



BRIC-A-BRAC: 'Antique', 'vintage', 'pre-loved' – whatever you want to call it, the demand for it is huge, as is my demand for TV programmes about all of it

'Distressed' furniture? The only thing I want battered is a piece of cod

In the long course of lockdown I have developed an unhealthy obsession with antiques, salvage, recycling, repurposing and restoration programmes.

I find myself compulsively scouring the television schedules daily, circling my 'must sees' with a black biro and organising my life around them. Since there are four or five scattered throughout the day, I don't get much else done. This is neither healthy nor wise. Worse still, I have abandoned the intellectual high ground of *Only Connect* and *University Challenge* in favour of a small pugnaeous Welsh antiques dealer and his lugubrious assistant, who trawl the country in a white van buying old stuff and broken things. I may well need addiction counselling.

By dint of being born last of the family, I accidentally fell heir to three generations of silver, glass and china, most of which had survived unscathed because it was considered too good to use – brought out only for wakes, weddings or an occasional wash or polish, then restored to the china cabinet, purely for show. None of it being dishwasher safe, it doesn't get much of an outing under my guardianship either.

One generation's gem is the next generation's junk, as fashion fluctuates until it comes full circle, rediscovered by a new generation. You realise that you're old when you see your grandchildren decorate their rooms in the style of wallpaper you may have had in your teenage bedroom.

The 60s, 70s, even the 80s are all considered 'retro' now and my contemporaries are shouting at the television screen, "We had one of those!" But what use are napkin rings and linen tablecloths in a society that has abolished formal dining in favour of

Anita
ROBINSON



tucking a sheet of kitchen roll in at the neck to eat pizza or Kentucky Fried Chicken out of a box in front of the telly? Delicate bone china, brittle as biscuits, butter knives, pickle forks and grapefruit spoons – no occasion sufficiently grand to use.

I remember when 'secondhand' furniture (unless inherited) was a term of disdain. Now, 'vintage' and 'pre-loved' are the whole go and dealers can barely cope with demand for it. There's a fashion now in furniture for the 'distressed' look – irregularities in the finish, artificially aged or deliberately left imperfect, lest the patina of years be lost. With respect, the only thing I want battered

is a piece of cod.

I've come to the conclusion that antiques dealers are all pessimists. "Brown furniture? Ye couldn't shift it. No call for it these days," delivered with a lugubrious air. Nothing pleases me more than a thorough hoke round among old stuff. I love the way the television antiques experts negotiate their way downwards with dealers until they get the item for half nothing. It has never worked for me. Due to being brought up too much of a 'laydee', I shrink from the art of bartering.

Apparently, the technique for success for the ordinary punter is to look unenthusiastic about the item one's interested in, implying you'd be doing the dealer a favour by taking it off his hands.

The seasoned bargainer spotting a likely item, feigns indifference, walks all round it, cursorily registering its stability, condition, noting flaws and cracks; then frowns, sucks his teeth and says (in a tone that implies the dealer should be grateful to get rid of it) "What're ye lookin' fer fur that thing?" The dealer quotes a figure. It is received with a sharp intake of breath, a shake of the head. The bargainer shrugs and wanders away to examine other stock. End of Act One.

Both know he'll be back. A deal will be struck to their mutual satisfaction.

I, on the other hand, spot something I love, go into noisy raptures and am charged full price. My sole foray into negotiation was an ignominious one. "How much?" I ask. He names a price. "You're not going to charge me that are you?" I coax with a smile. He remains impassively silent. My cue to suggest a modest reduction. "No," he says. Instant mortified collapse of stout party. I cough up full whack leave. It's never like this on the *Antiques Road Trip*...

*You realise that you're
old when you see your
grandchildren decorate their
rooms in the style of wallpaper
you may have had in your
teenage bedroom*

ON THIS DAY

AUGUST 31 1921

City of 'Civil War'

FIVE men and a little girl of five were killed in Belfast yesterday. Orange mobs, acting in close cooperation with well-armed and carefully-hidden snipers, kept whole districts in a state of terror until Curfew hour. Crowds of foolish people gathered at street-corners and ran the risk of meeting with flying bullets.

Fierce fighting was resumed in the familiar battle-grounds of York Street, North Queen Street and New Lodge Road and deadly conflicts were waged by armed men over a wide area. Police and military described the fighting as the worst ever experienced in Belfast.

Since Monday the district covering two square miles has been given over to the condition of affairs that can only be described as civil war. The streets are swept at regular intervals by rifle and revolver bullets while business has been carried on under the most dangerous circumstances.

Six persons were shot dead and upwards of 30 wounded. The dead are: William Kennedy (36), Grove Street; Stephen Cash (77), Sussex Street; Annie Watson (aged five), North Queen Street; William Smith, Maria Street; Harry Bowers, Cambridge Street and Thomas Mullan (20), 64 North Queen Street.

In addition, an Orange mob attacked the Catholic homes. They poured petrol on the doors. Passengers in trams were in danger from the bullets which passed across the Antrim Road.

So daring did the snipers become that they often stepped into the roadway and fired in the direction of other snipers. A tramcar was passing up the Antrim Road when a bullet lodged in a passenger's knee.

An armoured car and police in Crossley tenders passed up and down the road but... the firing was kept up with unabated vigour. Schools were closed. Around five o'clock much uneasiness was caused by the appearance of rough-looking men in the Orange quarters at the corners of the streets abutting on the Catholic districts... Suddenly they converged on North Queen Street and began firing into this thoroughfare.

All points of vantage were occupied by the gunmen of each side, street corners, housetops and windows being used by the snipers who kept up a deadly barrage. The worst centre of the fighting was that in New Lodge Road and adjoining streets.

(This graphic description of the virtual 'civil war' which gripped north Belfast was written by RP Hayes, The Irish News' Chief Reporter. Loyalists were angry at the all-Ireland truce which had resulted in the Specials' suspension and legitimised the IRA which defended the Catholic enclaves. With the new state under a cloud, the 'agony of Belfast' – to quote the newsreels – would continue for another year.)

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com