

The Antiques Road Show



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Can there be a more popular television show than the BBC's *The Antiques Roadshow*? Probably not. How many shows last forty years - as this show has? The Americans have made a namesake spin off and the English have several spinoffs, some under other names. In Australia the shows can be seen on three different channels simultaneously. When it is filmed locally the crowds frequently seem to be well into the thousands - and this is often at remote English countryside locales.

The show began with a pilot episode in 1977. Since then the show has seen several presenters. There are "specials" that are set overseas or have a theme, focusing on the East Enders, American antiques, The British Raj, the ceramics of Clarice Cliff or the 1940s, but the usual program setting can be in a town hall or town square, church ground, castle, mansion or manor.

The presenter (usually Fiona Bruce) will frequently begin the show with a brief narrative explaining the choice of the locale and sometimes give a tour of the site before going into individual objects. Experts in their field not only evaluate the object's age, nationality and value, they frequently can identify the origin, individual creator and the way it was made. The uniqueness of the object, its aesthetic qualities, personal non-financial value to the owner and history are

usually included. Often they or the owners have extraordinary stories connected to the assessed objects.



Antiques road show comes to Chester. Both images courtesy Wikipedia Commons

The expert's topics range from Japanese porcelain to coins, from Regency furniture to art nouveau pottery, from Edwardian toys to 1960s rock memorabilia Victorian watercolours, Regency jewellery and military history.

As expected furniture, clocks, coins, bottles, vases, crockery, medals, pottery and paintings are very common, but their history and how they were made becomes much more varied, detailed and interesting than expected. We also get segments where we have a chance to spot a fake among a choice of three or four and are shown how they are detected. The frequent delight in seeing owner's find out that believed trash is treasure comes as another bonus.



Fiona Bruce

Every show has something delightfully unexpected. These include:

Full suits of samurai armour

life size toy giraffes

a perfectly preserved eighteenth century ball gown dress

a jade Maori pendant, several hundred years old dug up in an English garden

psychedelic 1967 concert posters

1920s sequined dresses

an extraordinarily detailed model ship carved by a French prisoner during the Napoleonic wars

Asiatic decorative onyx carvings

Victorian era industrial machinery

old movie posters

the script, posters and production drawings for a 1930s Hollywood musical, signed by the famous cast

an apothecary's cabinet replete with medicines, instructions and labelled bottles

the comfort parcels sent to soldiers in the trenches in WW1,

Victorian children's games

The iron collars for Lord Byron's dogs

rare paintings of the yacht races off the Isle of Wight

A solid silver 1937 yacht model

Correspondence from Edward VIII about his year as king

1930s shawls and women's hats

Art deco statuettes of Hollywood actresses

1920s radios,

Rolling Stones memorabilia

An 1860s Union brigadier's great coat in fine condition, purchased off a rack at an op shop

Diamond bracelets also in fine condition purchased at an op shop, where they were believed to be paste and sold that way

Rita Hayworth's 1940s 54 carat bracelet, currently valued at €45,000 but likely to be revalued at €85,000 upon provenance of her connection

An immaculately and colourfully restored 1938 milk van which was used to drive the bride and groom up the isle

A decorated with carvings Tudor walnut table, twice the length of an adult. It was used in the foyer of a hotel for generations, up to its Antique Roadshow evaluation

The Captain's table meant for the *Titanic*. Shipping it was hit by delays and they missed the launch

A perfectly preserved eighteenth century doll's house, three stories high with figurines, furniture, wallpaper, chimneys and everything else a house of that time would have. The whole thing was delicately coloured and without obvious fading

Two lime green art nouveau vases from 1900, with colourful floral impasto. They cost as much to safely transport as to buy. An internet sale, the purchaser confused metric and imperial measurements. Thinking they were only 18 cms high, they were 18 inches high and film as taller than even that

The program for the legendary 1963 Queen's Benefit signed by all four Beatles.

A coastal watercolour by Lord Montbatten.

A Nato submarine commander's 1977 rolex watch, valued at €40,000.

A Nato parachutist's flying boots, valued at €20.

Picasso drawings found in a box of stationary in Germany.

A diary of a Napoleonic era naval officer. He illustrated it with drawings and watercolours.



Where is this furniture from? Antiques Road Show will find someone who knows!



A document in needlework



A 1930 tea set by Clarice Cliff (1899-1972) In 2009 The Antiques Roadshow had much to do with publicising her work. Similar ceramics often appear on the show.



Although French made and from late in the Napoleonic era, the military figure on this mantelpiece clock is of George Washington, much admired in France at that time. Such quirky facts often emerge in the show.

Here we see history in fragments, but mosaics are made of fragments and as in many mosaics, the immense variety within English history becomes apparent through these objects. If we watch enough episodes we get a mosaic of English history, some of it about royalty, celebrities and wars, but mercifully that is a minority. What we get is how they traded, administered, educated, doctored, healed, worshiped, organised, travelled, dressed, entertained and built. What *The Antiques Roadshow* ultimately shows us is the history of an empire and the history of a people, not only showing us the extraordinary, the aristocratic and the bizarre, but what can be remarkable and revealing in what where once the everyday objects from Britain and its empire.

More than history and art can be learned from the show. The unfailing good manners, tact and warmth of both presenters and contributors is in itself remarkable. While not having seen every episode only once has a contributor given a surly response and the one evaluator who spoke in a vexed tone was looking at a beautiful piece of art deco pottery, broken on inspection.

And the most valued object? The 1911 Fifa (football association) cup. Estimated to be worth a million pounds.

What will they come up with next?

Well actually being past its fortieth year, people are bringing antiques that were made after the show began!

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Written without prejudice