

## THE REPROBATE IN THE ANTIQUE TRADE

‘Zac my young friend look over there, I have an idea. See the ‘Silver Cross’ pram, I am going to lend this to you if needed and loan you some cash from my wallet. It is yours but in return you will enter the Antiques’ trade, as a ‘knocker boy’. You can buy anything antique but always sell everything you buy to me. I repeat everything to me alone. Tell me the price paid, that trust is your integrity and if you choose to do a ‘disappearing act’ with the pram and the money so be it. That’s your choice; if you choose to do the latter I will put you on my blacklist.’

Will I steal her pram and money? That’s a firm no, but I will gain knowledge and a small payment. In further conversation I disclosed to her (Mrs. W.) some of my past, time spent in Sweden, knocking on householders doors, trying to sell my pictures. Suddenly I had all her attention, I failed to disclose about my ‘run-in’ with the Swedish police. She did not quiz me further about my past.

I nodded my compliance, stating that theft of any kind was not in my nature; with this she stopped me from talking further.

We shook hands on the outcome of the deal, with little knowledge and very little money, that afternoon, I found myself knocking on stranger’s doors, trying to buy antiques from them in return for a cash profit.

By the time forty minutes had passed I had filled the pram, the cash outlay amounting to three quarters of my total money, leaving me with just a couple of pounds. In earnest I hurried through the back- streets, to show my wares to Mrs. W. who was about to close the yard. I felt excited but nervous about my purchases, seeing me she started rubbing her hands together in gleeful expectation. She welcomed me back and whispered to me.

‘Come into the back room, in case anyone sees us, away from prying eyes.’ I later found out any prized items of interest would be sold on to dealers from London, probably ending up in Bermondsey market on a Friday morning.

‘Show me my boy; the load looks good, nice old copper kettles. Zac you have done yourself proud, before we go any further you must tell me how much this lot cost you.’ She stared at me, her eyes wide reading my mind; I took the change from my pocket and counted it out.

‘Now Zac, I don’t ever want you to hold out on me about the cost, the price you paid, as integrity and honesty are the most fundamental and precious thing we have to offer each other. Now let’s see what we have here, copper kettles, one electric kettle with a wooden handle, Zac no electric items I will put this in for scrap.’ She berated me, wagging her finger.

‘A pair of candle sticks, these are ‘Solid Silver’, you can see the hallmark showing through, look at the style and detail to the base, they are of the Georgian period circa 1800. Yes, another pair of candlesticks, did these come from the same residence?’

I nodded. ‘Right now tell me which of the pair which is the most stylish.’

She stood the pair of candlesticks together and proceeded to point out that the Rocco style were the best and also two inches higher, the most sought after in height being eleven inches and taller. They had a proud air about them, she placed the smaller pair alongside, even I could see what she meant, a definite difference, I readily understood what she implied.

They were hall-marked silver, made in Birmingham in the Georgian period. To be able to tell this there was the lions head alongside the makers mark and the impressed anchor. She held one out pointing to the height, fourteen inches tall, slightly

worn and rubbed; you could see the silver was getting thin at their rims.

‘One other fact, see the small pair of a later date? I know this as they are weighted.’ She peeled back the green felt-covered cardboard base underneath. Weighting was common then, nothing untoward on the production. The hollowed area was filled with fine white silver sand, often use in the making of cast metal items. Never the less they are a fine pair of candlesticks. Zac remember what I said about weighted silver and solid silver candlesticks, when you send badly damaged items to scrap, the buyer will take into account any weighted items accordingly; of course they only pay for the sterling silver metal. I have seen the private buyers on view day at an Auction commonly thinking the heavier pair are the more valuable, also try and buy this type again, look here these are a pair of cast sticks much more desirable, look at the fine detail to the garland of flowers here and there, superb, very nice.

Now we are in a form of business together, from now on we will have a particular way of sorting the price out, beneficial to one another.’

