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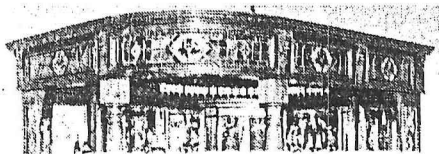
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**"ALWAYS A GREAT SELECTION OF
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pewter donor speaks out on museum policy

DEAR SIR,

Peter Hornsby's article in *Gazette* No 1241 (June 8) rightly points out the dilemma that faces the private collector when he seeks to defend for the national heritage an outstanding collection to which he has devoted a lifetime and a considerable amount of money.

He also rightly points out that had it not been for the vision of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, my own collection of British pewter would have left for Colonial Williamsburg in the States, never to return.

Where he seems to err, however, is in suggesting that the essential problem is museum finance. In my case there was no question of any sale or tax break. I was aware of the limited pockets of the National Museums of Scotland, so it did not even cross my mind to seek the natural home of an Edinburgh museum.

I offered the collection to the University of Edinburgh, who called in as their technical advisor Mark Jones, Director of the National Museums of Scotland who opined on a collection he had never seen and rejected an invitation to view as quite unnecessary.

An assistant later made a semi-private visit, and finally three months of silence were broken by the offer to put the

collection into store in remote Granton provided I funded a Chair of Pewter for more than £500,000.

It will come as no surprise that at this point my offer to the university was withdrawn, nor that an approach to the Burrell Collection suggested by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers fell on barren ground (we had not realised this museum also formed part of the NMS network).

The essential problem, in short, is the attempt of those who run our museums to dictate terms to any who challenge their universal competence, and their own preferences.

This is a spirit totally foreign to the Metropolitan Museum of New York and Colonial Williamsburg.

They all are enthusiasts and willing to learn. Here our servants have become our masters. Their inclinations define what is our national heritage. This is the real problem that Peter Hornsby misses - perhaps out of discretion.

All of this has been widely aired on television and in the press north of the border. I feel, however, that your readers should be aware of the real issues.

Alex Neish,
Edinburgh

Boilerhouse blues

DEAR SIR,

I would be interested to know if the directors, editors and readers of the *Gazette* applaud or are appalled by the proposed new Boilerhouse extension to the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Will this new explosion be a magnet to attract people to the V&A and to London or just another eyesore we have to endure for the sake of the pomposity of architects?

Elizabeth J. Keeble,
The Elizabethan Antiques,
Fareham, Hampshire

Mrs Diggle's pies

DEAR SIR,

I was very interested to read in *Gazette* No 1239 (May 25) about auction rooms serving food. Long ago, when you could still buy a grandfather clock for under £100 and before Sotheby's and Phillips had salerooms in Chester, there was a firm called Swettenhams, where trade and public flocked, not only for bargains but for the food.

As the auctioneer sold the last few lots of the morning session and the smell of hot pies came drifting across the saleroom a queue started to form and already people from outside started to come in because word had got around. I wouldn't have wanted to own those last few lots: little attention was paid to them.

As a bachelor, whenever I held a dinner party I always got Mrs Diggle (the creator of those marvellous foods) to make me a chicken and mushroom pie or something similar. So many people thought I'd made it all... Sorry Mrs Diggle, and thank you.

Keith Appleby,
Farmhouse Antiques, Chester

All is not lost

DEAR SIR,

On the Monday of the last Newark fair I had an appointment to keep. I looked at my watch to find to my horror that it was no longer on my wrist; clearly the strap had broken.

Insurance companies, of course, require one to report the loss, so with heavy heart I went to the organiser's office and asked for a lost property form. The person behind the desk asked me to describe the watch. "An Omega Constellation Chronograph Automatic," I replied. "Would it be this?" he asked, holding my watch aloft.

I was amazed. May I take this opportunity to thank the person who kindly handed in my watch. Sadly he or she left no name or address.

Clearly all is not lost.

Barrie Hawtin,
Ipswich,
Suffolk

Something lost...

DEAR SIR,

I apologise to the lady from Gibraltar who left a message on my answerphone in response to my advertisement in the *Gazette* on May 11. The telephone number she left was lost.

If she writes to me I promise I will respond.

Ian C. Roberts,
Rycfield House Antiques,
Skipton Road,
Bradley BD20 9EF

...something gained

DEAR SIR,

Thank you for recounting the experiences of Peter Christie (*Gazette* No 1240, June 1): my security has improved. In future I will never leave an open padlock unattended.

Dennis Woodman,
Kew, Surrey

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