced, with my allowance as a commercial vehicle was only sufficient for a hundred and twenty miles a week. I can remember David Marsh, my cousin's husband Robert Eden, and I, pooling our petrol to go down to view a sale on Dartmoor. For reasons I don't quite know, they left me behind to bid for items we all wanted, and I had a very uncomfortable two nights in a local pub, some three miles away from the auction, to which I had to walk daily in very inclement conditions. The weather was terrible but I bought a number of lots, and telephoned asking for someone to bring my car down to collect me and our joint purchases. This was done, but within twenty miles of Burford, we doubted very much whether our petrol would allow us to get home. Fortunately we just did, with enough probably for only another five miles' motoring. Conditions were not as easy then as they are today.

All the time, unwanted items of stock were disposed of via Mrs Roberts who had a shop in Chipping Norton, or through the business of Mr Hill of Bampton, respectively ten and five miles away. Only one tour north was undertaken this year, but a great number of auctions were held within easy reach of Burford. My first visit to Spain on a Cook's organised tour was with my cousin, Brian Warner. Private purchases included items from Barrington Park and the Hooper estate at Windrush, a few miles up our valley. By this time Zene Walker was established as a further Burford shop.

More than ever, I became convinced of the wisdom of concentrating more on fine art as opposed to furnishing antiques. Oak furniture continued in increasing demand but porcelain was now selling much less easily. Never before had I been less sure as to what was in greatest demand. It was shortly before Easter of that year, that I must have bought a large ostrich egg, sitting on a small red cushion under a Victorian glass shade, and hit on the idea of making this a window centre piece for Easter, surrounded with a quantity of silver teaspoons that I could offer at ten shillings each. An Edinburgh dealer told me he would be able to send me unlimited supplies of antique silver spoons as these were brought into him by scavengers in the greater Edinburgh area. At first I was sorry that so many of the spoons had initials on them, but this proved to be their best selling point, and over the next year or two, 'Roger Warner Silver Spoons' became quite a feature of the establishment, and I no longer remember how many hundreds we must have sold.

During the year, three visits were made by William Ware for picture cleaning, which I was now having done on the premises. He was a very good artist in his own right, had an art shop in the Kings Road, Chelsea, but loved getting out into the country and provided we put him up in a local hotel, was happy to come down and clean pictures; rather a new experience for me, at an agreed flat price per picture, rather than on the

amount of work involved. I find another quote from the report of this year, 'When buying privately my offers are subsequently too often found to have been too generous'. By this time I had a store in Witney in which larger items, such as panelling or an old pulpit might be stored. This however, being ten miles away, proved somewhat of a problem, and I was able to rent a room at the rear of the Bear Inn, near the bottom of Burford High Street, during the summer of 1955. The year's end showed bonus profit sharing to my helper Mrs Talbot of a hundred pounds, and workshop helper, Jack Wilsher of ninety five.

The lacquer William and Mary mirror which I purchased at the sale at Kinsham Court, Herefordshire, (Russell, Baldwin & Bright, 2 May 1956), I discovered - after I had sold it - had a full page illustration in the *Dictionary of Furniture* by Ralph Edwards. Pinto bought a horn book with a wooden doll for thirteen pounds, a knife grinding machine for eighteen pounds ten and a wooden bone shaker bicycle for the same sum. A few months later I was selling a stone sundial purchased by me in Edinburgh to the Museum of Science in Oxford.

One of the items I have always enjoyed buying are carved wood stags heads, mounted with real antlers. It is surprising how there appear at that time to be no illustrations of these in books of interior decoration, as they seem to have played an important part in so many seventeenth-century houses. A small pair, purchased by me at an auction at Allensmore Court near Hereford, had been on the hall wall from the mid-seventeenth century. Over the years the wall had been replastered, and had risen some two inches in height. The sale at Allensmore Court on 23 October, 1957 was perhaps my first really close contact with the firm of Russell, Baldwin, Bright, the Leominster auctioneers. Allensmore Court was a sale I look back to with particular interest. It had been the home of the Pattershull family for many years, but from the early nineteenth century there had never been any children in the family, perhaps due to their connection with British India, many of the family dying while on jobs or duty there. All the attic bedrooms still contained their original eighteenth-century simple oak four-poster beds. The auctioneers men, preparing the sale, had been told to take the hangings off the beds, and when I first saw them they were piled ready to be burnt. I can remember asking for them to be sold to me, and they then went to Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia where they formed the curtaining and covering of window seats in many of the houses. In the library, a Second Folio of Shakespeare was discovered lying on a window seat. Among the items I intended buying in the Ballroom was a very large ten foot high oil painting of the full length wedding portrait of a Pattershull husband and wife of around 1810, painted by Hobday, the Bristol artist. In the background could be seen a stone garden seat which I was later to acquire. When the sale took place, the auctioneers were told not to sell this picture, as the inheritors of the property were anxious that it should go to the art gallery in Hereford. It was therefore with some surprise that a month or two later, when a demolition sale of the property took place, I found the picture still hanging in the same position with a new lot number on it. I bought the picture for two pounds, the opening bid being from an old man of one pound, and this I was to sell to the London picture trade. They in turn sold it to go to a Scarborough collector, to join the collection of pictures being formed there. Sadly, the house to which it was sent later slid slowly down

the cliff face, with many of the contents - probably including this picture - being lost.

In the Smithsonian Institute in America, among the many wonderful items to be seen, is what is considered a unique boys' linen embroidered jacket, the gift of one of my American customers. This jacket, together with other later items of costume, had been stored away at Allensmore Court, and had been removed for, I believe, theatrical use. It was first seen by me when lying in a trunk in the auctioneer's store. Over the months ahead, I tried to purchase this trunk full of costumes, but without success.