A Mahogany Georgian bow-front chest was used to secrete away stock in the drawers. She started to explain the good and bad, regarding the chest of drawers, more than twenty were stacked in rows on top of each other, ranging from huge to standard 40-inch, down to 31-inches wide, the larger revealing a ‘secretaire’ drawer, often with a secret compartment, in the guise of an elongated log across the full width of the chest. She opened the centre- drawer which had a discreet steel spring-driven mechanism that released the shallow top-drawer below. Mrs. W. also indicated a row of three drawers, over 4 drawers’ deep, a huge piece of late Victorian furniture, veneered in

rosewood on an inferior carcass, standing to the floor, without legs.

She informed me that, owing to the large size these were not an easy seller.

‘You see Zac this will more than likely end up in a city, where there is an abundance of large properties, by the way the import of Rosewood from South America it is prized for its colour and patina. See here Zac, the light streaks here have a certain hue that only Rosewood faded over the years can achieve. Animal glue was common throughout the Georgian period, to the Victorian and the Edwardian period. This glue was used because it was both very strong and if a mistake was made, they could soften the glue with hot water to remove it without difficulty; also the veneer was unlikely to lift. Over years the animal glue is much prized for its versatility and they say it strengthens with age.

Did you know that Thomas Chippendale would relieve his bladder by peeing into the cast-iron glue pot that held scotch glue or fish glue, depending on which surface he was gluing, aiding its strength, so it was rumoured. Zac don’t look at me that way, I wasn’t around at that time, I am not 200 hundred years old you know?’

Without prompting, she informed me of the most sought-after of the chests, the easier sellers the rare and the mundane. Frequently Then she hinted telling that me I should be a ‘knocker-boy, in her words. Frequently telling me she was cash-but stock-poor.

‘Zac, be on your way soon and for goodness sake watch the front wheel of the pram, be careful as we can’t sell it if it falls to pieces can we,’ she gave another toothy smile and a wink .

These were my best buys, the rest a little mundane, only to be expected as it was my first foray into the world of antiques, buying 'on the knocker', without any formal training.

She was pleased with my purchases, I said that I had followed her advice and grouped the articles, offering a price for the job lot.

'You have done well my boy, now down to the matter in hand. First a business statement, Zac, we are friends but remember there is no sentiment in business; you may catch me out when talking money. I look above your eyebrows, avoiding eye contact, so sentiment never enters into the equation. I will offer you a good honest price for all the goods in the baby carriage right here and now but I have to remind you once again, friendship apart, we are talking money and I will make a profit as I told you. If for example I had bought something from you, then in your presence if I sell at a profit you must never take umbrage as this is the world dealers live in. In fact I often say to dealers I will leave a profit in it for them and have no regrets if they sell it on making a profit again, no room for sentiment, OK!

Two people are trying to find a level, which suits both parties, one is an expert and the other person has a hunch but no sense of value of what they have to sell. So the expert has the upper hand in three ways, rarity, popularity, lastly a buyer in mind. Remember even the shrewdest dealer makes mistakes. Their time and finances are tied up in any one particular deal, so this has to be kept in mind. One thing to mention, always make it clear who you are doing business with, never allow a 'third-party' to enter into the negotiations.' 'Mrs. W. why not' I asked.

She looked annoyed, not with me but on account of what happened to her in the past.

‘Two against one isn’t fair; they will then confer after you have told them your price, even asking what you paid in the first place. Some will have the audacity of mind to openly comment:

‘What you have paid must leave room for me to make a profit. I am sick and tired of this apparent ‘Nouveau’ way of haggling; remember your knowledge and your business-expenses have to be paid for, you have to put food on the table.

Zac if ever you find yourself in that situation, do yourself a favour and walk away.’

‘Mrs W, can we go back a bit.’

‘Of course we can Zac, what’s on your mind? When you’re selling to customers offer them information, on say the age etc.’

‘Yes! I would be delighted to do just that, providing they weren’t asking me questions in order to talk my asking-price down.’

‘Some do that; they want to know ‘chapter and verse’, seeking to gain advantage. Afterwards they just walk away, announcing that they can buy at Auction. Off you go then I say, I hope you spend lots of money buying at the saleroom, as I can enter goods for sale there. Zac between the two of us, it goes against the grain, but I have done well in the past where the same customer will pay more at Auction for my goods instead of buying them cheaper in my shop.’