In Quest of the Antique: The Bazaar, Exchange and Mart and the Democratization of Collecting, 1926–42

Abstract
The popularization of antique collecting is typically located in the second half of the twentieth century, with the rise of ‘retrochic’ and the emergence of new markets and online trading websites for anonymously exchanging second-hand goods. Close study of the printed literature connected with the inter-war second-hand trade, however, challenges conventional chronologies in the history of consumer culture, and can provide a new perspective on the role of collecting in British social and cultural life. This article examines the period, after the late 1920s, during which The Bazaar, Exchange and Mart reinvented itself as a forum for antique and decorative art enthusiasts. It argues that, in speaking to and publishing contributions from so-called ‘small collectors’, this ‘Popular Weekly for Collectors and Connoisseurs’ helped shape a modern and democratic culture of art appreciation in which ordinary people were actively invited to participate. The private correspondence archive of a Buckinghamshire subscriber who used the Exchange and Mart to sell his collection of ‘Egyptian, Greek, and Roman Antiquities’ to readers across the country during the 1930s reveals an intimate portrait of the desires, fantasies, and pleasures associated with the popular experience of collecting in pre-war Britain.

One of the most ubiquitous, and yet little studied, objects in the homes of collectors during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was The Bazaar, Exchange and Mart. Established in 1868, this inexpensive household newspaper, with its infamous classified advertising

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supplement, helped anonymous individuals to buy and sell everything ‘from an Autograph to an Orchid, a Toy to a Typewriter, a Mail Cart to a Motor Car’. Now a website primarily for the sale of second-hand cars, before the Second World War the twice-weekly Exchange and Mart was ‘an unequalled journal for the Amateur and Collector’. Its innovative function as an exchange allowing anonymous readers to ‘barter’ their unwanted goods and services without cash or credit, along with its encyclopaedic range of articles, saw the hybrid ‘magazine-paper’ enter the popular consciousness and shape perceptions of collectors and their obsessions in modern British society. During the inter-war period, in the words of George Orwell, the defining feature of this Victorian hobbyist’s periodical was one that had also captured the market for middlebrow novels, ‘detective stories’, and ‘collections of curiosities’; that is, ‘the charm of useless knowledge’. This audience, he noted in 1940, was composed of a very particular sort of particular person: those who took ‘a pleasure in dates, lists, catalogues, concrete details, descriptions of processes, junk-shop windows and back numbers of the Exchange and Mart’.

This article focuses on the period, after the summer of 1926, in which the periodical’s Saturday issue (known simply as the Bazaar) became a dedicated art and curio ‘Collector’s Issue’, recovering its central role in the popularization of antiques. It examines the new, egalitarian and participatory, collecting identities which Bazaar journalists and contributors helped foster, and then explores the collecting habits of a group of the periodical’s subscribers in the 1930s through a study of the private correspondence archive of an Exchange and Mart seller, revealing new facets of the relationship between collecting, mass culture, and democratization in modern Britain.

The Exchange and Mart did not introduce the concept of an ‘exchange and mart’ to the Victorian market. The periodical emerged directly out of an exchange column for women in Edward William Cox’s society journal Queen. The idea was said to have been Cox’s wife’s: a disabled entomologist who spent much of her time indoors, she published a notice in the magazine asking if readers would be willing to swap their duplicates with her.

Following the success of the column, in May 1868

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1 ‘Great Bargains in Everything Useful’, Saturday Review, 27 April 1901, 547.
3 During the 1920s and 1930s, the Saturday special feature issues were simply entitled The Bazaar, while the Thursday issue retained the title The Exchange and Mart; after 1926, both titles remained under the umbrella of ‘The Bazaar, Exchange and Mart, Ltd.’. In fact, throughout the period under discussion both readers and the periodical’s correspondents referred to the magazine and advertising supplement collectively using a variety of titles, including ‘The Bazaar and Mart’, and I have retained their non-specificity here.
Cox established *The Exchange and Mart* as a separate periodical to help ‘collectors’, using pseudonyms, trade collectables and possessions including natural history specimens, autographs, photographs, jewellery, china, clothing, and even pets from the comfort of their own homes. Aimed squarely at middle- and lower-middle-class readers, the new paper was priced at twopence and issued two or three times a week.⁵ Its anonymous ‘deposit system’ claimed to have removed the risks involved in independent trading and thereby revolutionized the market for second-hand goods, as purchases would be held at the *Exchange and Mart* offices until payment was received, rather than sent directly to the seller. Awed late-Victorian observers compared the magazine to a paper department store, so numerous were the objects private advertisers offered for sale or exchange. For Henry Wellcome and his professional collecting agents, as one historian of the Wellcome Collection of medical artefacts has noted, *the Exchange and Mart* was ‘as much a part of “the field” as were the jungles of Borneo or the African interior’.⁶

At the same time, the *Exchange and Mart* quickly became synonymous with the disposal or acquisition of stolen, adulterated, or faked goods. Readers of any daily newspaper during the early-twentieth century would have found the details of an array of fraudulent transactions, outright deceptions, and elaborate confidence tricks occurring up and down the country and at virtually all levels of society via the advertising supplement. Although a ‘Black List’ of untrustworthy readers was included in most issues, the deposit system could easily be circumvented by creative readers.⁷ Unrecorded in published sources are the transactions in which purchasers had not been swindled outright, but rather were unsatisfied with what they had ordered or exchanged, at which point staff sought to arbitrate disputes themselves.⁸ On the whole, however, in this ‘culture of duplicity’ *caveat emptor* applied: the paper could not be held liable for the indiscretions

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⁷ The majority of court cases appeared to involve readers who had declined to use the *Exchange and Mart* deposit system, and had written to the seller to arrange the exchange of goods and payment personally.

⁸ ‘The Creation of a New Market’, 87–90. Gill explained to the *Review of Reviews* in 1904: ‘A man buys what the seller represents as a genuine Sévres vase, and discovers, when he gets it, that it is lacking in some points which seem to him essential to a genuine Sévres. In those cases […] [w]e do not hold court and ask the witnesses to come before us. We decide the case solely on an examination of the article itself in conjunction with the correspondence of the disputants.’
of its readers. The cryptic nature of anonymously placed public notices could, moreover, comfortably conceal a variety of coded messages. The Exchange and Mart can be seen as the progenitor of the late-twentieth-century free-advertising paper, which as anthropologist Daniel Miller noted ‘operate[d] simultaneously as a safe, logical derivative of the community-based classified pages of local newspapers and an anarchic, potentially subversive and ambiguous means of laundering goods and services’. Interpreting the meaning of private traders’ advertisements for personal gain became a demanding skill in its own right, involving elements of risk and calculation, as well as excitement.