It was this same auctioneer at Russell, Baldwin and Bright, who pressed me to attend another sale he was holding on the West Coast of Wales. This I did, but only found one item to really interest me, a large icon type picture of a female saint. The hammer fell in my favour for it at two hundred and fifty pounds. My name was called out, but someone disputed the bidding. Against usual saleroom etiquette, the lot was offered again, and at over £500 I dropped out of the bidding. Some few minutes later a rosy-faced woman came up to me. She said that she had been the housekeeper in the house, and was so pleased that I had not bought the picture, telling me that the saint sometimes put out her arm and hit you. After the auction was over, the auctioneer came up to me and said how sorry he was about the dispute over the picture - although this was entirely of his own doing - and if there was ever anything he could do to help me, to let him know. Without really thinking, I said 'Oh! about that trunk of clothing in your store'. 'It's yours' he cried, and I hope I blessed the icon. I kept and enjoyed that jacket for many years, it being possibly one of the finest items I have ever owned. When I eventually sold it years later, it proved to be one of the most expensive items I ever handled.

This is a report written some thirty five years ago about the famous sale at Brympton D'Evercy, which took place on the 26 November 1956. This was the original dispersal auction held at the home by the direction of Clive Ponsonby-Fane, the sale itself being held by Taylor and Sons, the local Yeovil auctioneers, in conjunction with Messrs John Wood of London.

Prices realised by many of the lots now seem quite extraordinarily low. Lot 110 consisted of three George I cabriole club foot chairs, with slip in seats, selling for sixteen pounds the lot, and a walnut marquetry long-case clock by a London maker, with calendar movement, for thirty pounds. Both these items sold for some fifty percent less than the valuations I personally put on them. Sadly, I don't appear to have attended the sale on that first day, but lot 209, an eighteenth-century mahogany bureau bookcase, admittedly eight feet tall, with eight pedestal drawers below and a recessed centre cupboard two feet nine wide, was sold for only twenty five pounds. A three foot six mahogany breakfast table on quadruple supports was bought by Oliver of Guildford, a most important dealer, for twenty pounds, having been valued by me at this same amount. Lot 260, an oak credence table, fetched three pounds ten, although I would have been prepared to go up to eight pounds for it. Lot 343, a late-sixteenth to early-seventeenth-century cedar wood poker work decorated chest, seven feet long, with a decorated interior, fetched ten pounds. I had been buying somewhat similar chests at the sale at Ashton Court in June 1947 for one or two pounds each. It is only since 1967 that these have come back into their own.

However, I was at the sale on the second day, buying the first lot, number 365, an oak

hall table, for sixteen pounds as against my valuation of forty, but I don't seem to have bid for a set of Jacobean oak chairs with solid strap backs and baluster turned and tied underframes, which were bought by the trade for eleven pounds. Lot 381 was a written in lot and consisted of four carved wood stag's heads, mounted with horn antlers. Two of these, which I had certainly been prepared to purchase for sixty five pounds, came to me for ten pounds only. They were sold by me within a year to Colefax and Fowler, then the leading London interior decorators, for twenty five pounds each. Mrs Lancaster, who was an active member of the firm, kept them, and I repurchased them from her in the summer of 1971, reselling one of them to a Bond Street firm for three hundred and twenty five pounds, and the other to a Brompton Road dealer for two hundred and seventy five. So greatly have prices altered. The two smaller heads appeared to be very inferior, one was scrapped, possibly because of worm, while the other remained in stock until March 1960, when it was sold for ten pounds only.

Messrs Sternberg of London bought lot 386, which was given five lines in the catalogue, a seventeenth-century oak butter cupboard in two sections, circa 1620. They bought it for eighteen pounds and also lots 305 and 308, four Jacobean armchairs of early-seventeenth-century date, sold for prices of six to eight pounds each. It is now impossible to realise how unwanted Jacobean oak armchairs were at that time. Lot 402 at this sale, a Jacobean elbow chair with closed sides and plain panel back with shaped crest and rail, was bought by my cousin for one pound only. It must be remembered that Brympton D'Evercy was virtually an untouched house, and lots 411 and 412 were Georgian chandeliers of carved wood, painted brown with ten scroll brackets, which had probably been gilded, but never moved since they were first hung. Montague Marcusson, the London dealer, purchased them for three hundred and ten pounds each, which in comparison with most of the furniture prices, showed just how important these must have been. Lot 429, a brass gilt framed Adam octagonal hall lantern, I had valued at thirty two pounds, but subsequently had been given a commission by Bert Wolsey, London. I bought it for him for ninety five pounds against Mrs Angel, a leading dealer of Bath, at forty five pounds under the top figure that I had been given. Lot 435, a James I oak panelled coffer, finely carved, thirty seven inches long, was bought for fourteen pounds, and a mid-seventeenth-century oak secretaire with fall flap and drawers below, was bought privately for twelve. Lot 438, then catalogued as elm, was in fact a very fine small yew tree wood table, four feet six long by two foot nine wide on heavy turned supports, which Oliver out-bid me on by five pounds, purchasing it for sixty. The best oak joint stool, lot 450, fetched twenty six pounds, bought by Laycock of Skipton, Yorkshire, although the following two lots of stools made five pounds each only and lot 455, ten unusual eighteenth-century Chippendale chairs with cabriole legs and club feet were again bought by Oliver for ninety pounds against a commission of seventy two that had been given me by another dealer in Burford, and my original valuation of one hundred and fifty pounds. I can only think I didn't buy them due to lack of funds. Lot 473 was another set of six eighteenth-century chairs which made ninety pounds, but a pair of Chinese Chippendale girandoles were bought by Marcusson for one thousand three hundred and fifty pounds. The two late-seventeenth-century lacquer cabinets on stands, lots 497/498, are both illustrated in MacQuoid's *History of English Furniture*

(1905 edition, figures 127 and 131) and these changed hands for one hundred and twenty pounds and a hundred and seventy pounds respectively.

