

A GRAND day out

The Antiques Roadshow is coming to Nymans as part of its 40th anniversary series. Brighton-raised furniture expert Lennox Cato gives DUNCAN HALL the inside story on the BBC show's popularity

IT WAS in his former hometown of Brighton where the *Antiques Roadshow's* furniture expert Lennox Cato learned his skills.

Having run his own dealership in Edenbridge, Kent, for the past 20 years he is looking forward to his Sussex return. "I'm quietly hoping the weather will be on our side," he says. "The great thing about the team is the whole camaraderie – we are all in it together. It's like going to a party and suddenly everyone is your best friend! We start about 8.30am and it's full-on. We have to be as bright and sharp and informative to each and every visitor as that is why we are here."

Lennox joined the team 13 years ago, having worked in the antiques trade since 1978 when he set up Lennox Antiques in Brighton's Lanes. His adoptive father was Brighton antiques dealer Dicky Compton. "As a kid I knew if I had money in my pocket I had to increase it by £5 or £10 to be up on the week," he says. "It makes you think on your feet." He still enjoys receiving money for an item he picked out. "You can't get too big-headed though as someone will bring you back down to earth!"

As a youngster his desire to learn gave him an edge. "A lot of people made a lot of money while not having a clue about what they had bought or sold," he says. "I started listening and going with market forces. It is a different business now – you have to be a lawyer and an accountant, there are so many variables you have to be aware of." The rise of the fake in the 1970s and 1980s causes headaches, adding detective work to the list of necessary qualifications. "When everything was booming people were sawing the legs off items and replacing them with square or round ones, adapting a piece of furniture into another piece. Forty years later, a lot of those fakes look genuine." He is a member of the British Antique Dealers' Association, to offer customers extra reassurance – especially as

the internet impacts the trade. "Everybody is now an expert," he says. "Our business is very personalised – if a customer begins to trust me they will then buy regardless, but at first it's about baby steps. I can tell a customer an item is rare, and they can look it up on the internet and see it everywhere. You have to talk them through to make them realise how rare it really is."

Perhaps it is that personal touch which has made the *Antiques Roadshow* a hit for four decades. "People from Switzerland, Belgium and Germany watch how we do it but when they try to copy it somehow it doesn't work," says Lennox. "*Antiques Roadshow* is educational and informative, it doesn't play games with people. We have a specialist imparting their knowledge, but it comes through the filter of the back story of the owner."

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Although each segment ends with a valuation Lennox feels the story is the core of the programme – even when a piece turns out to have no monetary value Lennox is keen to remind guests that each piece has its own sentimental worth. At Lulworth Castle in 2011 Lennox identified an 18th century Cuban mahogany apothecary desk worth £200,000, which at the time broke the record for the most valuable piece of furniture on the programme.

Most of the time the experts have no idea what is coming – and it can be a surprise to the visitors when they are told what they hold in their hands, as his colleague Henry Sandon discovered in Wales. "A lady and her daughter had brought a ceramic dish," says Lennox. "The girl said her nan had given it to her, but she didn't really like it, so she had given it to her mum." When Henry valued the piece as between £4,000 and £5,000 the young girl tried to take it back. "Unfortunately there wasn't a camera there," he laughs. ♦



Antiques Roadshow presenter Fiona Bruce who will be presiding over the show at Nymans

GOOD TO KNOW

The *Antiques Roadshow* comes to Nymans, in Handcross near Haywards Heath, on Thursday 8 June as part of its 40th anniversary series. Doors open at 9.30am and close at 4.30pm. There will be a free park and ride service from Crawley Town Football Club's car park in Winfield Way, Broadfield, on the day. Entry to the *Antiques Roadshow* is free, with no pre-booking required, although anyone with an item with an unusual story, or large pieces of furniture should contact the programme in advance through the website at www.bbc.co.uk/antiquesroadshow, by emailing antiques.roadshow@bbc.co.uk or writing to Antiques Roadshow, BBC, Whiteladies Road, Bristol BS8 2LR.

Photo by Jeff Overs

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Lennox Cato has been a
resident furniture expert
with the *Antiques
Roadshow* for 13 years