The periodical was not simply a functional tool for uniting collectables with purchasers, unwitting or otherwise: it also helped create and sustain a community of like-minded collectors. During the inter-war period the twice-weekly paper’s advertisements must be seen in the context of its expanding range of editorial articles, serialized columns, and illustrated features, which spawned a miniature empire of inexpensive advice manuals for amateur hobbyists. As a middlebrow ‘Popular Weekly for Collectors and Connoisseurs’, the Bazaar expanded upon the remit of earlier populist but locally based collecting magazines in aiming to capture a much broader audience than traditional art journals, demonstrating that particularism did not have to be synonymous with parochialism. During its heyday in 1929, at which point it was reduced from sixpence an issue back to twopence, the collectors’ Bazaar could boast a weekly circulation of a hundred thousand copies.


10 As Harry Cocks has pointed out, the ‘popular vogue for writing’, the ‘increasing availability of cheap cameras’, and the accessibility of ‘semi-hidden’ advertisements precisely like those in the Exchange and Mart combined perfectly to ‘create a non-professional world of sexual fantasy’ (or, in other words, an informal network for the distribution of amateur pornography) in the 1920s and 30s; see: Harry Cocks, Classified: The Secret History of the Personal Column (London, 2009), 94.


14 See e.g. The Collector (Hull, 1884), The Collectors’ Advertiser (Rotherham, 1903), The Collector’s Miscellany: A Bimonthly Journal for Collectors (Saltburn-by-Sea, 1928).

15 ‘Reduced from 6d. to 2d.’, Bazaar, 9 March 1929, 418.
November 1927 to say how ‘eagerly’ she ‘look[ed] forward’ to receiving her copy of the collectors’ *Bazaar* every Saturday.\(^{16}\) During this period, the paper would certainly tap into a form of depoliticized, domestic, and distinctively middle-class sociability.\(^{17}\) But the figurative exchanges staged in its columns and the diversity of its audience reveal that it also helped foster modes of self-expression which transcended class and gender divides. The *Bazaar* published a range of columns by respected experts and connoisseurs while actively involving amateurs, or what were appreciatively termed ‘small collectors’, in debates. Contributors made a concerted effort to introduce the novice to the world of high culture and the history of decoration without prejudice or snobbery, and lobbied for antique shops and local museums to make themselves more accessible to those of modest means. Readers, whatever their social position, were actively encouraged to engage in forms of art criticism and historical research through the viewing and purchasing of ordinary second-hand collectables, informed by the transformative notion that every man or woman had the potential to become a ‘connoisseur’.

The *Bazaar*’s rise to prominence in this period stands as evidence that the winds of ‘democratization’ present in other, more commercial, areas of society and culture were also blowing through rarefied corners of the world of art and antiques, unsettling traditional hierarchies of taste.\(^{18}\) The paper capitalized upon a form of ‘inclusive, pluralist participation’ in the everyday politics of collecting, in common with forms of contemporary associational life and voluntary organization.\(^{19}\) The *Bazaar* was envisaged as a form of reciprocal communication, and solicited readers’ contributions in the form of both letters and short, anonymous articles. Columns such as ‘The Curiosity Shop’—a regular feature which promised readers a weekly armchair ‘chat’ on ‘curios, coins, old furniture, pictures and all the gossip of the world of connoisseurs’—contained the views of both official and unofficial correspondents in varying proportions. Meanwhile, the *Exchange and Mart*’s ‘Special Service Department’ performed a function akin to that of *Notes and Queries*, providing answers to readers’ written enquiries and offering to identify and value readers’ possessions, including antiques, which could then be sold through the supplement.\(^{20}\) Rather than a

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\(^{19}\) Helen McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics in Inter-war Britain’, *Historical Journal*, 50 (2007), 893.

straightforward reflection of the popular collecting world of the late 1920s and early 1930s, then, the Bazaar can be seen as an ‘arena’ in which practices and cultures of collecting could be rehearsed and reformed. Its columns gave untrained experts a creative outlet and a voice in discussions regarding the uses of art, history, and cultural property in everyday life. Reading the inter-war Bazaar demonstrated that it was possible to unearth beautiful things from the detritus of a London street market stall, to see stateliness in a small set of china, or even to derive valuable historical insight from antiquarian printed ephemera. Dispensing with conventional categories of value in favour of the individualistic tastes of the ‘small collector’, it aimed to show that self-improvement and a stake in high culture could be bought at the cost of a few shillings in a second-hand shop or, indeed, via an advertising supplement (Figs 1 and 2).

‘Collecting in a Small Way’: Antiques in the Inter-War Bazaar

In the humble opinion of George Whiteman, a Bazaar editor, there were ‘two classes of collectors’, and one of them ‘did not get anything like the attention it deserves’. He referred to ‘those lovers of old and beautiful things, many of them with quite moderate incomes, who do not confine themselves to one branch of antiques, but buy here a chair, there a picture, elsewhere a piece of china or pewter, in order to beautify their homes or because those particular pieces appeal to them’. Rather than speaking to a refined audience of scholars, curators, or dealers, Bazaar contributors chose instead to focus on the amateur and the novice, or, in the parlance of the magazine, the ‘small collector’. If, as Deborah Cohen has argued, ‘to cherish antiques was to proclaim a taste that required cultivation beyond the means of the vast majority’, what the Bazaar represents is the moment at which the ‘vast majority’ of amateur collectors could be taken as seriously as the gentlemanly connoisseur. The Exchange and Mart assumed that ‘small’ antique and decorative art enthusiasts would not schedule their collecting lives according to the pages of contemporary metropolitan periodicals such as the Connoisseur, Burlington Magazine, or Old Furniture, purchasing art objects and watching auction sales with the

22 This paper draws on Christopher Hilliard’s definition of ‘democratization’ as ‘a shared sense of entitlement to participate in cultural activities’. Christopher Hilliard, To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratization of Writing in Britain (London, 2006), 5–8.
Figure 1
sole aim of making a profit. Instead, they bought inexpensive collectables ‘on impulse’, and because they loved them, not because they corresponded with a sense of what was fashionable or even particularly valuable.\textsuperscript{25} Overlooked by historians of collecting and

\textsuperscript{25} ‘Collecting by Impulse’, \textit{Bazaar}, 2 June 1928, 746; Whiteman, ‘Importance of the Small Collector’, 3.

\begin{figure}
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\caption{‘The Collector’s Bazaar’, The Bazaar: The Popular Weekly for Collectors and Connoisseurs (30 March 1929). Author’s collection.}
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inter-war consumer culture, small collections and the individuals who created them provide an important insight into the desires, fantasies, and sentiments which made up the everyday interaction with the material world.

The archetypal *Bazaar* collection was self-made; only rarely was it inherited. ‘Small Collector’ J. J. Elliot of southeast London claimed with pride in July 1928 to have made a collection of ‘fifteen pieces of old English china’.

