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FOREWORD

Bargain Hunt has been a staple of British television for over twenty years. In fact, it's so quintessential, I'm unable to pinpoint the first time I sat down to watch two teams – bedecked in red and blue fleeces – buy three items to take to auction in a bid to make a profit. If I were to guess, it was probably sometime between 2005 and 2010; those were my university years and, as I've learned, our programme is beloved by students (who may or may not consider *Bargain Hunt* to be the perfect 45 minutes of procrastination).

When my uni days were done, I was able to secure a trainee position at a Glasgow auction house. I remember my first day as though it were yesterday: I was shown around the galleries, made to feel very welcome and asked to assist the head of the jewellery department

with some photography for an upcoming sale. There was no pressure, no need to stress.

With equal clarity, I can recall my first day as a *Bargain Hunt* expert: I was shown around the antiques fair, made to feel very welcome and asked to compete against one of the programme's most respected experts, Paul Laidlaw (a towering, charming figure in a Panama hat) as part of a beloved daytime competition that would soon be watched by millions of people both at home and abroad. Running on pure adrenaline, I was (easily) convinced by the blue team – two farmers – that buying a modern-day plough was a sensible idea. I seriously doubted the wisdom of that particular purchase but, as it transpired, there really was no need to stress; it turned a fantastic profit and sealed our victory over Paul and his reds. What a debut?!

That I would be asked back by the producers for a second attempt felt improbable at the time. Had I been told *then* that I would be co-presenting the programme just two years later, I would have displayed utter disbelief. In fact, I don't think I did believe the programme's long-serving Executive Producer, Paul Tucker when he called in 2015 to break that news. 'Surely not?' seemed like the only appropriate response.

Broadcast on BBC One for the first time in the year 2000, *Bargain Hunt* (presented then by the inimitable David Dickinson) swiftly garnered a loyal following.

David's tenure – although nothing short of memorable – was relatively short-lived compared to the twelve years Tim Wonnacott spent at the helm between 2003 and 2015. His indelible mark? The iconic end-of-episode kick, of course.

It was with a great sense of responsibility that my co-presenters and I stepped in to fill those big shoes. 'Co-protectors' seems like a more fitting title; for many, *Bargain Hunt* is simply a daytime favourite, but for countless others it is a programme around which they shape their entire day. There are the retired viewers, who consider the programme an essential part of their lunchtime routine; the new parents, who pray that the phone won't ring as they bounce sleepy babies on their shoulders and watch us with the subtitles on; the carers, who plan their daily visits to elderly relatives around our start time of 12:15 pm; the aforementioned students, for whom *Bargain Hunt* continues to provide endless, quality meme content; the 'glory-hunters', who tune in just in time for the auction; and those who work from home, who spend their well-earned lunch break in the company of experts and presenters who feel (as we're often told) like good friends.

While our show's broad appeal is undeniable – and while the rules of the game are easy to explain in a sentence or two – trying to elucidate exactly what these different demographics enjoy so much is less

straightforward. Perhaps the fact that making a profit on *Bargain Hunt* is genuinely challenging is what appeals the most – if you’ve ever cheered on a team that’s made a £1.50 profit, you’ll know exactly what I mean. Or perhaps it’s the notion that *anyone* is welcome to apply to appear on the programme – fill in just one form and before you know it, you and your housemate could be the stars of the newest *Bargain Hunt* meme (and the proud possessors of some very fine fleeces).

Or maybe it’s the very real drama that can unfold. You see, the 45 minutes shown on television represent several days of filming. First, there’s the ‘buy day’, then there’s the ‘auctioneer chat’ and, finally, the auction itself. A lot can happen in that time; there’s been one marriage proposal, a handful of breakups and even a few births between the antiques fair and the auction . . . you just never know exactly how an episode is going to play out.

But, then again, you do: two teams will buy three items to take to auction in a bid to make a profit. Some will, some won’t. There will be those who listen to their experts and those who ignore their advice entirely. Some will use their allocated buying hour wisely, others will finish with one second left on the clock. The odd person will feel compelled to buy a plough, but most will stick with porcelain and ‘proper’ antiques. As their items go under the hammer, a bold few will shout words of encouragement to the bidders in the saleroom. Most,

however, will mutter a determined: ‘*Come on!*’ as they watch their selections go by. Some teams will make a tidy profit and some will make a mighty loss . . . either way, they could still come out on top.

No matter what, lunchtime each day will start with the words: ‘Hello and welcome to Bargain Hunt’ and will end with a joyous kick.

