

RICHARD SCOTT ANTIQUES

50 Years of Cracks and Chips

by Celia Ward

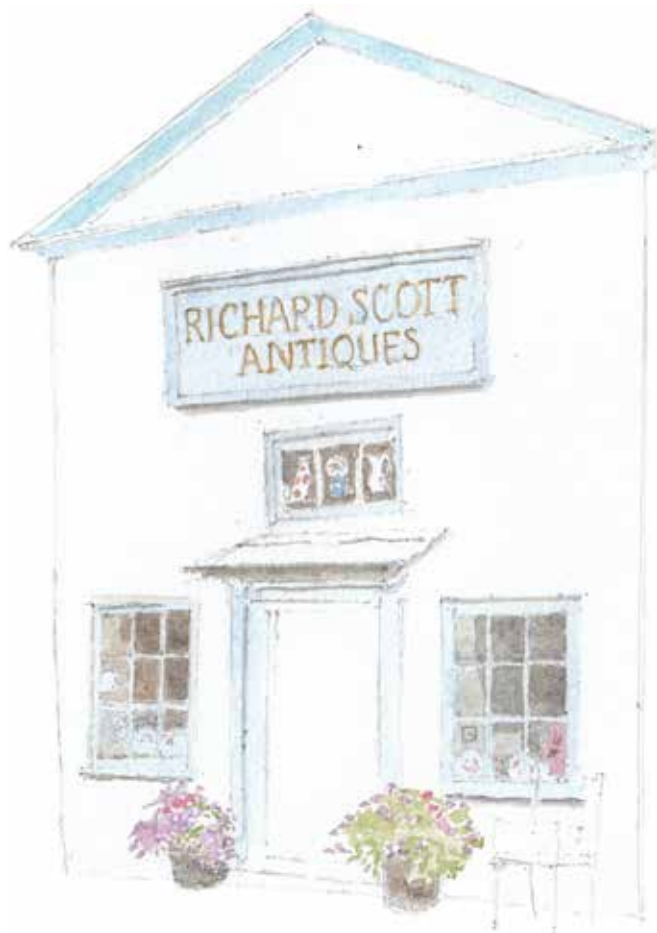




Jennie McGregor came to work at the shop in 2021, after 12 years as facilities co-ordinator at an engineering company. Her love of antiques began as a child. Brought up in an antique-dealing family, she loved sorting through boxes from house clearances, fascinated by small treasures that were once part of people's lives.



Richard Scott started the shop in 1973 after 12 years as a Conservation Officer at the V&A. He was given this job after rescuing a dying cat caught in the brambles on the Berkshire Downs. The cat happened to belong to the head of the Conservation Department at the V&A.



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Defying the holiday traffic and vast farm vehicles labouring up nearby Letheringsett hill, exists an altogether other world. Step past the old wooden chair on the pavement, through the door of the miniature pedimented façade, and one is in a space of stillness, infinitely various design, fragility, and unapologetic charm. At first one is bemused by the smallness of a shop that yet conveys lavishness, a possibility even of magic. Frayed Eastern carpets suggest a patrician richness in contrast with the humble construction of the premises. The delicacy of individual pieces of glass and china contrasts with the sheer amount of stock arrayed in cabinets, on furniture, on walls, and into the recesses of the shop.

Little oddities strike the eye — a chameleon made from tin cans, hanging by its tail from an electric cable, a collecting box for the relief of distressed antique dealers. Oriental deities stand by Christian martyrs. Occasional contemporary paintings punctuate plates decorated with floral patterns from ages that had less compunction about prettiness. The shop extends in a series of rooms, like mini railway carriages. From the china and glass reflecting light from the street windows, one is led through to a narrow connecting space where Jennie sits beneath a shelf of curiosities, by a case of old jewellery. By the counter hangs a photo of the shop's proprietor in a tunic made from old sacks, and wearing a large fringed lampshade on his head, while opposite, by a sink curtained with worn embroidered cloth, the man himself sits with his dog, Roxi, ever ready to engage customers, dispense tea, or consider the quirks and vacuities of human pretension.

Below and opposite
Illustrations and texts from Victorian punchbowl

I maintain it Sir
the Law is equally
open to the poor
as to the Rich



So is the London
Tavern, if you
have money to
pay for it

I hardly know
Doctor what is the
matter with me —
I eat well, I drink
well, and in Fact
I sleep well



Very bad Symptoms,
I'll give you something
shall take away all that



The central section of the shop contains a lighted display of china expressing everything from elegant usefulness to bourgeois exuberance. A tall cabinet in the middle houses more museum-style antiques, while the drawers of a plan chest reveal chequerboard troves of Delft tiles. The end room is a *cabinet destampes* with a chair to sit on (though should one sit on a chair that looks suspiciously like a piece of still life?), a collection of old art books, and piles of unassorted prints.