I earn but £110 a year and can only afford £10 a year for my hobby, but it is a joy to me to know that every few months, when I have saved up a pound or two, I can buy some beautiful little treasure which I have been watching for some time. I make a point of going round the second-hand dealers’ shops regularly, and, as I never look at the things in the front windows, but go right into the back rooms and ask to turn things over, I can find among the miscellaneous collections little works of art and curios worth buying and keeping. I know, too, that they are not likely to be sold until I have saved up enough to buy them.26

Elliot’s tastes and painstaking approach to finding and buying collectables may not have been shared by fellow second-hand shoppers, but nor were they out of the reach of the majority of consumers. Revealingly, the only collecting grandees to be profiled in the *Bazaar* during its heyday as a smart collectors’ magazine—Lord Iveagh and Lord Leverhulme—were those whose art collections had recently been opened to the public. The foundation of the Lady Lever Art Gallery was attributed by then editor, theatre critic and curio collector Maitland Davidson, to the most casual kind of collecting: the type that involved ‘seeing some bit of old stuff in a shop window and taking it home’. In this case, the ‘nucleus’ of Lever’s ‘great collection’ was said to be the pair of ‘two little Derby biscuit ornaments’ which he had purchased, while a grocer, to adorn his parlour mantelpiece in Wigan. ‘As a matter of fact’, Davidson, added, ‘so great did [Lever’s] wealth become […] that he acquired a certain amount of pieces that were not quite up to the standard of his best purchases’.27

That this modest and unpretentious conception of the art of collecting had an influence on readers is vividly demonstrated in the ways in which *Bazaar* correspondents used the figure of the ‘small collector’ to describe their own hobby. In the spring of 1930, the magazine hosted a competition asking readers to write in with the story of the origin of their own collections, believing that ‘the experiences which led its readers to take up

what, to the man-in-the-street, must seem a strange obsession, are worth recording. The more readily it can be seen how converts to collecting are made the easier will newcomers to the ranks be induced to join. Published entrants all confessed that their own successes and pleasures in collecting had arisen in mundane circumstances. Collectors were born simply from being in the right place at the right time: ‘dragged into’ a London auction sale by a friend and ‘carried away by the novelty’; while staying in an ‘old house’; or having seen an interesting object in a museum. One reader had ducked into an antique shop in Ilford during a rain shower and had ended up buying a miniature of a lady for ten shillings, which he later donated to the National Portrait Gallery. Cyril Nicholls of Whitchurch, Shropshire, had bought a set of six prints after reading about them in the Bazaar, only to be told that they were in fact worthless reprints by the magazine’s Special Service Department. ‘Many people, after this’, he admitted, ‘would be writing on “How I Stopped Collecting,” but it was this that really started me’.

The Bazaar promoted the idea that, as a small collector, it almost mattered less what was in one’s collection than the experience of collecting it. The expertise provided by the paper’s contributors was of a heterogeneous character; the individual ‘quest’ for unusual objects was encouraged above following trends in the decorative art market that might turn out to be lucrative. For instance, those who found that ‘ordinary’ English vernacular cottage furnishings were becoming more popular and thus valuable towards the end of the 1920s were recommended to abandon that avenue and to ‘go in exclusively’ for ‘local’ furniture particular to one county, to ‘make their original contributions to a comprehensive collection of provincial furniture’.

An ‘amateur collector’ from Cumberland advised readers to take up his unusual pastime: restoring old musical instruments, as due to the lack of interest in the field, ‘a great deal of material can be “picked up,” often for a few shillings’. During this period, the Bazaar was an early

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33 [‘Country Doctor’], ‘Collecting Old Musical Instruments’, Bazaar, 8 December 1930, 220.
enthusiast of the much-maligned, and typically inexpensive, Victorian collectables such as prints, coral jewellery, and Berlin wool work. During the 1930s, Dr John Kirk used the Exchange and Mart to purchase objects for his folk life collection, which later became the foundation of the Victorian street at the Castle Museum in York, one of the earliest examples of this type of social history display. For small collectors, the pleasure of their hobby clearly lay not in the mainstream cultural significance of the objects they accumulated, but in the challenges associated with ‘picking up’ itself. The easy and the ‘ordinary’ held little appeal.

The ‘quest of the antique’ was, therefore, not wholly connected to the pursuit of the profitable. In September 1928, the Bazaar editor had proposed the establishment of a ‘National Museum of “Fakes”’ to show novice collectors the deceptions which produced ‘pseudo-antiques’. His idea was universally approved in the Bazaar letters page, but met with scepticism elsewhere. ‘Would there not be a great deal less happiness in the world if we were all experts?’, the Manchester Guardian asked in response to the Bazaar debate. ‘[M]any a poorer man asks only not to be disabused as to the authenticity of his two or three pieces of “Chippendale” or “Sheraton” and to be left to think that this piece of china or that would “fetch a lot if I ever wanted to sell it—but of course, I [never would]’’. It was undeniable that antiques were things possessing codes to be deciphered. Yet in the Bazaar they became riddles with solutions which could be puzzled over and discussed with just a little rudimentary knowledge of local history or art and design. They were not treated as anxiety-inducing investments or markers of social status. Accordingly, readers were provided with a weekly diet of antiques-based quizzes, ‘curiograms’ (anagrams with a decorative arts theme), and the ‘world’s first illustrated crossword for collectors and art lovers’. Features carried titles such as ‘The Mystery of English Enamels’ and ‘A Problem for Collectors of Glass Pictures’. Although the Bazaar was always interested to some extent in authenticity, and with it romantic stories of finds, bargains, speculations, and fluctuating


38 See, for instance, the ‘problem’ of the scene depicted on a rare piece of Stuart needlework from the collection of Franklin & Hare of Taunton, which was ‘solved’ by a reader: ‘Our Problem Picture’, Bazaar, 9 November 1929, 4; Clara March, ‘The Problem Solved’, Bazaar, 30 November 1929, 4.
values, the type of collecting the paper promoted held an attraction which cannot be reduced to the acquisition of capital. An important part of the appeal of antiques was the ‘modern craving for the magical’ which, as Michael Saler has pointed out, animated many different forms of cultural practice after the fin-de-siècle, helping to reconcile ‘the central tenets of modernity: rationalism, secularism, urbanism, mass consumerism’ with a deeply felt need for enchantment, glamour, and poetry in everyday life. In the pages of Bazaar, promoting the search for hidden meanings in the material world carried with it a ‘democratic message’: that the ‘occult significance’ of things long sensed by the most dedicated antiquarians and connoisseurs could also become ‘accessible to the common individual’.39