Long may it continue.

Natasha Raskin Sharp

INTRODUCTION

As a brisk wind circles a vast conference hall, *Bargain Hunt* contestants Katie (Nicholas) and Aisha (Francis) glide between busy aisles in an antiques fair with £300 bulging in their joint purse.

The fair at Detling in Kent has 300 stalls mushrooming over 3,000 square metres. Each stall has tens or hundreds of items on display, with the pair looking for just three that have profit-making potential. And the clock is ticking.

Despite having cash in hand, shopping has never seemed so difficult as the choices arrayed before them are apparently limitless. There are rusty buckets, sets of bed linen and lengths of lace; coins, clothes, carpets and candle holders; flat irons and fire guards; desks and

tables; trays, trunks and tea sets. To one side there are shelves of glass vases in every shade and hue, to the other the glare of polished silver is blinding. For the mechanically minded, serried ranks of clocks, watches, barometers and metronomes might appeal. If bling's your thing, there is row upon row of necklaces, earrings, beads, bracelets and brooches.

Ringin' in their ears is the challenge set by presenter Charlie Ross. Today, this team must select something that's been shaped in a mould. Then there's the 'big buy' on their shopping list, to cost more than £75. All in just one hour, a limit strictly adhered to by the programme makers. This isn't going to be as easy as it looks every day on lunchtime television.

Happily, help is at hand in the shape of Thomas Forrester, an auctioneer and programme expert who has been a regular on *Bargain Hunt* since its inception in 2000. He has enough instinct, knowledge and abundant humour to take the pain out of the process. If they make any unwise choices, it will be left to him to redeem the total with a purchase made from any funds they had left.

An antique is an object from a bygone age, at least a hundred years old according to most definitions. Although this is an antiques fair, the Bargain Hunters aren't restricted to items that are Edwardian or older. They can root out any vintage, classic or retro objects and artefacts that take their fancy. Quirky will even fit the bill

if the price is right. The aim is to make cash when each of their carefully selected pieces goes under the hammer at a future auction. What will today's hot choices be?

A first stop was made to examine a Chinoiserie vase, a European adaptation of Oriental design that's been in and out of favour in Britain since it was first conceived in the mid-eighteenth century. This wasn't an especially aged specimen, nor was it the only one in the show. Katie and Aisha moved on. But something at the next stall caught Thomas's eye. The reclining brass Buddha, with its glass eyes, had definitely been cast, and so fulfilled Charlie's challenge, and its price ticket immediately put it into the big buy bracket.

Thomas used his loupe, the experts' handheld magnifying glass, to scrutinise the sparkling red and green band encircling the Buddha's head. Some of the glass chips were missing, but he felt sure it came from Cambodia and dated from the nineteenth century. While the figure's top hand was artlessly formed, it was nonetheless charming and he felt at auction it might make as much as £150. Katie and Aisha paid £75 for the heavyweight item, securing two of their programme challenges in one item.

Sixteen minutes had passed and one purchase was bagged. But there was still plenty to do and three pairs of eyes were rapidly raking over packed tables and shelves until an old camera caught Katie's eye. She had, Thomas

confirmed, picked up a fascinating piece of social history. Experiments in photography took place throughout the first half of the nineteenth century but only after 1888, when George Eastman's Kodak company produced portable cameras and flexible film to replace cumbersome plates, did most people have the opportunity to try their hand at it. Although this Box Brownie probably dated from the 1930s, the range was ubiquitous for more than sixty years. Its pivotal role was to popularise photography for the masses, yet the price tag was a humble £8. However, when Thomas revealed there was little wriggle room in terms of possible profit, Katie turned her back on it.

As Thomas peeled off to scour a different aisle, Katie spotted another piece of mechanical history, this time an early calculator. It was clunky, like a typewriter, but it still worked. Most vintage calculators functioned via a crank handle, but with ranks of operating buttons, this London-made model from the 1930s, with a £35 price tag, was a bit more advanced than that and had steampunk appeal. At thirty-three minutes, the sale was made and the team had just one item to find, with a princely £190 remaining in their pockets.

It took nearly fifteen minutes to find the last item but, when they saw it, it was love at first sight. The object of their infatuation was a diamond and sapphire ring, set in 18-carat gold. It was, Thomas confirmed, an excellent

choice. Not only did it have evergreen appeal but second-hand rings like this one were a form of recycling, so conformed to the green agenda.

