

Antique China Restoration

18th September 2007 - Roy Underdown Pavilion

The “designer” overalls and matching angle poise lamp are necessary equipment for Katie Bewes as her slides revealed the years of expertise learnt in the fascinating world of antique china restoration. The jar of Vaseline, gypsum bandages, rolls of masking tape, strips of plasticine and sheets of dental wax seemed unusual tools and materials in Katie’s workshop, but these are vital to repairing the damaged and broken articles, and bringing them back to their former glory.

Katie talked about the various items that were brought into her workshop, and of the various methods of restoration. A Victorian footbath, with one handle missing was one of these items, and Katie showed slides of how she made another handle, from a mould of the existing handle using the Vaseline, gypsum bandages and plasticine, and that, to get the colours right, repetitions of air brushing, glazing and “cooking” were required. The background colours would be worked on first, and then the painstaking work of restoring the illustrations was undertaken. This was the first footbath she had worked on, but, within a few weeks, had two more to restore!

In some cases there wasn’t a handle to create a mould from, so an armature was created using galvanised wire, araldite and masking tape, which was then filled with car body filler, which, if caught at the right moment, was “like cheese” to carve.

Teapots with chipped spouts were restored with the aid of plasticine, masking tape and a lot of skill. Many highly collectable items were brought in for repair and restoration.

One of the stories told by Katie was of the owner of a damaged vase. The owner’s father was a designer at the Stoke pottery where the vase was made, and this was the last one of this particular design, and the restoration meant that his father’s memory could be kept alive. The vase was in many pieces, and had to be reconstructed from the bottom up. The top section was rebuilt separately, and the two sections then joined together. It was impossible to put a price on the sentimental value on pieces and many customers would pay more than the face value of a piece just to have it restored, purely for sentimental reasons.

Katie talked about Lladro figurines, and of how, because they are highly collectable, are usually kept within their original boxes. One such damaged figurine of a young lady holding a bunch of flowers turned up at Katie’s workshop for restoration, still within it’s original box. The bunch of flowers were missing, and Katie spent hours painstakingly rebuilding these flowers out of milliput. Having painted and glazed the flowers, and restored them back into the hands of the young lady, she returned the figurine to the box, only to find the original missing flowers had been in the box all the time!

Katie spoke of other unusual items, such as Victorian piano babies, and Chinese Carp dishes, and of the traditions associated with them. This was, truly, a fascinating glimpse into what Katie does for a living.