The ‘quest of the antique’ was thus intimately related to what it meant to be modern in inter-war Britain. Pewter expert and collector Howard Cotterell wrote in to the Bazaar December 1928 to express his appreciation of the new direction which the Saturday issue had taken: ‘[i]t is so essentially human and touches upon subjects for which one looks in vain elsewhere, and subjects which are for the everyday man, as opposed to the millionaire’.40 As James Hinton has argued, a ‘taste for high culture’ in pre-war Britain did not necessarily represent ‘an obstacle to a democratic modernity’, or a cul-de-sac of class-bound conformity. Rather, it could fuel the ‘creative energies of pretty ordinary people who were not prepared to settle for being nothing but ordinary’, thereby giving rise to new cultural formations and forms of collective identity that cut across older social hierarchies.41 Writing in March 1929 to thank the magazine for publishing a recent article on a particular area of their own interest, old pamphlets, a Camberwell reader confessed simply that they collected ‘without knowing it—from necessity and not from choice’.42 Readers may have found it difficult to explain this ‘strange obsession’ to the ‘man-in-the-street’, but they understood—and the editors understood that they understood—their habits to be completely unremarkable. In praising the value of individual expression in pursuit of the old and beautiful, it had created a space where like-minded collectors could celebrate their sense of difference under mass culture together.

'The Quest of the Antique': Antiquarianism and Modernity in the _Bazaar_

If the small collector’s search for the ‘old and beautiful’ in clothing, home furnishing, and decoration was motivated by a response to the homogenizing forces of mass manufacturing and consumerism, their quest for alternative ways of living was not one that simply took refuge in nostalgic forms of escapism. The magazine suggests ways in which the ‘creative engagement with mass culture’, which as Matt Houlbrook has shown shaped new forms of inter-war selfhood, could be played out through visual and material as well as literary practices. The _Bazaar_ aimed to portray antique shopping as an adventurous and artistic quest for the improvement of self and society in the present: exercising collectors’ natural tendency to seek out the ‘curious’ across the country would prompt diversification and improvement in local cultures of retailing and the curation of collections in public ownership. In contrast to the largely metropolitan focus of contemporary art collecting journals, it devoted a large proportion of its editorial columns to the market for old furniture, curios, and decorative art outside of the capital, so that the _Bazaar_ gradually came to play a key role in shaping a landscape of beauty that was as much national as it was ‘provincial’. It had been a Glasgow reader who had suggested the idea of a gazetteer for antiques enthusiasts and tourists in February 1927, pointing out that ‘all collectors and all dealers are not in London’. The Saturday issue duly began to print maps, directories, and articles classifying independent antique dealers and the objects they sold, acting as a portable shop window for the casual collector, the weekend motorist, and the otherwise uninitiated. As contributors actively promoted the regions’ most progressive antiques retailers, they were also calling for further modernization in standards of access to museum collections, to cultivate a broader collecting public interested in raising aesthetic standards in everyday life. In this way, the pursuit was linked to a dynamic modern commercial culture, as well as with antiquarianism.

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44 Matt Houlbrook, ‘‘A Pin to see the Peepshow’: Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson’s Letters, 1921-1922’, _Past and Present_ (2010), 249.
45 Collectors, according to Barbara Benedict, have historically been ‘curious people’: those who assumed ‘the peculiarly modern identity of the solitary searcher, the inquiring everyman, the democratic detective’. Barbara Benedict, _Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry_ (Chicago, 2001), 8.
A central feature in the magazine between 1926 and 1931 was hobbyist writer Leo Forbes Outram’s ‘The Quest of the Antique’, an illustrated column describing the author’s journeys by motor car around Britain, calling at notable antique shops and nearby sites of historic interest. Along with the serialization of the Hampshire antique dealer Thomas Rohan’s three popular Mills & Boon memoirs, which occupied a full page in nearly every issue of the Bazaar during this period, ‘The Quest of the Antique’ did much to demystify the ‘secret’ rituals involved in purchasing antiques for young collectors and holidaymakers.48 Taking its title from the book of the same name published by collector and journalist Agnes Willoughby Hodgson in 1924, the column expanded the format of a traditional shopping advertorial by including snippets of local history and informal interviews with knowledgeable dealers about their own antiquarian researches or the things they had collected.49 True to the Bazaar’s progressive outlook and national remit, Outram’s ‘quest’ was staged not in the unspoilt country village of ‘Deep England’, but in modernized shops and ‘antique galleries’ in towns and cities like Bath, Oxford, Brighton, Nottingham, Cardiff, Manchester, Liverpool, and Newcastle, as well as in London.50 In helping the small collector efficiently manage his or her forays into the otherwise bewildering world of antiques, the Bazaar was helping reshape the provincial amateur’s relationship to connoisseurial authority and high cultural expertise.51

Outram did home in on the things that had always interested curious collectors: bargain investments, hidden drawers, historic architecture, and unusual rarities. At the same time as he uncovered the quaint and the old-fashioned, however, a common thread running throughout all his journeys was the mission to introduce readers to the most forward-thinking and well-organized dealers he could find. ‘Mrs Wilkinson, who trades as E. F. Wilkinson’ of Paignton was recom-mended as being ‘in the vanguard of women dealers in the South’, for example.52 It was now a ‘self-evident fact’, Outram claimed in October

48 Thomas Rohan (1860-1945) published three books on his experiences as an antique dealer in Southampton and Bournemouth after 1900. A blend of Rohan’s memoirs with practical advice for novice collectors, they appeared in the Bazaar in serial form under the heading ‘Secrets of the “Antique” Trade’. See: Thomas Rohan, Confessions of a Dealer (London, 1924); Old Beautiful (London, 1926); and In Search of the Antique (London, 1927).


51 On populist or middlebrow cultural authority, as outlined in another writer’s journey around England in this period, see: John Baxendale, Priestley’s England: J. B. Priestley and English Culture (Manchester, 2007).

In 1927, that ‘antique shops [...] have become ordered showrooms. The modern collector has not the patience to forage in a mass of rubbish for what he hardly expects to find, and for which he certainly can ill spare the time’. Particularly noteworthy were dealers who had made a special effort to display their stock in ‘museum’ settings, especially if they could suggest ideas for interior decoration in small homes. An ‘antique gallery’ in a converted cotton factory in Preston was, Outram remarked upon visiting it, ‘astonishing in its size and housing capacity’; spread over some ‘five floors packed with well-chosen [...] furniture, glass, china, [...] and some very fine oil paintings’, it convinced him that the Lancashire dealers stood a good chance of weathering the ‘depression’. In addition, the column diligently reported on provincial businesses which held free temporary art exhibitions: in October 1928, for instance, Outram recommended Bazaar readers pay a visit to the free exhibition of paintings, drawings, and prints by Laura Knight on show at John Gibbins’s avant-garde Ruskin Galleries in Birmingham. The ‘quest of the antique’, like Outram’s contemporary H. V. Morton’s In Search of England, was ‘an adventure, not an elegy’.