China was made to memorialise coronations, battles won, revolutions fought, and visits to seaside towns. But its delicate forms are also the voice of dissent, irreverence and humour. The most intimate moments in life necessitate the accompaniment of china or glass, for the sharing of love, revealing of secrets, making of plots, construction of plans.



Every inch of the shop is a celebration of china, its beauty perceived more keenly when placed next to glass, silver, and books of Old Master drawings, or when providing homes for flowers from the garden and shells from the beach. Many pieces are cracked, linking high life to £1 discoveries, and us to centuries past, carrying memories of love and loss, reminding us life wasn't always as it is today.

While china rarities retain over centuries their untouched perfection, preserved on high shelves or cloistered within glass cabinets, most pieces enter the riskier arena of everyday life.



They survive accidents, suffer mending and washing, show their age, and change their purpose, humbled by life's vicissitudes. Cracked and two hundred years old, the hand-painted saucer becomes home to garlic and ginger by the cooker.

Myriad unknown hands (many china decorators were female, some as young as 12) are honoured anonymously in Richard's tiny handwritten labels, declaring approximate date of manufacture, details of condition, and price. In an age of barcodes and QR information, these labels are witness to a more humane culture.



A Little History

Born in his grandparents' rambling house near Windsor, Richard was educated at Gordonstoun. His father, Anthony Scott, was a composer, and Richard's cultural interests were always wide. While a teenager he became friends with the composer Gerald Finzi and his painter wife, Joy, revelling in the beauty of their house. Here he encountered a world of musicians and artists. Joy sculpted Richard's head in the studio attic of their house. Immersed in the Finzi's library, he discovered the work of Stanley Spencer. Joy's friend, Jim Ede, later commissioned Richard to restore a bowl by Lucie Rie, and bought an etching by him which hung in Kettle's Yard until Ede's death.

Richard remembers Ede living in the gallery, sleeping in a small plain bed, while his wife slept upstairs, communicating with her husband through a floorboard that lifted up and down. Kettle's Yard made a deep impression on him, becoming in some ways a model for his shop, where everything, including people in the shop, worked together to form a place of beauty and surprise.





After school Richard spent three years in the army in what was then Malaya, returning to the County Art School in Oxford where he fell in love with the Ashmolean Museum, marvelling at being able to handle drawings by Raphael and Michelangelo.

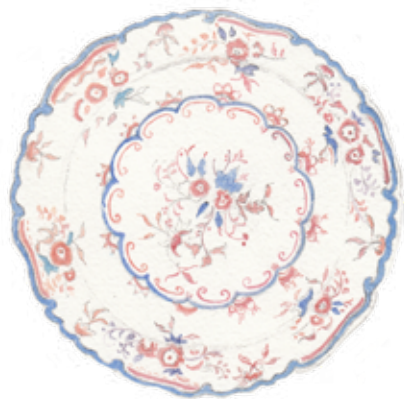
Richard opened the shop (formerly a tobacconist's and sweet shop) after his twelve years at the V&A. He and his young family moved out of London to rent an old cottage in nearby Bodham. It had one cold tap, a kitchen range, and an outside lavatory. The family had baths in front of the kitchen range each Friday. To make ends meet, Richard worked on a neighbouring farm.



