



Born to bid

Will Farmer, who is almost literally a life-long fan of the antiques world, has indulged in his love of all things auctioned both on the TV screen and in his thriving business

From the tender age of six months, Will Farmer would often be snugly tucked up in his pram under an auctioneer's rostrum while his mother indulged in her passion for antiques – and, she claimed, he would only cry when they left the auction house, writes Natalie Prior.

With such a positive early introduction into the world of antiques it was, perhaps, inevitable that Will, who is director of Fieldings Auctioneers in Stourbridge and a long-standing expert on the *Antiques Roadshow*, would embark on his own love affair with all things collectable.

Will, who is originally from Bakewell in Derbyshire, said: "My mum and my maternal grandmother were huge antique-aholics. Every Bank Holiday or school holiday my mum, gran and I would trawl antique shops, fairs and auctions looking for treasures."

By the age of six, Will was using his pocket money to buy little silver pieces and at ten he was collecting toys and Steiff bears. In 1984, aged 12, he had discovered his true passion for art deco and 20th century ceramics and had his own stall at an antiques fair. Two years later, at 14, he was sneaking out of lessons to sell and bid at auctions.



Will Farmer

While studying for his degree in silversmithing, jewellery and fine art history at the Birmingham School of Jewellery, Will bought and sold antiques to pay his way. After college he formed his own company dealing in 20th century furniture.

Will said: "My dad said I had the best collection but the worst stock as I kept the good stuff for myself!"

In 1999, he joined the Birmingham auction house Weller and Dufty as head of fine art and antiques but left in 2001 to set up his own auction

house, Fieldings Auctioneers, with business partner Nick Davies.

Will said: "We were based in Market Street in a beautiful shop but we had no sale room so we used to sleep overnight in Hagley Village Hall before our auctions so we weren't broken into!"

Since moving to Mill Race Lane, the antiques and fine art specialists have become an established auction house.

Will said: "I adore Stourbridge and it's been brilliant for us – people really took us to their hearts. We now have 24 staff so Fieldings has become quite a large beast."

The auction house holds 16 sales a year and everything is meticulously planned.

Will said: "We are known for that and our reputation means people want to use us. We treat the auction like it's a retail experience – we use fresh cut flowers and set up the lots as rooms so people can see how items look together."

Each member of the team has a different specialism and Will's is 20th century decorative arts and glass. As an internationally known expert in the work of English ceramic artist Clarice Cliff, he has jetted all over the world including being invited to value an outstanding collection in New York.



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He said: “A brief email turned into two transatlantic trips and many hours with some of the best examples of her work. We ended up buying 180 pieces which were air freighted back.”

Another memorable find came from an email enquiry with a picture of a decorative plate attached. Will said: “The owner had kept the plate, which had belonged to her grandmother, in the front porch of her house. It turned out to be a 1930s May Avenue charger, an 18-inch ceramic plate with an abstract pattern by Clarice Cliff, which eventually sold for £20-£25k. The owner was gobsmacked as it was a life-changing sum.”

In 2004 Will, who had already appeared on *Flog It*, was spotted by a producer of the *Antiques Roadshow* and invited to join the team. He recently filmed his 13th series on the show, which marks its 40th anniversary this year. He said: “I feel like I’ve grown with the programme and I’m now a regular as one of the senior specialists. Filming takes me all over the country.”

Will was close to home last month as the team descended on the Black Country Living Museum.

He said: “We film two episodes at each location and we have to pitch to the producer why our item should be filmed. Over the years

the ethos of the show has changed. We tend to focus on funny or heart-warming stories rather than high value items. The show is as much about relationships and families as it is about antiques.”

Will, who lives in Birmingham with his partner, would like to follow in the footsteps of *Antiques Roadshow* stalwart Henry Sandon. He said: “I hope to carry on as long as the show will have me. Henry has been doing the roadshow for 40 years and is 84 so I hope to be there as long as him.”

In his downtime, Will still enjoys collecting and likes to hunt in junk or antique shops. His main passions are art deco, Poole Pottery and 20th century glass from the UK and Scandinavia.

For auction first-timers, Will offers some sound advice: “Anyone new to an auction can feel intimidated but don’t be shy. We have lots of staff on hand to offer advice. If you love an item ask the auctioneer for more information as they have insider knowledge which can be very useful. Finally, you should always set a limit and stick to it. An auction is very exciting and it’s easy to get carried away.”

W: fieldingsauctioneers.co.uk.



Clarice Cliff