During this period, Bazaar contributors were conscious that the trade was attracting growing numbers of amateurs and merchants who were collectors first and foremost, and noted that, while this could be a boon to customers, standards were slipping as a result. ‘Furniture, pictures, porcelain, pottery, glass, lace, needlework, bronzes, silver, all these, and more, require study’, a ‘Woman Dealer’ pointedly reminded aspiring antique shop-owners in 1929. Readers used the magazine to air their frustrations with dishonest or difficult dealers, and lobbied for improvements to the accessibility of collections for the benefit of other small collectors. In September 1929 a ‘Poor Collector’ from Leeds implored old furniture retailers to accept weekly hire purchase payments: ‘[t]he up-to-date dealer of almost everything under the sun conducts thriving business by this method’, they noted; ‘so why does
the antique dealer stand out?" The editor called on decorative art dealers to follow other independent retailers by introducing clear price labels to discourage dishonest dealing and help ‘nervously hesitating’ collectors. In the antique trade, he declared, ‘whoever is standing still is moving backwards.’

Furthermore, Bazaar writers and collectors argued that it was possible to adapt antique collections, alongside contemporary design, to suit a variety of homes, budgets, and lifestyles. Local historian William Whiteman hoped the Saturday issue for collectors would help ‘enrol’ readers as ‘active evangelists of beauty’. ‘Every crusader against Ugliness’, he suggested in 1930, ‘will have modern ornaments, which are not mass-produced, or harmonious antiques, in accordance with his purse’. In the Bazaar, ‘antiques’ could easily be accommodated in the homes of those with very limited budgets. Addressing a column on this subject to ‘young married couples’ with a combined income of £5 a week, Alice Jeanes made the case that there was ‘no need to furnish the house completely at once’: ‘[i]n a new home much is forgiven, and it is “rather a lark” to pick up one’s chairs, tables and cupboards one at a time, and filling out temporarily with makeshifts [sic]’. In this way, taking on the perspective of a patient, questing small collector became a common-sense adaptation to the straitened situations in which many young families would find themselves in the early 1930s. Likewise, H. Hurford Janes, a reader who wrote in ‘for the benefit of the sceptical’ to describe how he had decorated his one-bedroom home with a collection of old furniture for ‘£30’ over a period of 3 years, showed that ‘antiques’ allowed one to cut corners, adapt, and economize without sacrificing individual expression. His ‘finds’ included ‘a corner chair of Chippendale design’, which he had ‘discovered as a leather-backed office chair in Shepherd’s Bush Market’, and ‘a Grandfather clock case used inappropriately, but conveniently, for books, shelves having been fitted inside’, purchased for a few shillings from a second-hand shop. The home, the Bazaar endlessly reiterated, should be furnished above all by ‘beauty and the expression of personality’.

60 ['Poor Collector'], ‘Antique Dealers and the Instalment System’, Bazaar, 31 August 1929, 11. Another reader’s sympathetic reply was published: A. B. L. James, ‘How Bargains Are Lost’, Bazaar, 14 September 1929, 16.
64 Alice Jeanes, ‘Furnishing with Antiques on £5 a Week’, Bazaar, 22 July 1930, 3, 9.
66 William Whiteman, ‘An Ideal Home or a Warehouse?’, Bazaar, 5 April 1930, 8.
precedence over a slavish devotion to established signifiers of good taste or cultural distinction.\textsuperscript{67}

As important in the ‘quest’ of the small collector as locating friendly dealers and inspiring curios were visits to the collections of fine and decorative art objects exhibited in public museums. ‘[T]here is one thing the Victoria and Albert Museum can do better than almost any other public place I know of’, writer Frank Bingham declared in 1927: ‘[i]t can teach you how to buy antiques’.\textsuperscript{68} Indeed, according to the \textit{Bazaar}, examples of decorative art objects akin to those in even the largest public collections could often still be picked up in street market stalls. For instance, readers who had admired the Thomas Sutton collection of eighteenth-century tea caddies in the V&A, donated in 1919, were told in 1926 that it was still ‘possible for the collector to pick up tea-caddies nearly as good on the barrows in the City’.\textsuperscript{69} During this period, the \textit{Bazaar} was positioning itself as an intermediary between the amateur collector and his or her education in art appreciation and design criticism. Readers were supplied with a plethora of advice on gallery visiting, such as ‘Ten Rules for Enjoying Old Masters’, and printed summaries of L.C.C. lectures on the history of furniture.\textsuperscript{70} In the summer of 1928, the paper ran a competition in which readers were invited to arrange a set of ten pictures on a blank wall, thereby ‘put[ting] [them]selves in the position of a hanging committee of the Royal Academy’.\textsuperscript{71} If gallery visiting made one a more informed antiques buyer, then practising the art of second-hand shopping could better equip small collectors to interpret museum collections. In August 1929 Louise Gordon-Stables noted that ‘the Caledonian Market and the second-hand clothes shops’ had lately been inundated with ‘amazing bargains’ in unfashionable handmade and antique lace, ‘so that now is the time for the lace-lover to form the nucleus of a collection’.\textsuperscript{72} She pointed amateurs in the direction of the collection of English lace on show at the V&A, and then to the sixteenth-century portraits in the National Portrait Gallery, where, armed with this new knowledge, they


\textsuperscript{69} ‘A Notable Tea-Caddy Collection’, \textit{Bazaar}, 2 October 1926, 352.


\textsuperscript{71} ‘Result of “The Bazaar’s” Hanging Competition’, \textit{Bazaar}, 14 July 1928, 45.

would be able to examine ‘in minute detail collars, cuffs, ruffs and ruffles’.  

It was for this reason that, just as the *Bazaar* could not condone backwardness in the British antiques trade, nor did it encourage lovers of the ‘old and beautiful’ to become complacent with current standards of display and access to public collections. In 1929, editor George Whiteman proposed an expansion in the numbers of ‘small, specialised museums, properly equipped and organised’ in provincial centres, and focused more particularly on the interests of antique collectors, in order that the latest techniques in museum practice might be distributed more equitably around the regions. The *Bazaar* was not in favour of prioritizing the desires of influential ‘connoisseurs’ above those of ordinary art-loving museum visitors, however. Two months later, Whiteman could be found arguing for a cull of worthless donations in the smallest local museums. The senseless deification of the private collector, without regard to the needs of the vast majority, had to be stopped for the sake of the collecting world at large:

Almost anyone can recall at once several small museums, that are merely jumble heaps of worthless oddments without interest or instructive value. We have ourselves seen such cuckoos in the nest as […] some highly suspect flint arrowheads and scrapers found by a town councillor with a taste for archaeology.

