

## 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, the ceramics of Clarice Cliff or the 1940s holocaust, but the usual program setting can be in a town hall or town square, church ground, castle, mansion or manor.

The presenter 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. Often they or the owners have extraordinary stories connected to the assessed objects.



### *The Antiques road show comes to Chester*

The expert's topics range from Japanese porcelain to coins, from Regency furniture to art nouveau pottery, from Edwardian toys to 1960s rock memorabilia

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.

Every show has something delightfully unexpected. Full suits of samurai armour, life size toy giraffes, a perfectly preserved eighteenth century dress, jade Maori pendants, 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, 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 Wright, correspondence from Edward VIII, 1930s shawls and women's hats, art deco statuettes of Hollywood actresses, 1920s radios, Rolling Stones memorabilia....



*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, 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.

What will they come up with next?

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

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*Written without prejudice*