



East Hoathly & District Preservation Society

Without Reserve

Presented by Janie Ramsey

Fri 8th September 2017

Hurricane Irma was giving the Gulf of Mexico a severe lashing; a rain storm over Sussex was doing its best to emulate it. Committee members, who turned up early to set up the village hall for the evening's talk, were wondering if anybody was brave (or silly) enough to venture out to attend. Fortunately, a good turnout ensued to hear Janie Ramsey deliver a wonderful and amusing talk about her time in the antiques trade and some of the events that took place at Sotheby's, where she was a director for ten years.

She hadn't intended on becoming an antiques dealer, as the original plan in 1975 was to set up a book shop with her partner in Tunbridge Wells. Between acquiring the premises and opening for business, it had morphed into an antiques shop, something that she really came to love. It was a continuous learning curve of all the items that came her way and the development of very keen observational skills and an ability to quickly assess people and their intentions. There were both good and bad sides to the business. Trust was very important as over 80% of the business was dealer to dealer, either directly in the shop or at fairs or via 'runners', so items would be exchanged and the financial deals settled at a later stage, sometimes after the original purchase had already been sold on. Those who reneged on a deal would soon find to their cost that word had gone round like wildfire and that could put them out of business. Theft and trickery was a problem too that afflicted shops and home owners alike, the latter being subjected to cold calling 'knockers'. The 'ringing' that took place at auction houses defrauded both the auctioneer and the seller, although that's been overcome by those houses who require all bidders to submit bank details prior to each sale.

Come 1990, Janie had the opportunity to join Sotheby's in Bond St. and that opened up a whole new world of items bought and sold by the rich and famous. She related tales of how the behaviour and attitude of those people varied so much, with some being reviled by their exploits and others praised for their openhearted kindness. True haggling over items didn't happen in the rarefied atmospheres of these locations, something that she did miss at times.

Rising to director in 1998 she would oversee the dressing of galleries for important sales, such as the Versace collection from Lake Como and the Duchess of Windor's collection. The sales rooms had a number of moving walls, which make it far easier to portray a particular setting for the items. The organisation of preview events was a challenge, particularly when royal visitors were involved; even those occasions were subject to mishaps that wouldn't be out of place in a Laurel & Hardy sketch.

In 2008, Janie retired from full time work at Sotheby's but continues in a consulting role. She gives a number of talks about the world of antiques and given the enthusiastic response to this one, we'll be certainly looking forward to another such occasion.