By contrast, the *Bazaar* promoted newly opened collections such as those at Kenwood House, where ‘excellent’, ‘home-made’ cakes were served in a tea room ‘decorated by a promising young artist’, or Dr Johnson’s House in Gough Square, where the famous attic ‘will be available for social purposes’. These institutions had done much to prevent a ‘dry museum atmosphere’ settling over the historic architecture and objects on display.

The *Bazaar* had taken account of the concerns of provincial readers who themselves had expressed a wish to sweep away the cobwebs from regional collections to make them more accessible to a wider public. A correspondent from Pontypool, for instance, had written in to ask why it should not be possible for a number of ‘noble mansions’ furnished

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76 ‘Kenwood’s Tea Room’, *Bazaar*, 29 June 1929, 10; ‘A Toast in Tea’, *Bazaar*, 21 December 1929, 4. Discussions in the *Bazaar* prefigured later debates on museum accessibility; see, for example: ‘Visitors to the Museums: Promotion of Public Interest’, *The Times*, 10 April 1935, 15.
with antiques to ‘allow on certain days in the year serious art-lovers, not mere sight-seers, access to these houses with a view to enriching their store of knowledge’, and to donate the ‘money thus obtained for admission’ to a centralized funding body such as the National Art-Collections Fund. Owners of ‘priceless heirlooms’, he believed, should ‘be prepared to share their privileges with the man in the street for at least one or two days in the year’.77 In the Bazaar, therefore, patiently searching for ‘finds’ and ‘picking up’ knowledge on old furnishings, social customs, and decoration from well-organized antique galleries and public museum exhibits was far from backward-looking. The relationship between the public collection and the private consumer of ‘art’ was portrayed as symbiotic: each could bestow value and meaning upon the other. However eclectic or fragmentary the small collector’s education, they had become entitled to play a role in urgent discussions surrounding the accessibility of art, history, and beauty in everyday life. The chance survival of one Exchange and Mart seller’s private correspondence archive demonstrates that, in giving readers’ access to collectables in their own homes, the periodical continued to play an important part in the democratization of culture throughout the 1930s.

‘Dispersing Small Museum’: Selling Antiquities in the Exchange and Mart

Harold Clements was a devoted Bazaar, Exchange and Mart subscriber and small collector, having advertised curios for sale in the newspaper since its redesign as a collectors’ magazine in the late 1920s.78 Upon becoming manager of the Fir Tree Hotel, a public house and bed-and-breakfast in the picturesque Buckinghamshire village of Woburn Sands, he transformed its function room into what he called ‘The Fir Tree Hotel Museum of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman Antiquities’. After 1929, as its self-styled ‘Curator’, Clements placed notices in the paper advertising the ‘dispersal’ of his ‘small museum’ every few months, selling an assortment of statues, jewellery, vases, and ‘rare’ curios including coins, amulets, and seals. By 1942 he had received at least 369 letters from 112 individuals across Britain via the paper.79 The correspondence which survives is addressed to Clements, meaning

79 Three uncatalogued bundles of documents relating to Clements’s ‘Museum’ are contained within a miscellaneous collection: H. Clements, antiques dealer, of Hemel Hempstead, DE/Ls/46, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Hertfordshire, UK. All subsequent manuscript citations are held in this collection.
that his sales patter and ‘arousing descriptions’ have been lost, but the responses of the Bazaar readers to whom he showed and sold ‘antiquities’ furnish a rich picture of the private culture of collecting the periodical fostered before the Second World War (Fig. 3).80

The publican’s timing was auspicious. Alongside the popular spiritualist revival during the inter-war period, the discovery of Tutankhamen’s tomb in 1922 had given rise to a widespread fascination with Egyptian culture and design, particularly small, everyday artefacts.81 Reflecting both these enthusiasms and the Bazaar’s eclectic range and readership, Clements’s traceable correspondents had a diverse array of occupations. Through the Exchange and Mart, the publican received inquiries from and sold ‘antiquities’ to a fellow hotelier and two antique dealers, as well as a doctor, two dentists, a manufacturing chemist, an architect, an ironmonger, a gentlemen’s tailor, the owner of a Fenchurch Street firm of general merchants, the manager of a Balham theatre company, a porter at Claridge’s, a long-distance driver, a nurse-turned-housekeeper, and, after the outbreak of war, a dockworker and a factory hand. Several of his most frequent correspondents were retired, and a number were children. Others wrote to the Museum from their beds, including a terminally ill 73-year-old spiritualist in Worthing putting together a ‘cabinet’ of curios for two ‘young friends’, who informed Clements cheerily that his ‘homeopathic Dr.’ was doing ‘wonders’ for him.82 Only one correspondent claimed to be a professional Egyptologist, although several told Clements that they had visited Egypt, or had seen ancient artefacts in London museums. The publican also sold two ‘Egyptian’ objects to the Director of the Science Museum.83 A small number of collectors arranged a visit to see the ‘Museum’ and its ‘Curator’ in person, such as H. V. Morton, who motored up to Woburn Sands from his flat in Grosvenor Place in November 1935.84

Typically, sales of Clement’s ancient artefacts were conducted purely by post. Only rarely did the publican and his correspondents make use of the Exchange and Mart central office’s deposit system to facilitate transactions; in the majority of cases, both parties wrote directly to each other and were evidently willing to make the exchange of goods and cash on their own terms. Clements described his curios as ‘fine guaranteed antiquities’, and in some instances gave a description linking them to named collectors or excavations: for example, among

80 Benjamin Barlow to Harold Clements [hereafter Clements], 2 January 1939.
81 James Stevens Curl, Egyptomania: The Egyptian Revival (Manchester, 1994), 211. On the democratization of spiritualism and the occult during this period, see also: Jenny Hazlegrove, Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars (Manchester, 2000), 19.
82 R. S. Carrington Smythe to Clements, 23 May 1934.
Figure 3
Map showing postal addresses of 112 correspondents for which letters to Bazaar, Exchange and Mart seller Harold Clements survive (c. 1929–42). Map prepared by P. J. Stickler, Department of Geography, Cambridge.
the objects which remained unsold by 1942 was a 3-foot-long ‘Ancient Egyptian Necklace, of Cylindrical Beads, intersected with small discs, in faience. B.C. 900. Excavated at Gurob by Professor Flinders Petrie’. A number of correspondents asked directly for the publican’s promised ‘guarantee’, along with any information about the objects and their history which he might be able to give them, some withholding their payment until he had supplied it or negotiating with him over price. A Westbourne Park collector informed Clements that his prices were higher than those of G. F. Lawrence of Wandsworth, the antiquities dealer who had been involved in the sale of the Cheapside Hoard to the London Museum in 1912. The majority were more confident. In June 1934 Miss Doris Cogger of Tottenham sent a postal order for seven shillings and sixpence directly to cover the cost of an Egyptian ‘Sacred Amulet’ and a certain ‘Ancient Egyptian Necklace’ excavated by Flinders Petrie, adding matter-of-factly: ‘Useless without [guarantee]’. In fact, many expressed their gratitude and surprise that Clements was willing to send them things sight unseen, mindful perhaps of the lingering reputation of Exchange and Mart readers for foregoing payment. George Pike declared that it was ‘jolly decent’ of Clements to trust him and his wife with the ‘ancient jewellery’, and supplied a telephone number where they might be reached in East Dulwich; another correspondent gave, uninvited, the details of ‘Mr. H. T. Mead, Curator of the Canterbury Royal Museum and Beaney Institute’ as his ‘reference’, adding that he had ‘scanned the Advertisement columns of the “Bazaar” for a long time in the hope of seeing some such offer as yours’.