‘The stones have already been mined, the gold has already been dug out of the ground,’ he said. ‘Buying a ring like this one is helping to save the planet’s resources.’

Art Deco in design, it dated from the 1940s. It was perfect in every respect – except for the fact that it cost more than they had left in their fund. Now the team, aware that time was ticking away, united to charm the stallholder into a price reduction that both sides could live with. Her first position of £190 was no good as it left Thomas with nothing with which to purchase his bonus buy item. There was more haggling to be done, until finally £189 was agreed, with a comfortable forty-seven minutes on the clock, leaving Thomas with £1 in his pocket for a bonus buy.

Just as the deal was struck, the rival blue team being led by Chuko Ojiri bundled past at speed. They were running out of time, with several purchases yet to be made, and had to make some decisions, fast. For Katie and Aisha, a well-earned cup of tea awaited them while Thomas went off and shopped for his bonus buy.

Undefeated by the pin money at his disposal, he returned with a ceramic bottle label on a chain

specially made for sherry drinkers, confident he would at least double his money.

After the shopping is over, the next step is to take the haul to an auction. History has changed auction rooms irrevocably, with most starting life years ago selling rundown properties and farming stock. Today, a colossal range goes under the gavel – sometimes great works of art, although there are many more everyday items at pocket money prices.

Auctioneers, hammers and the lofty rostrum can inspire fear among first timers. This book will help to demystify the process, much as the programme does for the contestants. Usually, it's the first time *Bargain Hunt* teams have attended a professional auction – and they've got skin in the game. Did they buy wisely, or was their judgement skewed?

Their financial fate lies in the hands of the buyers at the auction. At the end of it, they will go home with their profits in their pockets – if they have any. If each of the three items they've chosen sells for more than they paid, they are awarded a 'golden gavel', a lapel pin that signifies their luck and antiques acumen. But alas, losses occur with more frequency than golden gavels. If the team loses money, well, it's written off as the titles roll at the end of the programme.

These days, it's not just people in the saleroom on the day that will determine their progress, but those standing by on the phone or on the internet. Sometimes bids are left with auctioneers from those who've viewed the day's lots beforehand but can't make the sale. Although the reach of the auction is extended, new platforms like the internet don't necessarily increase values, although they certainly widen the purchasing pool. Some items have regional appeal that enhances their value. Likewise, some auction rooms are simply less productive than others. It all goes into the mix to make for some nail-biting moments for teams who are left urging sellers on from the sidelines; whooping as the bids pour in or groaning as an ominous saleroom silence descends.

Bargain Hunt has changed since it first appeared on our screens in 2000 with presenter David Dickinson. It's now bookended by a different theme tune and titles and even the rules of the game have been refined since the days when viewers were typically silver-haired retirees.

Today, the programme has pace and adrenalin, and the contestants are as likely to be young fans who as children watched *Bargain Hunt* at the knees of their grandparents.

But some features about this Great British television institution remain the same. The first BH purchase ever made was a 1950s 'Everhot' Art Deco tea set for £34

and it's an item just as likely to attract interest today. Delving into the country's social history through a selection of spellbinding objects is just as captivating as it ever was. And a score that runs into minus three digits, may still be just enough to win.

Catchphrases from the Show

'Buy low, sell high.'

'Make a memory.'

'Now, those have to be cheap as chips.'

'A bobby dazzler.'

'Double bubble.'

'Let's go Bargain Hunting!'

'Join us for some more Bargain Hunting Yes?
Yes!' (Kick)

'What's your favourite item?'

'What will make the biggest profit?'

'Not a word to the blues/reds . . .'



1

CERAMICS

Stacked on the shelves of a Devon antiques emporium were plates, cups and saucers that caught the eye of one contestant for their aching familiarity.

This was a part-set of Homemaker, a black-and-white design sold in quantity by Woolworths from the 1950s for two decades. The giant retail chain's branches once held ranks of plates and bowls, flan dishes and soup tureens, coffee pots and cruets, all distinguished by a creamy background decorated with inky cartoon drawings of household items. The cups alone were entirely black, reflecting the limitations in the printing processes of the era. It was monochrome crockery like this *Bargain Hunt* challenger saw at every mealtime as a child.