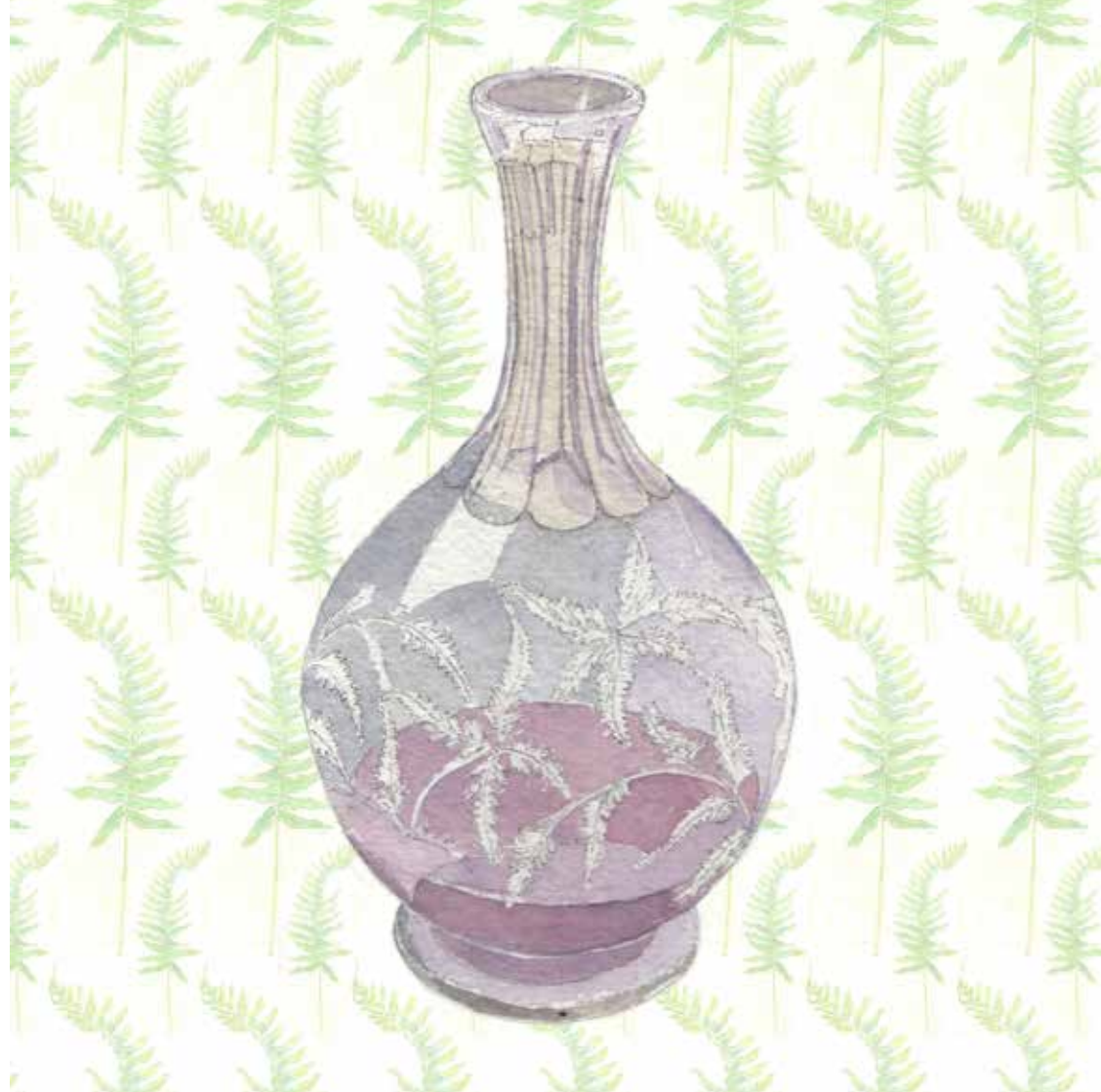
At first he had little money to stock the shop. Joy Finzi came and helped, staying with Richard's family, where she slept on the bottom bunk in Richard's son Luke's tiny bedroom. She helped paint walls and organise the running of the business. Later Mary McCarthy stencilled the façade to look like Dutch tiles.

Although Richard pioneered 'invisible restoration' while working in the Conservation Department at the V&A, he now treasures traditional brass rivet repairs. He polishes the rivets on broken plates, glorying in the care with which past generations mended precious pieces. He remembers two Polish riveters, working in London during the 1960s, who took in work for Harrods. Back at home he has a china repair workshop in his garden, overflowing with broken fragments that sometime will be mended.





Though the essence of the shop has remained constant for over 50 years, it is always changing. The shop bears the imprint of all who have worked there, each with their different interests, Richard providing space for them to sell their own china and antiques. The shop alters not only as things get sold, but daily as pieces are shifted around. Amid the china, dried leaves come and go, along with berries in glasses, and 18th century cups planted with snowdrops and narcissi. After 50 years it is still transforming and the traffic through the door just keeps coming. Richard Scott Antiques, with its chipped and cracked fine china, continues to flourish.