While of higher quality, the goods in this sale can be fairly closely compared with those sold at the Ashton Court, Bristol, sale in 1946. The only explanation that can be given for the low figures realised at Brympton was the spate of important country house sales taking place at just that time, with more goods coming on the market than the trade were able to absorb. In the cellars of Brympton I can remember an eighteenth century telescope, which Montague Marcusson out-bid me on. Years and years later, talking about the sale, I said how sorry I had been not to have obtained it, and he said, 'Oh! what a pity; it stayed in my cellar for years and years, and I eventually sold it at a loss to go to Paris.'

Of the two old act of parliament posting house clocks, lots 580/581, the first realised ten pounds and the second, with a shaped dial, was bought by me for nine, and probably compared with that purchased by me from Bletchington Park, Oxfordshire, early in 1971, for one hundred and eighty five pounds. Two small eighteenth-century inlaid tea caddies, together with a larger one forming lot 667, fetched six pounds ten, and lots 669 and 670 had to be sold together, although including a nineteenth-century straw-work caddy under glass panels, date 1803, and these were sold for ten pounds. At the end of the second day the largest and finest collection of West Country brass club heads I have ever seen were sold. These were the signs carried on poles by villagers going off to a cricket match or sporting event, each village having a distinctive design. There were no less than two hundred and eighty different types represented, more than I have ever seen together, but these were dispersed in separate lots, and I have no note of the figures realised. Some of them, I believe, later came into the hands of Gabriel Olive, my one time helper, who by then had a shop in Wincanton. The third day of the sale was devoted to pictures, but I didn't attend. Some purchases were made on my behalf on the fourth and final day, when small decorative items and metal work were sold.

All this is far removed from the uncatalogued cottage-type auction once attended by me in Yorkshire, when frequently the auctioneer had never even seen the items being offered, and which were carried out of the house in no particular order, with no lot numbers, the small objects scattered together on a tray. At such sales immediate cash payment was demanded, and the goods dumped at one's feet or into one's arms, which made life difficult if the following or subsequent lots were wanted. It must have been at one such sale that a complete seventeenth-century tapestry was sold for a few shillings. At the end of the auction the buyer, realising it was far too large, cut it up into about six rough squares, selling to her friends, to use it on their floors. A few weeks later, when the antique trade heard of this, they managed to buy all the pieces back, and reunite it as a tapestry. This event occurred sometime during the early 1930s in Warwickshire, just before I moved into the area.

It was about thirty five years later that another extraordinary sale took place in Wiltshire, not, I think, by those auctioneers with the name of Doolittle and Dally. It was held at a sizeable country house, with a view day before the auction. On the morning of the sale, the auctioneers were informed by the owners that they had overlooked the furniture stored in a barn below the house, but that it must be sold and cleared that same

day. On examination, the contents of the barn proved to be a complete house-full of furniture, and although I was not at this sale, a friend told me the trade spent the entire day racing between the house and the barn up a considerable slope as the two auction sales were run concurrently. Much the same occurred at a sale near Hidcote, where the National Trust Gardens are, when the sale had to continue for many hours after darkness with only a few candles to show the items that had been found in rooms and cupboards and initially overlooked by the auctioneers. The local trade, I am told, did very well on this occasion, but I was not there. Thinking of the prices of tea caddies at Brympton, one needs to remember that this was a period when most antique shops in their back premises had tea caddies stacked up, maybe on the side of the staircase going up into store rooms, also oak bible boxes, which no one wanted at any price whatsoever.

There are not so many items that I have sold that I really regret having parted with, but one of these went to New York. It was an album of watercolour drawings, entitled 'Dress of the Year'. In this, the artist had painted her friends, wearing what seemed to be the most fashionable dress worn in the previous years covering the last part of the eighteenth century. One of the pictures was of dresses that had been worn at the Ball at Windsor to celebrate the recovery of King George III. In it, all the girls wore in their hair paper streamers with the words God Save The King. So far as I know there is no other record of this having been the fashion at that time.

14 January 1957 saw the sale of my roundabout to the Castle Museum at York. (Figure 53) I was invited to go and see its arrival and travelled up by train, but the fog was so bad that no one could see the roundabout, and the proposed television showing (quite an early use of it) never took place. Around the same time I was selling the inn sign of the Silent Woman Inn to the Museum of Rural Life, Reading for a mere twenty five pounds. It is worth recording how plentiful those turned wood punch bowl stands, known as 'cats', were. This was a circular wooden ball with six turned legs, three pointing upwards and three down to keep the hot bowl above the table, something that has now largely vanished. Also, the fact that oak dressers, usually seventeenth or early eighteenth century, with two front legs only and none at the back, were still fairly common in the Worcester/Herefordshire area, where so many of the timber built houses were supported on stone foundation which often projected into the room, so legs directly against the wall were an impossibility.