The distinctive design – branded 'iconic' by *Bargain Hunt* expert Stephanie Connell – was created by art student Enid Seeney, who lived and worked in the Potteries. A Woolworth's stock buyer discovered it on a trip to

Staffordshire and agreed to give the avant-garde pattern a trial run. Made from economical earthenware by Ridgway Potteries, it offered householders the opportunity to quickly and cheaply replace broken items. There were several different teapot designs, selling for between ten shillings and fifteen shillings (that's fifty pence and seventy-five pence today). Once mundane and now highly collectible, a teapot might command £200 at a sale today.

In this moment of nostalgia for the *Bargain Hunt* buyer, she parted with £35 for the incomplete tea set and it sold at the subsequent auction for £50, yielding a £15 profit, a testament to the enduring power of good design.

Since the dawn of time, mankind has fashioned clay cups and plates from natural elements. And almost since then, form as well as function has been a consideration. Ceramics is a catch-all phrase to describe items that are shaped, decorated, glazed and fired. Porcelain is part of the ceramics family, developed in China where a blend of white kaolin clay mixed with crushed stone could be fired at high temperatures to produce a product that was smooth and lustrous.

Using first the Silk Road through Asia and then fleets of junks, China was the world's foremost trading nation for many centuries, with porcelain among its major exports.

Chinese porcelain was highly sought after by Europeans, particularly the signature blue-and-white variety. At the time, the domestic choice was technically limited and far less elegant. The Delftware tin-glazed option was only available in Britain from the sixteenth century, after the process of mixing lead and tin into a glaze to form a white background was imported from the Middle East.

With Chinese merchants demanding payment in either silver or gold, Oriental pots were only purchased by the very rich. France's Louis XIV had all the silver at Versailles melted down to finance the import of porcelain, while Augustus the Strong, the Elector of Saxony, was so spellbound by it that he described himself as having 'porcelain fever'.

For centuries, no one in Europe recognised the vital role that kaolin clay played in making the Chinese hard-paste porcelain that inspired such a frenzy. Finally, it was in August the Strong's royal factory at Meissen, near Dresden, that a series of experiments led to the firing of Europe's first comparable white porcelain, in 1708.

Of course, the recipe didn't stay a secret and soon the French and British were producing a substitute of their own.

A century after the breakthrough at Meissen, British manufacturers took the concept in a different direction

with bone china. Although it was translucent, it was stronger than hard-paste porcelain, despite a lower firing temperature.

Still, the lure of Chinese pottery didn't abate. The last half of the nineteenth century saw British fashionable society in the grip of 'Chinamania', a desire to own Chinese porcelain, despite the abundant alternatives available at home, something for which they were widely mocked in the press at the time.

There are plenty of Chinese-style ceramics available at antiques fairs today, which may be originals, copies or even outright fakes. The experienced eye of *Bargain Hunt* expert Ben Cooper is an asset for any team who might be bewitched by Chinoiserie.

When he isn't leading *Bargain Hunt* teams into battle, Ben sometimes finds himself working as an authenticator of Chinese ceramics at major antiques fairs.

'Generally, we expect to see British ceramics through history bear marks, as a way to identify the skill of the makers. With Chinese porcelain that isn't the case. Imperial porcelain might have blue rings on the bottom, or auspicious characters.'

Presented with a piece, experts like Ben will pick it up to scrutinise the shape, the decoration, the porcelain body and the colours, to determine whether it is genuine.

‘With anyone who has a specialism, it becomes second nature,’ he explains.

Chinese ceramics reached something of a high-water mark in the reign of Emperor Kangxi (1662–1722) and, in the nineteenth century, identical work was produced because he was so revered. So, to distinguish a replica from the real thing is no mean feat.

‘The Chinese have been copying their historic porcelains for years,’ says Bargain Hunt’s Jonathan Pratt. ‘Some suggest it is flattery, not forgery. However, there is a massive industry in China making copies of older pieces. They make their way to auction and fool many.’

But a number of original and rare Chinese pieces do turn up in sheds and lofts, so might you have a rare piece of Chinese artwork tucked away at home? The short answer is, yes.

‘The British had a strong presence in China during the nineteenth century when there were two “Opium Wars” followed by a Chinese rebellion against foreign powers,’ Jonathan, better known as JP, explains.

During these times, the soldiers involved collected small items and brought them home. Larger pieces of porcelain from looted palaces were also exported back. When these crop up at auctions today they cause a ripple of excitement that extends across the globe, with Chinese buyers keen to repatriate items.

Tales from the Auction House

Two plates retrieved from a suitcase under a bed in 2021 were sold by Caroline Hawley for £146,000. Marks on the plates led her to believe they were linked to a Qing dynasty emperor who ruled between 1722 and 1735. The five-clawed dragon image indicates the plates would have been made for the Imperial household. A buyer from the UK put in the winning bid.

