

Antiques have had their day

Article and illustration by Bill Naylor



Age increases value. That's why I rarely venture outdoors for fear of being held to ransom. But antiques are hard to define. Artwork and artefacts increase in value as they age, but when mass-produced are rarely valuable unless they're defective. Then there are

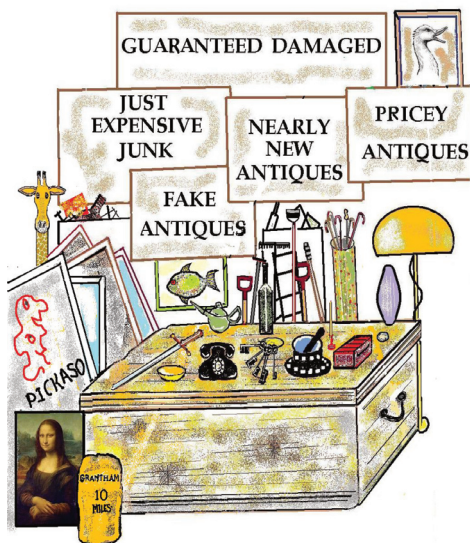
those antiques which despite being old or ancient appear to have been made by someone on a Friday afternoon who was keen to get home.

There are also countless forgeries and fakes (galleries are filled with them), some even created by famous artists and craftsmen, usually when they were penniless, but they're often substandard. Stradivarius, for instance, never sold a single one of his paintings. Memorabilia from the Titanic always attract buyers. Parts of the iceberg not so much.

The idea that all antiques have been produced by craftsmen is not always true. Although the Romans loved statues, a lot of them were mass-produced. They didn't wheel barrow around a tonne of marble every time a statue was commissioned, they'd often just replace the head. That's the reason most statues in Rome resemble Russell Crowe.

Love 'em or hate them, TV programmes about antiques and memorabilia are very popular. *Antiques Roadshow*, almost an antique itself, has been on the air since 1979 and spawned similar shows like *The Repair Shop* and *Flog It*. Catering very much to the collecting fever, and the outside chance the object gathering dust in the loft might fund a holiday or more.

It was this motivation that drove Maurice, a human magpie I knew, who had been an obsessive collector since he was knee high. Maurice collected car numbers, match box labels, and while it was legal, birds' eggs. He had stacks of shoeboxes containing birds' eggs, all of little value or interest as they all originated



from his uncle's pigeon loft. He regularly used a metal detector but the only ancient item he'd unearthed was a broken metal detector, A.D. But Maurice was convinced one day he'd strike gold, and was fired up when he learned the programme *Cash in the Attic* was visiting town. Maurice was convinced an ancient unidentified item in his loft was quirky enough to spark a bidding war among collectors and literally produce cash from the attic. On the day of filming Maurice was being interviewed about the mysterious object he'd wheeled into the sales room on a trolley.

"It was underneath all the stuff in the loft, piled up to the roof, my dad had collected over the years. He was worse than me for collecting. And because this was at the bottom, I reckon it's got vintage. My dad, like me, was brought up in that house and his dad before him. The house is over 100 years old; that's almost a century. By my reckoning, this Objay dart could have been in the loft before the house was ever built."

The TV expert smiled and sighed. "I very much doubt that, Maurice. You see, it's a water tank."