In October 1956 I was selling a set of hand bells together with manuscript music for them to the Welsh National Museum. The rolls of Chinese wallpaper which I had bought from a dealer in Devonshire were eventually seen by Count Orcelli on one of his buying expeditions from Florence. I always found him a fascinating personality, knowing that he had stood for execution in front of an American firing squad, and also later stood waiting execution by an Italian firing squad. But somehow here he was in Burford buying antiques together with his half dozen henchmen (thugs). They were interested in the paper which I believe was priced at some four hundred and fifty pounds with a reduction to him as a fellow dealer. He haggled and haggled and eventually rose to his feet as did his henchmen, and all marched to the door. As the last was going out, he suddenly halted, turned around, increased his offer by ten pounds and said 'What about it?' I said no and they left. Rapidly, I ran to my car which was in the garden, and went off for a half hour

run, returning to find, as I knew would happen, seven men sitting in a row in the shop, waiting to continue discussions. These went on unsuccessfully until it was lunchtime, when we scattered. Then, at about two o'clock he returned, swearing lustily, and said 'I'll buy it, but you've got some upstairs, you've got some here in the shop and some outside, how do we know you are not moving it around, we want to see it all together'. So out into the garden we went, laying it out under stones down my drive. Finding that there really were the number of sheets that I had told him, he said, 'Very well, I will pay you in cash' and one of his henchmen pulled out wads of five pound notes. There was a mild wind blowing and somehow in this activity the notes were dropped and blew all over the garden. It was quite an afternoon with Italians everywhere.

1957 was our record year to date with gross profit of over ten thousand pounds. Oak dressers and dining room tables were in great demand, and eighty pounds per month were being withdrawn into my Number 3 account to build up a reserve fund of nine hundred and sixty pounds, against emergencies, but during the year no Tax Reserve Certificates were purchased. A regular monthly tour of the Hereford/Shrewsbury area now seemed a wise plan for the coming twelve months.

Until the advent of the *Antiques Trade Gazette*, the locating of auction sales provided somewhat of a problem, as I was willing and able to travel way out of my home area. Most larger and better sales were advertised weekly in *The Times*. Notices of such sales often covered two pages, and were eagerly perused. In addition to this, but at a somewhat later date, we were subscribing to at least two relatively local newspapers. In addition, there was the *Western Gazette* covering the West Country, and the *Westmorland Gazette*, and so the reading and cutting out of potential auctions became quite a major job. I was now subscribing to an Auction Press Cutting Agency, but the details of most auctions sent were insufficient to be of much help to us as knowing where to go looking for goods. We sold a hundred and twenty four pictures during the year for just short of two thousand pounds, but showing a profit of eleven hundred. A quote from my policy paper at this time; 'Fine art of all kinds and distinctive objects to be our goal and main objective when buying'. I took part in the first Antique Collectors' Market in the Corn Hall in Abingdon, this I believe was one of the first-ever provincial Antique Fairs. It was not very successful from a selling point of view, but I can remember the arrival with a van, turning down a wrong road, going under the old archway next to the Police Station and then turning round, having already lifted out one or two items. The result was that the van had risen on its springs and got stuck under the arch. It was extremely embarrassing, as this was directly outside the Police Station, and six large constables had to stand in the van before we got it through again.

I have always been one for stockpiling and a note for 1957 says 'Storage saturation point nearly reached'. Less private buying was done during the previous twelve months, but the year ended with a stock value of approximately ten and a half thousand pounds. Another note says; 'I am very anxious to free myself more from the daily routine of shop keeping and have more time to myself, but how is this best achieved?'. Edinburgh was visited twice during the year and twenty-four auction sales were viewed or attended. Another new contact made was with Mitchell Foster, a Californian dealer, a one time film star of some note of the silent film days. He became a very regular and good

customer over the next few years.

A small sale which has always haunted me, was one at Sherlock Row, Buckinghamshire, the property of the Earl of Northesk. My recollection is that I knew nothing of this sale until motoring past it one day. I stopped and found the sale was in progress. I went in, and bought some half dozen lots including four small naval scenes, signed DS, 1785. These were by Dominique Serres, an eighteenth-century maritime painter. Also among purchases was a wax portrait of a young girl in a red leather case, slightly faulty, but of superb quality, and something which is seldom to be seen now.

During 1958 over six thousand people entered the shop, sales and gross profits were almost identical to the previous year due to great activity during the September to December period. A further shop, that of Sandford Shone, had now opened opposite me in Burford High Street; he was previously in the Tewkesbury area. The size of our stock was approximately two thousand items, of which a quarter was held in reserve. Two thousand two hundred and fifty pounds were my personal withdrawings, the highest ever from the business, three hundred and forty four pounds of this going towards the purchase of Westcombe Cottage on Bircher Common in Herefordshire which we acquired as a holiday home. None of the pictures accepted by Christie's during the year in fact sold. I have a note, however, that we appeared to have had our best ever group of English customers. Fifteen dressers were sold during the year.

Herefordshire, Shropshire and Wales I considered one of the most fruitful hunting areas. My workshop helper, Jack Wilsher, was away for some months due to a hernia and on the 31st December 1957 the total priced up value of stock was nineteen thousand six hundred and fifteen pounds. I question if anyone actively engaged in the antiques trade during the 1950 - 1965 period had any idea that some fifty years later it would be looked back upon as one of the great buying periods. However, the sheer bulk of goods flowing onto the market from so many different directions undoubtedly put a strain on the trade, and not only financially. Driving home from a long day's auction viewing, I can remember twice having to stop the car within ten miles of home to have a short walk to prevent myself falling asleep. Always such days away for viewing or attending a sale had to be dovetailed into keeping a watchful eye on the day-to-day running of the shop.