Acknowledgements

I was helped with the writing in this booklet by my husband, James Ramsay, who has enjoyed rambling discussions and theological debates with Richard over many years. The historical details were gleaned from Richard and Jennie during afternoons spent talking in the shop while customers came and went. China and Delft tiles were lent to me to draw, and on return I borrowed more. The fragments illustrated below, which also feature in the back endpaper, were of a plate I carelessly dropped in the shop. Nick Bundock (whose exhibition *Fragments* in 2018 was one of the highlights of the shop's life) loaned me other beautiful pieces, while eloquently introducing me to the history of European china. However, it was my late parents, John and Alison Ward, who first provided me with examples to draw, and first opened my eyes to the magic of 18th- and 19th-century English china, mostly cracked. I thank them all for enriching my life.

All illustrations are in watercolour, and I made the patterns from my paintings.

Celia Ward
February 2023



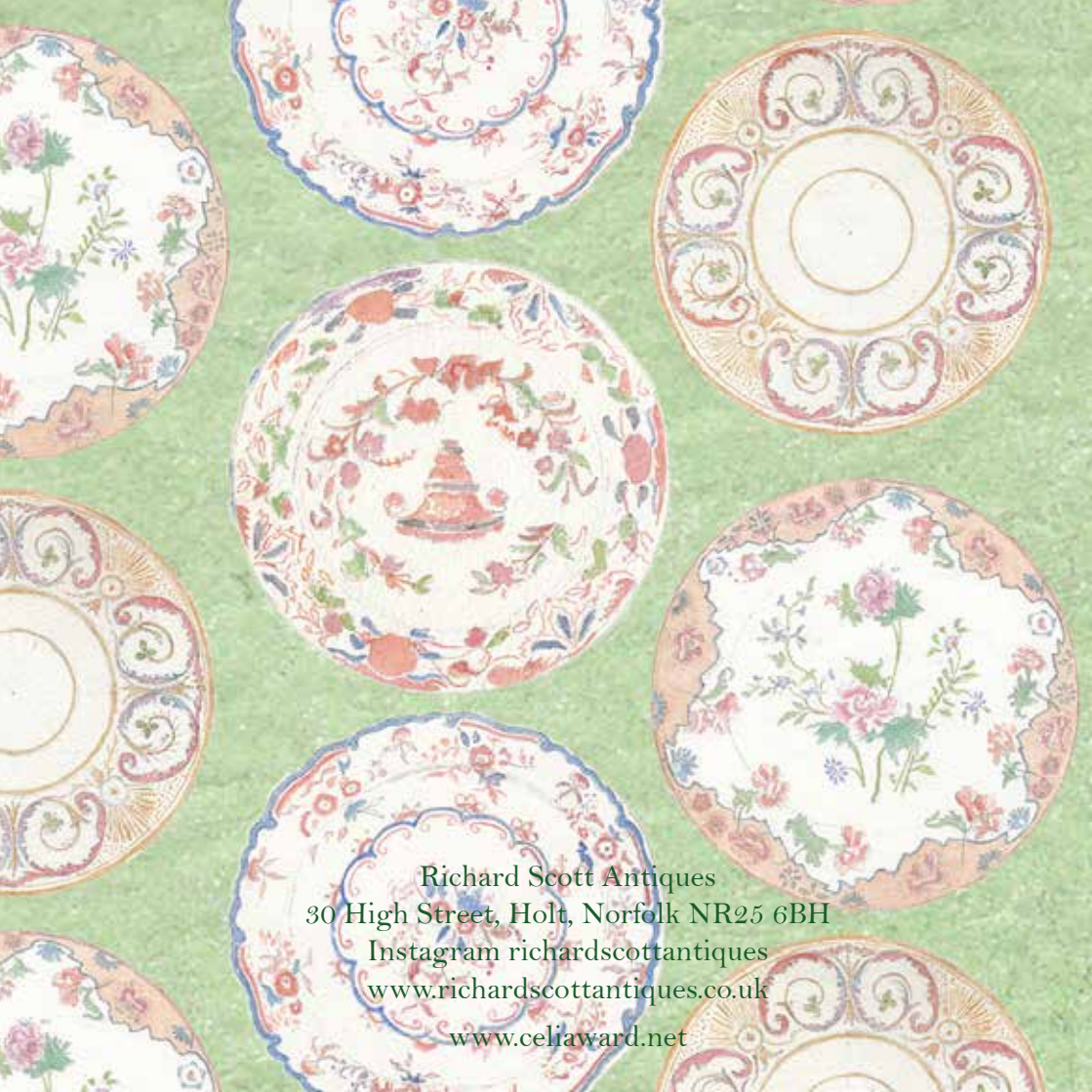


Richard would like to thank all those,
too numerous to name,
who worked in the shop over the last 50 years.
They contributed so much to its life.









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