

## Collecting Staffordshire figures

*By Marion Short*

*How do you know whether it is old, or a reproduction? This is the question that I am frequently asked by people fascinated by Staffordshire figures and animals and who would like to collect but are frightened of being sold, a reproduction instead of the real thing, by an unscrupulous dealer.*

*I tell them that it is by continuously handling and by comparing old with new and by noting the differences (and there are*

*auctions and looking at items for sale. Ask the auctioneer questions, then feel the weight, look at the glaze, the crazing and the modelling. Buy a reproduction piece from a retailer of modern china and compare the differences; eventually your eye will get tuned in. If a piece is rare don't worry too much about the odd chip and hairline crack, but make sure that you take a note of any restoration. Once again ask the auctioneer if, to their knowledge,*



*Tom King and Dick Turpin*

*many), that they will eventually be able to tell, as I can now, the genuine from the fake from the other side of the room.*

*I suggest that skills of this sort can be developed by, for example, going to view at*

*a piece has been restored. Obviously, the price should be cheaper if these defects are present but it is sometimes necessary to have such pieces in a collection.*

*Staffordshire collecting is an absorbing*

hobby, and figures can be collected according to individual interests and means. For example, there are many theatrical figures and groups, as well as politicians, religious subjects, royalty and, of course, animals. With such potential available it should be possible to develop a thematic collection.



Walton Sheep

Animal subjects are particular favourite and so we have sheep, cow, horse and dog collections (all very popular) and it is possible to have many variations within the chosen subject. The costs vary according to age and rarity and sometimes with the location in which the piece was bought. A Walton sheep with a signature within the cartouche on the back is going to be much more expensive than a more common theatrical piece, for example Garrick as Richard III.

There are many excellent reference books written on this subject which are well illustrated and invaluable to both the beginner and the expert.

The best known of these is the book *Staffordshire Portrait Figures* by PD Gordon-Pugh which covers the Victorian period from 1837-1900.

There were however, a considerable number of potters working very prolifically from around 1750 onwards, for example, the Wood family, Neale and Co, Pratt, and Larkin and Poole. In the early 1800's we have Obadiah Sherrat, Charles Tittensor and John Walton and examples of work by any of these potters will grace any collection of worth. You will find the aforementioned in books such as *English Pottery and Porcelain* by Geoffrey Wills, *Staffordshire Figures* by John Hall and *Staffordshire Pottery The Tribal Art of England* by Anthony Oliver.

Another good source of reference is, of course, museums. The British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London are well worth a visit. There is also the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge, Brighton Museum and, of course, at the centre of the industry, the museum in Stoke-on-Trent. Not so obvious, but affording great pleasure would be a trip to the Theatre Museum at Covent Garden which has a very comprehensive Staffordshire collection of actors and actresses.

And this is, of course, what makes portrait figures such a fascinating subject; it is the social scene of the time in which they were made. No other country has such a comprehensive record in pottery of the interests and attitudes of the period from 1750 to 1900.

I hope that this article has whetted the appetite of both the would-be and present collectors and that when you visit antique shops, antique fairs and even boot fairs you will look out for these colourful objects and appreciate them with new eyes.