The other important event at this time was our purchase of the cottage in Herefordshire. Some time before, we had decided it would be a good idea to be able to get away from the shop and its immediate surroundings when we wanted to, and I began looking for a semi derelict cottage in the greater Leominster or Ludlow area. Numerous properties were offered to us, but none seemed suitable. One morning, a letter arrived from agents in Leominster reporting a house for sale on Bircher Common, lying equi-distant between Ludlow and Leominster. As I was on my way to an auction in the area, it only seemed right to look at it. According to the instructions, it was not derelict in any way, and I had been looking forward to the job of restoration. However, when I reached the cottage, although it had no electricity or mains water supply, it had wonderful views, a small orchard and a garden of the right size. A few days later I took my wife, and her sister and mother-in-law who were here on a visit from South Africa to see it, and we all approved. The asking price was two thousand pounds. This seemed to me somewhat excessive according to the going rates of the day, so the agents told me to make an offer.

This I did, but it was promptly turned down and I wondered what to do next. The agents told me to make a larger offer. I did and it was also turned down. A few days lapsed, the telephone rang. It was the agents, and they said, 'Do you still want the property on Bircher Common'. I said that I did, and they replied that I would have to make a still higher offer. 'If I do, it will be exactly the sum you originally asked for it', I said. They acknowledged that it would be, but asked if I was still willing to buy. When I said that I was, they told me that someone else had offered the full price, but they would rather get me into the area, as then I could attend more of their auction sales. I was hooked, and now had a secure base from which to work.

Unbeknown to me, about the same time, Lawrence Darton, my one time helper then working at a school in Birmingham, decided that he wished to get away to the country at the weekends and during the holidays. His financial resources were very limited, and going to agents was told that they did not handle properties costing less than seven hundred and fifty pounds. 'But', he said, 'there must be many derelict or remote premises worth much less than that. If agents don't handle them, how will I find out where they are?'.They agreed that there were many such properties, and suggested he looked at notices in the local Post Offices, or possibly the pub, and that occasionally but rarely advertisements appeared in local papers. After looking at many properties changing hands in the one to two hundred pound range, he found a small cottage property with an orchard attached, and after buying it found that, in the orchard, there was a second cottage, though in need of considerable restoration. This all shows the vast differences in the value of money at that time.

1959 proved an outstandingly successful year for the English antique trade as a whole, and an outstandingly bad one for Warner family health. I was out of action for three months with measles, and Ruth in bed for a longer period, which did in fact stretch over into the following year, when, on 12 May, the premature birth of our final daughter, Deborah, took place after numerous complications.

Nonetheless this proved our best year ever, with sales of over twenty two thousand pounds and gross profits of over eleven thousand, and again six thousand five hundred people in the shop. With a total of six antique shops now firmly established in Burford, it had become one of the very good antique centres of the Midlands, if not the country. A total of one thousand eight hundred and forty items were purchased, of which over nine hundred and fifty sold during the year, and three hundred and fifty of these only came in stock during the last four weeks of the year. Lionel Huskinson, head of the Ruskin Art School in Oxford, Mr Williams the dealer from Edinburgh, Messrs Keyman of New York and John Graham, curator of the Colonial Williamsburg Museum were all with us in the first half of that year. But it was not until, I think, October that Choulet, the dealer from Brussels, became a regular Continental buyer. Whitehouse Antiques of Ascot, that same October, bought from us the pair of life size white marble figures of ladies holding shells that I had bought as a very early lot in the sale of Paulton, the Hans Sloane family home in Berkshire. These figures from the moment of my purchase at a relatively very low sum proved a problem. First to find a firm of monumental masons willing to transport them to Burford, as they were life size, then to find their vehicle was too large to go through my back gate, where the figures were dumped. Somehow we

managed to get them half way up the garden where they stood, but the weather got colder and frostier, and it seemed essential to move them again. The only way we were able to do this was by calling in the AA Breakdown Services with a crane, and somehow with bales of straw which had to be found, got them up into my ground floor barn showroom. These I believe are now to be seen somewhere in California, but did not go there direct from me.

1959 saw the purchase on the 1st January by Ackermann, the long-standing firm of Bond Street picture dealers, of a pair of oil paintings of horses that I had bought in North Wales following my return from the Isle of Man. Awaiting a train in Liverpool, I had a sudden hunch that I must be in Beaumaris, and, going there, found Mr Lek, the Dutch dealer had returned to his home. I found my way to him with the aid of a taxi, only to find that he had nothing of interest for me. Just as I was leaving to catch the only possible train south, he said, 'You don't buy pictures do you?' and on my replying, 'Yes, sometimes', he took me into his garage, and there I found these two important sporting paintings. March 1959 saw Phillips of Hitchin buy the smallest walnut bureau bookcase that I had ever handled, just two feet three inches wide, the mirror door unfortunately broken. In addition, he bought the smallest satin wood music Canterbury I have ever seen, a lead figure of a swan and a Charles II cane topped table that had come from the sale at The Hendre, Monmouth. I had read that during the reign of Charles II, cane furniture of every kind was made, but though I had seen cane seated back chairs, this was the only example of a table that I have ever seen or handled.

In June the Victoria and Albert Museum were buying an embroidered bedspread from me for thirty pounds, and in October Colonial Williamsburg purchased the pair of William and Mary red velvet embroidered pistol holsters that had come out of the chest at that sale at Kempsey near Tewkesbury in 1959. Gordon Small of Edinburgh, one of my suppliers, again came to Burford and I received a letter from the owner of the Smugglers Museum in Cornwall, asking if I could possibly supply him with certain items he wanted, including a well sea-washed skeleton complete with all accoutrements. This was an order I failed to fill. Towards the end of the year I again made purchases for myself, amounting to something over nine hundred pounds, including stock item 7823, that small conversation picture of father, mother and child which I had bought a year or two before for forty pounds at an auction near Bath, but had to return to stock when I sold it to an American, I think in 1989, for fifteen thousand pounds. How much taste and prices had altered over those years. Scotland was visited in November. Chester Masters, the dealer from Cirencester, Bornoff, the dealer from Westbourne Grove, London and John Fowler all became increasingly active buyers. Over two hundred and seventy chairs were sold during the year, chairs still being one of my favourite items of furniture.