Most transactions ended after one purchase or inquiry, but a significant number requested Clements’s full ‘catalogue’, or to accept the dealer’s standard offer to post them a portion of his collection ‘on approval’. After having secured an Egyptian ‘Sacred Charm’ for two shillings, which he planned to wear on a ‘chain’, Middlesborough paper merchant Arthur Leader told Clements: ‘I think I would like a few decent sized objects now, anyway I leave it to you—wrap anything you think will do for me’. Clements’ repeat customers received much pleasure from having the dealer select and present antiquities to them, without obligation to purchase. Many correspondents called themselves ‘amateur’ or ‘small’ collectors, and had evidently bought things through the magazine in this way before. Mrs Coblly of Harlesden, for

85 Clements, ‘Offered Mr. Hall, 10 June 1942, Crest Private Museum, 57, Hill Field Road, Hemel Hempstead, Herts.’
87 Doris Cogger to Clements, 30 June 1934.
88 George S. Steddy to Clements, 22 September 1934.
89 Arthur Leader to Clements, 5 March 1935.
example, spent £2 on an assortment of various small curios, including a heart-shaped Egyptian amulet and a ‘Roman Glass Vase’ in 1933.\(^{90}\) When Clements asked if she would be interested in making another purchase, she replied: ‘I do not really need any more and could not promise to buy more than perhaps one or two […] so you must please yourself as to whether you think it worth while to pack them off to me’. ‘Of course’, she added with a wink, ‘one always enjoys handling those things’.\(^{91}\)

Apparently unprompted, many correspondents described in detail their reasons for responding to Clements’s advertisements or their interest in antiquities, revealing the intimacy that could be rapidly established as part of the negotiation between second-hand dealers and their clients.\(^{92}\) ‘Curiosity’ was an often-repeated term, and several claimed to have bought things for educational purposes. Captain H. J. Carr of Hyde, Cheshire, was searching for ancient Egyptian ‘children’s toys’ and other curios suitable for a ‘school history museum’.\(^{93}\) The young Gilbert Monckton wrote from his house at Harrow to purchase two Bronze Age rings and a Roman bowl to ‘illustrate [his] forthcoming lecture’.\(^{94}\) Many others were looking for smaller antiquities to use as pieces of jewellery and ‘good luck’ charms. R. C. Toft of Southend-on-Sea wanted ‘a ring with a history, to wear’.\(^{95}\) In 1932, Mrs Topping of Leicester was interested in Clements’ 3-foot-long ‘Ancient Egyptian Necklace’ from Flinders Petrie’s excavation at Gurob. ‘What shade of blue is it?’, she asked. ‘Would it be suitable for splitting up to make several necklaces?’\(^{96}\) Some correspondents’ reasons for purchase were more sentimental. Miss Julie Callander of Torquay, a self-described ‘collector in a small way’, explained that she was trying to replace a collection of antiquities belonging to her late grandfather, which after his recent death had ‘unfortunately’ passed to his ‘second family’, adding darkly in brackets: ‘(second wife)’.\(^{97}\)

Two of Clements’s best customers, a married couple named Benjamin and Mabel Barlow, were keenly interested in Egyptian things, as they put it, ‘on the Occult side’. A retired bank clerk-turned-musician and an ‘artist’, a former domestic servant who had trained at the Slade School,

\(^{90}\) Mrs. C. Cobley to Clements, 6 February 1933.
\(^{91}\) Mrs. C. Cobley to Clements, 4 April 1933.
\(^{92}\) On another archive of letters written to a private second-hand dealer who advertised in Vogue during this period, see: Celia Marshik, ‘Smart Clothes at Low Prices: Alliances and Negotiations in the British Inter-war Secondhand Clothing Trade’ in Ilya Parkins and Elizabeth Sheehan, eds, Cultures of Femininity in Modern Fashion (Durham, NH, 2011), 71–86.
\(^{93}\) Captain H. J. Carr to Clements, 28 September 1932.
\(^{94}\) Gilbert Monckton to Clements, n.d. [c. 1929-1936].
\(^{95}\) R. C. Toft to Clements, 9 February 1933.
\(^{96}\) Mrs. E. M. Topping to Clements, 2 February 1932.
\(^{97}\) Miss Julie Callander to Clements, 14 January 1940.
the Barlows were collecting books and antiques to decorate their ‘isolated’ old cottage at the head of a creek on the Roseland Peninsula in southwest Cornwall. Benjamin confessed that all the antiquities would be kept on display, and hoped they would not ‘deteriorate too much’:

We like to have our own specimens about the house as far as possible […] and we have not room for very much more. I suppose it is really better to keep them in a Cabinet, but to me it makes them seem too remote, and we do like to feel that they are part and parcel of our own household Gods.

The indifference of the local villagers to Mabel’s paintings meant that the winter of 1938 found them living in reduced circumstances, but despite being only ‘small buyers’ they kept almost everything that Clements sent them, writing to the dealer separately to surprise the other with special birthday and Christmas gifts. Unusually, the publican also sent the Barlows presents; unannounced, he gave Mabel a ‘Specimen of Coptic Embroidery’, uncannily anticipating her interest in old textiles as an ‘accomplished Lace Maker’. The Bazaar seller’s ‘little Collection’ seemed to have been ‘magically fitted’ for the Barlows’ cottage and interior lives: for Benjamin’s study of ‘Religion, Philosophy, (especially Oriental), and Mythology’, and Mabel’s drawings. The couple’s friends were ‘really superstitious about Egyptian antiquities’, but as the Barlows told Clements: ‘You will I am sure be able to choose something that will fascinate us’.