Given its compelling history, it's hard not to view Chinese porcelain without unfettered admiration. An early love for antiques was cemented for *Bargain Hunt* expert Gary Pe when, as a young man, he bought a terracotta urn with its handles held in the teeth of sculpted beasts. Unmistakably Chinese, it had been unearthed in the Philippines, where he was brought up. There had been a busy trade route between the Philippines and China for centuries and, to prove it, here was a piece of Late Song or Early Ming pottery found on one of the islands. Admittedly, its glaze was partially gone but it was something that had likely been in existence since at least the fifteenth century, many decades before Europeans could produce porcelain for themselves. It was the first object he paid money for

and he has kept it for more than forty years and across three continents.

In parallel to the fascination for Chinese artefacts came Japonism. Despite its rich cultural and economic life, Japan effectively existed in isolation until the arrival of an American fleet in 1853, which compelled the country's reluctant inhabitants to trade more briskly with the West. Afterwards, pottery makers catered both for export and internal markets, with imagery from Shinto, the dominant faith, appearing on numerous articles made for domestic buyers.

Perhaps more significantly still, the West discovered kintsugi, or golden joinery, an unusual feature of Japanese artefacts in which repairs to major pieces shine out, when in the West they are masked. Broken pieces were traditionally glued, and the joins richly painted with gold, silver or platinum powders before being lacquered. The bold lines that resulted spoke of the artefact's journey, and celebrated an inherent joy of imperfection. It left people in the West, bound to the idea of flawlessness, scratching their heads.

Oriental porcelain aside, Britain's home-produced merchandise also has a sterling band of supporters, with Worcester being the most widely collected eighteenth-century ceramic. The key period is the output of the Worcester factory in the first thirty-two years of its

existence. It's known as the First Period, or the Dr Wall period, for the name of one of the company's original partners. (Indeed, it didn't officially become known as the Royal Worcester Porcelain Company until 1862.)

Initially, it was strongly associated with tableware and took its inspiration from Chinese and Japanese porcelain. But decorative innovations came in thick and fast, with floral, rococo and moulded decorations coming to the fore. Today, people might collect by patterns, type of decoration or date. When a rarely seen example is unveiled it brings enthusiasts to auction, explains JP.

'As a child, I collected Panini football stickers and there were always some missing that everybody wanted,' says JP. 'Early pieces of Worcester are like that, particularly those in rare shapes. When they turn up they make big money – but they don't turn up very often.'

Philip Serrell began his passion for Royal Worcester when he visited a museum as a child.

'When people look around museums at porcelain like this, they have to appreciate that, back in the middle of the eighteenth century when the first Royal Worcester pieces were made, it might have taken two days to reach London by coach, there was a sewer running down the main street and life expectancy was probably about forty years of age. Yet the men, women and children

who worked in the ceramics factories were producing beautiful things. How did they do that?’

Royal Worcester and Royal Derby are the country’s oldest porcelain makers. As people lose faith in currency, they are investing in antiques like Royal Worcester, explains Philip, and they get pleasure from the items they buy. He recalls a saying used by his first boss to help govern any investment: ‘Let your eyes be your guide and your pocket be your judge.’ ‘It means: don’t buy because everyone else is buying. Buy it because you like it, and because you can afford it,’ he explains.

And, he says, it’s still possible to purchase something made in the eighteenth century, perhaps in a characteristic blue-and-white pattern, for about £50. These days ‘old’ doesn’t always equate to ‘most valuable’. Today, the big money goes to the porcelain hand-painted in the early twentieth century by factory workers who have become acknowledged artists.

Harry Davis is a particular favourite for Philip, who insists: ‘You can’t find a better twentieth-century painter in my book.’

Best Buy



In 2006, Philip Serrell went to the top of the *Bargain Hunt* bonus buy charts after he seized on a Royal Worcester mini-masterpiece. The vase, with a painted scene of sheep on its side signed by Harry Davis, could fit into the palm of his hand. Davis had begun work as an apprentice for Royal Worcester in 1898, aged just thirteen. Two years later, the company permitted its artists to add a moniker to their paintings, so much of Harry's work, from the turn of the century until his retirement in 1969, aged eighty-three, can now be distinguished. When Philip realised the vase was in pristine condition, he knew he was on to a winner.

Bought £170 Sold £780 Profit £610