The sale at Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire, home of the Blount family, should I think be noted. I can remember one of the turret rooms which had seventeenth-century oak panelling on the wall. Due to subsidence the panelling had got misplaced, and interestingly, the seventeenth-century pictures still hanging on the wall had frames which were lop-sided, and did not have right-angled corners, to fit the awkward shape of the panelling. I made a number of purchases at the sale but left before the end, when linen

was being sold. As I walked out of the tent, the porters still were carrying bundles of linen from the house. Suddenly I saw the gleam of Queen Anne yellow silk in one of the bundles, rushed back into the tent, bid for the lot, paid for it, put it in the car and motored ten miles before daring to stop to find what I had bought. Opening up the bundle, I found the best Queen Anne yellow silk bedspread I have ever had.

By now I was fully convinced of the wonderfully sound decision it had been to choose Burford as a place of residence and trade. London available, but not too near, possible car parking, and good hotels, of which the Bay Tree predominated and was popular with our American clients. The fact that we were selling to museums gives an idea of the interest and variety of goods on offer. In our Day Book I see that the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Royal Ontario Museum, Canada; Victoria and Albert Museum; Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, USA; the Castle Museum, York; Greenwich Maritime Museum; the Museum of Rural Life, Reading; Platt Hall Costume Museum, Manchester; The Afrikaner Museum in Johannesburg, the Northampton Museum and Gloucester Records Office were all among our customers.

The following items sold by us were illustrated in the American *Magazine Antiques* during 1960:

January	Caledonian Inc	Lancashire mahogany mule chest
April	Article by Mrs Little	Bunch of Grapes, inn sign, Georgian toy butchers shop
October	Russell Button, Rushmore, Kentucky	One of set of three gothic Windsor chairs Painted cupboard
December	Russell Button	Mahogany tripod table, music canterbury

A feature of export to America that perhaps needs to be mentioned is the tremendous expense involved for the buyer, not only with the purchase of goods in this country, but in their shipping and delivery to their destination. One story told me by our dealers, Rushmore of Kentucky, was that, after some years enduring the difficulty of off-loading on arrival, examination and then re-loading of goods, they had made an arrangement with the customs authorities for sealed containers of their European purchases to be inspected on their own premises. Probably having spent tens of thousands of pounds on goods, the arrival of a shipment was always looked forward to with expectation. Frequently there were delays on the American railway system before containers would arrive, and, on one such occasion, the containers did not look of the usual type. Rushmore said 'These are not for us' but the customs man said, 'Nonsense, we've got our paper work. These are filled with antiques for you. Open up, and we will get going on the job to see that everything you have is over a hundred years old and so duty free'. However, Rushmore were quite certain that these were not their containers, and when

eventually the seals were broken, the back of the container opened, and with a bump, bump, bump, out rolled quantities of motor car tyres. The wrong containers had been sent to them. Where was their shipment of antiques? It took some weeks, I believe, to get it sorted out but eventually the shipment arrived safely. These were the hazards at the recipient's end that the English dealer never knew.

The usual method of an American buyer would be, on arrival in London, to choose a shipping firm, all of whom employed freelance agents who would act as chaperones, taking the American buyers round to shops likely to have the type of goods wanted. Some of these freelance operators would work for more than one firm, and I can remember a certain occasion when in one week the same agent arrived with three American buyers, admittedly on different days, knowing almost exactly what they would be interested to see and be likely to buy. Sometimes the agents would be well treated by their American clients, staying in the same hotel, but sometimes they were treated as very much lesser beings, and life was not altogether happy for them when driving the car if they could not produce a shop with the sort of goods the buyer was looking for. However, as I became known to certain American clients, they were very happy to come on their own. I can remember one awkward day when my leading New York textile buyer, Cora Ginsburg arrived in the shop, followed some twenty minutes later by one of her prized customers, the head of the textile department of the Royal Ontario Museum. Some fifteen minutes later, a rival New York dealer also arrived. Fortunately my premises contained a cellar, a barn on two floors and a garden, and, with the greatest ingenuity, I managed over the next hour and a half to keep the three parties separate. However they all decided to dine at the same hostelry, and I believe chaos broke out during lunch.

I cannot now remember why in 1956 I invited my only male Warner cousin to accompany me on a Cooks Organised Coach Tour of Spain. Probably we were both needing a break. The tour was overland by train as far as San Sebastian where we spent the night, and I purchased a good, though large, primitive oil portrait, having to cut it from its stretcher and roll to allow it into the coach the next day. Looking ahead, I must have taken some cash funding with me, as well as a list of addresses given me at my request by Bert Wolsey, with whom I was now on easy terms. Arriving in Madrid, I told our courier that I needed an interpreter and he volunteered for the job, never however having been into an antique shop of any kind in his life. Our first call on the Linares shop certainly impressed us both. On the ground floor were postcards and souvenirs, but as one progressed upstairs through six floors, the goods on offer became better and better and more and more costly, with what appeared to be complete churches and stone arches at the top. Later that evening we reached the Rastro, a great courtyard on two levels containing nothing but antique shops. While we looked around, I still remember a lorry driving in, heavily loaded with gilded woodwork of seventeenth or eighteenth century date from a dismantled church. Numerous and varied purchases were made, including four great folio manuscript books, and church service books with leather binding over oak boards and heavy brass studding. Stacks of these were in many of the shops. The four acquired cost seven pounds ten shillings each, but the seller told me that if I would buy a hundred, he would let me have them for five pounds each. Sadly I declined this offer. My recollection is that around ten o'clock that night, with lights still shining in the

Rastro for our benefit, we returned to our hotel in two taxis. 'Whatever am I to do with all this?' I said to our courier. 'Leave it to me', he replied. Next morning, on our departure south from the city, none of my purchases were to be seen. I became worried, and asked the courier. 'Hush', he said, 'all is well; we've left our spare tyres and wheels behind', Over the following years the prices of these manuscript service books, many dating around 1700, steadily rose with purchases made by or for me from seventy five pounds to two hundred and twenty pounds, and it is now illegal for them to be exported. In Majorca, in the early 1990s, a single page was priced at eighty pounds.