Were Clements’s correspondents taken in by the antiquities and the fictions spun by their ‘Curator’? To place them in relation to the modern sensibility of enchantment identified by Saler as a key characteristic of inter-war mass culture: had these collectors been ‘naively’ duped by the publican? Or could they instead be said to be ‘ironic’ believers, having ‘immersed’ themselves in Clements’s ‘imaginary world […] without mistaking [it] for reality’, aware that antiques in the pages of the Exchange and Mart were not always as advertised? Only 5 of the 112 correspondents represented in this archive expressed doubt about the things they had purchased, one having noticed that the ‘Statuette’ he had purchased had been broken

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98 Benjamin Barlow to Clements, 16 November 1938.
99 Benjamin Barlow to Clements, 16 November 1938.
100 Mabel Barlow to Clements, 3 November 1938, 13 December 1938; Benjamin Barlow to Clements, 27 December 1938.
101 Benjamin Barlow to Clements, 11 November 1938; 21 November 1938.
102 Benjamin Barlow to Clements, 16 November 1938; Mabel Barlow to Clements, 13 December 1938.
103 Benjamin Barlow to Clements, 16 November 1938; 27 December 1938.
and glued back together. The only ‘Egyptologist’ with whom Clements corresponded explained in a curt letter that even curios sold in Egypt were now being made ‘in Birmingham’, though he conceded: ‘Some of the things I bought from your Museum are quite good’. Birmingham collector A. J. Newton professed to be ‘quite in love with’ the vases and 3-foot-long Egyptian blue bead necklace from Flinders Petrie’s excavation which he had purchased in 1932, but offered tentatively: ‘[a]t the same time, I cannot help thinking, and saying, that they are only replicas’.

Meanwhile, some of Clements’s customers had undoubtedly invested in the idea that the curios were not mass-produced copies, but ‘genuine antiquities’. Arthur Leader, for example, sent a panicked but apologetic note to ask whether the ‘Sacred Charm’ he was wearing had an ‘EVIL repute’ or could be ‘considered unlucky’, hoping Clements would not think him ‘a bit potty’. In March 1933 self-described ‘decorative’ collector Mr Lendon Bowers requested the publican send back a ‘small iridescent glass bottle—Roman (Jerusalem, 1st Cent.)’ which he had previously seen on approval and declined. Three months passed before he wrote from Kilmarnock to Woburn Sands enclosing his payment of six shillings, and to express his ‘pleasure’ in his serendipitous new purchase.

[Altho’ it is not the one I meant which was included in the specimens sent & which had more iridescent glaze thereon, I am pleased with it. It did not occur to me that you might have more than one of same place & period. This one is certainly perfect in design.]

Some of Clements’s happy customers had undoubtedly been wholly taken in by the seller’s self-proclaimed status as a museum-keeper; perhaps, for some, this itself was sufficient guarantee of the special authenticity of the objects he sold, in contrast to purveyors of mass-produced consumer goods.

It might be equally suggested, however, that the real naïfs were those who expressed their disappointment upon realizing that the ‘ancient’ artefacts they had purchased from a cabinet in the function room of a pub in Buckinghamshire were fake. The ‘buffering role’ played by the modern ‘ironic imagination’ which, as Saler writes, prevented ‘complete acceptance or acquiescence into any particular cultural construct’, would have helped smooth anonymous and unregulated Exchange and

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105 George Parker to Clements, 22 January 1934.
106 Major Earl Pitt to Clements, 31 January 1935.
107 A. J. Newton to Clements, 10 November 1932, 4 December 1932.
109 Mr. H. Lendon Bowers to Clements, 27 March 1933.
110 Mr. H. Lendon Bowers to Clements, 1 June 1933.
Mart transactions. The Bazaar had, after all, helped spread the message that its readers could have a hand in determining the meaning and value of old collectables: for the small collector, an antique did not have to be one-of-a-kind for it to be ‘perfect in design’. The satisfaction of the correspondents who had allowed themselves to become enchanted by the publican’s fictions can be seen as a rational response to a material world in which nothing was ever as it seemed. By its very nature, the quest of the antique required a leap of faith. Assuming the identity of either an amateur ‘Curator’ of antiquities or a ‘collector’ of antiques and decorative art during this period was a whimsical indulgence, though one which could have profound meaning in everyday life. As Benjamin Barlow put it in 1938, finding Clements and his antiquities via the Bazaar had been a ‘privilege and a pleasure’: ‘You have sent a Collection which has fulfilled our dreams in a most subtle way’.

Conclusion

‘Papers like the Exchange and Mart’, Orwell declared in 1939, ‘only exist because there is a definite demand for them, and they reflect the minds of their readers as a great national daily with a circulation of millions cannot possibly do’. In their quest to find enchantment in everyday life, Bazaar, Exchange and Mart subscribers did not simply constitute a collective of narrow-minded or nostalgic eccentrics. They were staunchly individual but firmly of their own time, having been admitted into a club of thousands of responsive readers to whom no desire was too far-fetched; no problem too troublesome; no hobby or obsession too trivial. As an effortless means of purchasing, exchanging, and disposing of used or unwanted goods from the comfort of one’s own home, the paper undoubtedly also played a part in sustaining, as well as entertaining many people in times of economic uncertainty and domestic crisis. In the Exchange and Mart, second-hand goods were never second best. Even as it was redesigned as a stylish art periodical in 1926, the Bazaar’s ‘Popular Weekly for Collectors’ would continue to speak to these modest yet modern concerns: the eclectic range of articles, debates, and viewpoints it published traversed traditional connoisseurial, class and gender hierarchies and in so doing won a

113 Benjamin Barlow to Clements, 17 November 1938.
varied readership, united only in the quest for personal expression and the desire to avoid conformity.

While it retained connections to élite cultural authority, the ‘quest of the antique’ in which the *Bazaar, Exchange and Mart* invited inter-war readers to participate was, in a small way, deeply emancipatory and egalitarian. Rather than being channelled into a domain in which they could be handled only by experts and professionals, antiques in the pages of this newspaper—from Victorian bric-à-brac to ‘ancient Egyptian’ antiquities—were accessible to all, as things to be invested in, puzzled over, displayed, dreamt about, and loved. Adjusting the focus of the history of collecting and related material practices to take in popular periodicals and the second-hand trade therefore has important implications for understanding the relationship between self-cultivation, social distinction, and the democratization of culture. By engaging with forms of high culture, as Hinton notes, ‘creative individuals might find the resources to critique established social norms, advance their individual quests for a meaningful sense of self, and, in so doing, open up new ways in which a society could imagine, and shape, itself’.115 The study of the purchasing habits of a select group of connoisseurs and dealers operating at the high end of the art market must not be allowed to obscure the self-consciously demotic and democratic culture of collecting nurtured in *The Bazaar, Exchange and Mart*, which in its progressive outlook, embrace of artifice, and modern sense of irony may well have borne more relation to the way in which ‘old and beautiful’ material culture was experienced by ‘the everyday man, as opposed to the millionaire’.116