The last night of our fortnight's tour of Spain was spent in Perpignan. I was still looking in antique shops, and was offered for five hundred pounds a splendid triptych type altar back. It was large, and explaining that I was unable to move it - my cash incidentally also being low - I was misunderstood, and for fifty pounds an offer was made to smuggle it over the border into France. When the night train reached Paris, every member of the tour - and there were about thirty of us - was carrying something for me. I remember the waiter at the Gare du Nord laying a place at our long breakfast table for the carved life-size wooden heads that I had acquired.

Many new antique shops were opening everywhere, among them that of my cousin and her husband Robin Eden. During the year it was from him that I bought a large gilt gesso fire screen, the original needlework panel of which was missing. This I thought highly of, but was completely unable to sell, everyone falling over its projecting feet. I banished it to my somewhat damp garage, where the Pelham Galleries from London, looking round one day, enquired about it. Wanting to cut my losses, I asked for ten pounds, and they bought it. Like me, they found that on display people invariably fell over the projecting feet. So when a fellow London dealer saw it and was interested they sold it to him at cost price. He was a little more intelligent, and went and found period red velvet, and filled up the opening. My next meeting with it was on a flood-lit stand at the antiques fair at Grosvenor House, with a large label, 'Purchased for the Nation, Victoria and Albert Museum'. None of us had had the wit to identify the coat of arms on the top of the screen, which matched that on other Gesso furniture already owned by the museum, and which had come from Stowe House, Buckinghamshire. The screen's catalogue number is W.40-1949.

October 1960 brought a new customer, Mrs Nugent-Head, then living at Bourton Hill House near Moreton-in-Marsh. I can remember that very wet day when she rang up and said, 'It is too wet to go out, bring me every piece of blue and white china you have, it doesn't matter what it is, just bring it along'. I arrived to find two other Cotswold dealers had had the same request, she suddenly deciding to fill in her time by decorating a room with blue and white china arranged in chevrons and other shapes on the wall. She was also playing the same game with the higher levels of the London picture trade, with 'Send me down your twelve best pictures'. In most cases I think she was selective with the pictures, but bought all the china I had taken. I can remember one of her rooms carefully draped like the interior of a tent with heavy turned wood mortar stands in the corners holding flowers. Often her requests would be 'Yes, bring china over [or some such thing], but get here between eleven fifteen and eleven twenty, my husband is going out. He says I am buying too much, we can get it in before he comes back from his morning walk'. I

would find him walking down the road, so, driving rather slowly until he turned the corner, I would then turn into the gates to off-load. Mr. Nugent-Head cannot have had a very happy life with his American wife, and it was not so very long before the inevitable auction sale took place, certain items again coming back to me.

It was about this time that for the first time I met and got to know C D (Bruce) Chatwin, who from now on became a very regular customer. He was furnishing his house near Wotton-under-Edge, and many items came from me. At that time he was unknown as a writer, but was working for Sotheby's in their antiquities department, doing much Continental travel on their behalf. It was after a day in London that by chance I met him on the train back to Charlbury, the nearest station to Burford, ten miles away, and I think it must have been only as I reached Oxford that he began telling me, in that small rail compartment which held eight people, of his latest find. Walking back across Shepherds Market in London, he was called over by the stall holder to a stall selling jewellery and silver ware. The owner said, 'I don't know what this is, any interest to you?', and handed over a small silver mounted, what proved to be rock crystal phial, with an object inside. At that time probably Chatwin will have been only one of the half dozen people in the world who would have immediately recognised what it was. It was around the year 450 that Charlemagne, the greatest crowned head in Europe, was visited by an itinerant dealer and offered the so-called Crown of Thorns. This he bought for an immense sum and, partly to show off, took individual thorns from it and mounted them into rock crystal phials, which he sent to all the leading rulers of the civilised world. From there, they found their way in to the treasuries of cathedrals including St Mark's, Venice. What Chatwin had been offered was one of these thorns in a rock crystal phial, but all the elaborate silver work which once must have surrounded it had been removed and destroyed. By the time he reached this part of the story, everyone in the railway carriage was sitting on their seats with interest and excitement and I only just remembered to jump from the train before it moved on from my local station. What a wonderful story-teller Bruce Chatwin was.

Many wonderful things were acquired by me during this period, for what now seem ridiculously low prices. Sadly, although the prices were low, profits were equally so, and goods were none too easy to sell. It was in summer of 1960 that I sold to the National Portrait Gallery the terracotta bust of George I which had come from the stable yard at Hinton St George, Crewkerne, in Somerset. One of the very saleable items at this period, and still in tremendously ready supply, were cut glass celery glasses which were usually bought for wedding presents as vases. In September 1960, some fifty four items were purchased at a sale at Blacksey Hall in Norfolk. They included a mahogany taper leg square piano costing six pounds. A few days later, I attended an auction sale at Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Park, where I purchased a very large mahogany two pillar table for seventy pounds, and an oak refectory table for thirty five pounds only. Upstairs in that house I can remember in one of the bedrooms, the tiled fireplace surround included a seventeenth century pill slab. I wonder where that is now? It was not until the 8th October of the year that I set off on a North Country buying trip. I was away for nearly three weeks and bought just over six hundred items. Admittedly most of them were smalls, rather than furniture, due I imagine to the fact that that was what I

found was selling best at that time. This tour was in part a survey of the state of the antique trade and my future routings.

Among dealers visited was Robert Thomson, a dealer in Bradford, perhaps one of the most honest dealers I have ever known, whose printed labels read 'Robert Thomson, Antiques and Semi-Antiques'. Eight tea caddies from another source, cost eight pounds ten the lot, this including one Chippendale style example and one made of yew tree wood. A fortnight later at an auction sale at Bourton-on-the-Water, I bid for and bought a tray of china for seven pounds including three blue and white octagonal saucers all with the Chelsea Blue Anchor mark. While realising what these were, I didn't know of their extraordinary rarity, and somewhat against my judgement was talked into selling two of them a few days later, for a very small profit. When at last I sold the remaining saucer, having one day found someone using it as an ashtray, it fetched no less than one thousand pounds. At this time only some half dozen examples of blue and white Chelsea were known, but soon after my acquisition a part tea set of it turned up in the Kings Road, Chelsea, but this I never saw.

1961 saw me selling to the Clock House at Ascot, a large carved wood so-called gaper head, the Dutch chemist shop sign of a wooden head of a man with his tongue outstretched on which would rest a pill. The example sold had come from an antiques fair in The Hague in Holland. I was also selling ivory teething sticks, something that no one seems to know about. As christening presents children were sometimes given a small ivory object on which they might bite, in the form of the trade it was hoped they would enter. I remember one I had in the form of a cricket bat, another one in the shape of a saw, whose parent I think, must have been a carpenter. Keil of Broadway, Christopher Gibbs, John Judkin, Mr Bingham of Shreeve, Crump and Lowe of Boston, USA were all customers, and I see that I sold Mrs Graham Greene yet another dolls' house for ninety pounds. I also sold five hundred pounds' worth of goods to Dirven who had begun coming over from Holland buying in this country. Morris Goldstone, the oak dealer in Bakewell in Derbyshire, was another of our regular customers from whom I was sometime able to buy.

Perhaps it is also worth mentioning Vyse Millard of Amersham, who seemed to attend all country sales of note together with the 'circus ring' of London dealers. He appeared to suffer from mild deafness, and it is interesting how often in an auction, when wanting more time to examine an object being held up, his deafness seemed to get very much worse, and the auctioneer would pause and explain it clearly while Vyse had that extra careful look.

Certainly worthy of remark were my curious meetings with James Currier, who, with his wife and daughter, would come into the shop again and again looking and listing items of furniture but never buying. Then, one afternoon, he turned up and said 'We will buy virtually everything you listed for us on our last visit, but can you get it over to Stanton near Broadway tomorrow morning'. I knew our carriers were already busy, so I said 'No'. 'Very well' he replied, 'I will send a van for it'. At nine o'clock the next morning a butcher's refrigeration van turned up with nothing in it, and no possible fixings inside, which we filled with furniture. Certain items needed repair and one of the conditions of sale was that at my leisure later I would go over and do the repairs on his

premises. I do recollect having considerable difficulty in getting payment from him but it eventually came. Why the furniture had got to be got to the Manor House at Stanton, which he had rented, on that very day, we have never been sure. The daughter was perhaps awaiting a major operation in Oxford, but wanting to live in an English Manor House with old furniture around her for a short while. I was by no means the only Cotswold dealer who was supplying things to him, and some were less fortunate over payment. Whether it was part of a story, we don't know, but I can recollect that when I went to do the necessary repairs I found the unoccupied Manor House, Stanton, one of the most uncomfortable houses I have ever been in.

20th July 1967 saw the auction sale of 'surplus items' at Melbury House, Dorset, a sale organised by a local Wiltshire firm. It will always stand out in my mind for three reasons. The first was the introduction of my new helper Philip Astley-Jones to a large country house auction. The second, our sight of Stonehenge under full moonlight - I believe around midnight - when we returned with a laden car after a very long auction, delays in collecting our smaller purchases and a stop for food. Much was bought at this sale, the larger items having to be collected by local carriers. These included a pair of oak Gothic benches that I believe had almost certainly come from Abbotsbury, which belonged to the Fox-Strangway Family, who also owned Holland House, London, from where certain items in this dispersal had come. However, the pile of carved oak fragments that I purchased belonged to Melbury House itself, part of an over-mantel, seen by Horace Walpole nearly two hundred years earlier and stated by him to have been the work of Grinling Gibbons.

Following my view of this auction, and my talk with my Lloyds Bank manager, he agreed to double my existing overdraft to enable me to try to purchase lot 4 in this sale. This was a full set of Mortlake Tapestries of the seasons, without their borders, that hung high up in what at one time was a billiard room. Although tapestries were still unpopular, I considered the figure of two to three thousand pounds expected by the auctioneers to be too low, and decided if necessary to bid up to a figure nearer ten thousand. Apart from the London textile trade, I believe I was the only bidder, but I was outbid. Fashion, and its effect on prices, is a surprising thing. When this set of tapestries, cleaned and repaired, appeared in a London Sotheby's sale in February 1996 - approximately thirty years later - they fetched a total of some one hundred and fifty five thousand five hundred pounds plus ten per cent. It is worth noting that I had purchased three similar panels at an auction at Roehampton on 23rd October 1939 for just under fifty pounds, selling them four months later for a mere nine pounds profit, as war conditions began to look more difficult.