



## The History of Caroline & Penman Antiques Fairs

Caroline Penman (nee Filmer) was, at the age of 9, determined to be an antiques dealer. Her parents moved from a modern home in Reigate, to a Tudor house in Lindfield, W Sussex. They visited shops, auctions and houses open to the public, to furnish a period home. Caroline found that she could remember facts & dates, while her elders forgot them. At school, gradually double history lessons took over from sports & sciences, and her knowledge of social history and associated artefacts grew, concentrating on the 18th century.

In her school holidays she worked in the local antique shop in Lindfield, Sussex, then **Brighton Fair** came into Caroline's life, and she worked for Cultural Exhibitions Ltd, in 1959. Every July thereafter she was at the Brighton Fair (which was a very social event!), working for Reg Wilkinson (glass) for 3 years, before taking a stand of her own.

Caroline left school at 16 for a part time apprenticeship at Eric Seldon's Eastbourne antiques shop. She started buying, with the £2,000 left to her by her grandmother.

1962: Parents bought her a shop in Lindfield, nr Haywards Heath and at the age of 18 Caroline opened her own "**Lindfield Antiques**" shop. 99 High Street. It's now a dress shop.

1967: Caroline's 1st fair, **Lindfield Antiques Fair**, in the local King Edward Hall. A 2-day event in August  
1968: she launch of **the Mid Sussex Antiques Fair** at Martletts Hall, Burgess Hill.

1969 April: launch of the **Ardingly Antiques Trade Fair** at the South of England Showground.

June: Caroline married a Royal Engineer, Richard Penman, who was rapidly bought out of the army, and became involved in dealing (in model engines & tin toys), and together they showed at various antiques fairs including Brighton and Kensington, Wilton House, South West fairs, Howison-Howorth Fairs and North West Fairs run by Noel Gibson and Sue Brownson - using an American RV as a base (great fun!)

When VAT started (1973) the prospect of special scheme book-keeping for the fast turnover in the shop and fairs was too daunting, so the shop was sold. Caroline & Richard still showed at fairs, travelling all over the UK, enjoying travel in an American camper van.

Gradually the organisation of the Fairs took centre stage.....especially after Richard's car accident in 1981, after which he was in a coma for 6 months, then gradually improved, but he never was quite himself again. 1983 bought a flat in Chelsea as 2 months a year spent in London Fairs – sold flat in 2006, for more profit than all the fairs in the interim! From about 1990 Caroline ceased all dealing, concentrating on organising Fairs.

There were Penman Fairs in the provinces and in London, from outdoor "boot fairs for dealers" up to standfitted, vetted multi-day fairs. From 2021, semi retired, Caroline only runs the Petersfield Fair.

Up to 2020 there were approx. 363 fairs run by Caroline, as Caroline Filmer, Penman Antiques Fairs, and Penman Fairs Ltd - 244 standfitted antiques fairs, 35 Art Fairs & 84 unfitted fairs.

## Penman Antiques Fairs 1967 onwards



- 1967 – 1984 **LINDFIELD ANTIQUES FAIR** Annual 2 days, August Bank Holiday.  
After 1984, it was passed to Ron Beech who also took over Tony Keniston's fairs. Lapsed around 2004.
- 1968 - 1970 **MID SUSSEX ANTIQUES FAIR** Martlets Hall, Burgess Hill Annual 2 days
- 1969 – 1985 **SOUTH OF ENGLAND ANTIQUES TRADE FAIR**, Ardingly Showground  
Initially 60 indoor stalls, some vetted. Outside pitches grew to 800,  
Eventually 5 times a year, with up to 1000 stalls+ Abergavenny and Pig & Sheep Building  
Sold 1985 to Geoff Witacker (owned Newark), whose son sold all to DMG
- 1979 - 1983 Various showground, aerodrome fairs were tried, to emulate Ardingly:  
2 years: EPSOM RACECOURSE ANTIQUES FAIR  
1 year: BIGGLESWADE Old Warden Aerodrome  
2 years: CAMBERLEY AERODROME  
1 year: THRUXTON AERODROME  
1 year: NEWICK Village Hall, sussex  
1 year: PETERBOROUGH Showground
- 1979 – 1982 **SHEPTON MALLET FAIR**, West of England Showground. Indoors and outside.  
1982 Given to Dave & Anne Stroud as a wedding present. They sold to DMG in 1995 & emigrated to Australia. DMG employed Sue Ede to run all the "IACF" fairs. Annual then twice a year
- 1973 – 1977 **NATIONAL COLLECTORS' FAIR** Cumberland Hotel, Marble Arch  
bought from Eric Gamlin for £250, ran twice a year, 3 days, 50 stands
- 1978 – 2010 **WEST LONDON ANTIQUES FAIR** Kensington Town Hall. Originally Jan only,  
August date added in 1984 but sold in 1997 to Clarion Events. 3 floors, up to 90 stands
- 1980 - 1991 **BRIGHTON ANTIQUES FAIR** Corn Exchange  
taken over from Roger Heath Bullock, Cultural Exhibitions – 4 days up to 50 stands
- 1982 **TUNBRIDGE WELLS ANTIQUES FAIR** The Spa Hotel, Only ran one time following a burglary  
(Sue Barton's silver being stolen overnight)
- 1982 - 1984 **THAME ANTIQUES FAIR** Spread Eagle Hotel, Oxfordshire (taken over from Eric Gamlin)
- 1983 – 2020 **CHELSEA ANTIQUES FAIR**, Chelsea Old Town Hall - Established 1950.  
taken over after the death of Josephine Graham-Ballin. Originally 10 days open, March & September  
2000 the BADA Fair started, ½ a mile away in March, so Chelsea was September only (6 day duration)  
2003 the March fair became "King's Road Antiques Fair", 4-day duration, to avoid competing with BADA.  
When LAPADA fair started in Berkeley Square, "Chelsea" reverted to March running concurrent to BADA Fair  
2020 The BADA fair was taken over by Open Art Fair, but Covid 19 stopped the fairs for a year....
- 1985 **CHARLESTON MANOR** Oak & Country Antiques Fair, E. Sussex  
Only one edition as the single track drive proved too problematic to administer!
- 1985 **GROSVENOR HOUSE Private Fair** - Penmans were employed by the Junior League of London for the  
entertainment of 400 guests after lunch. Exciting, hard work but only profitable for a few dealers!
- 1986 - 1995 **WESTMINSTER ANTIQUES FAIR** Horticultural Hall, Vincent Sq (taken over from Donald Newby)  
45-50 stands, a happy and popular Spring fair.
- 1987 - 1989 **CITY OF LONDON ANTIQUES FAIR**, The Barbican, (started in partnership with Raymond Gubbay,  
1989 David Walker & the City Art Fair joined, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Barbican Hall. It was then sold to The Daily Mail  
Group, who moved it to and sold it on to the Design Centre in Islington, where it lasted 3 years.

- 1989 - 2019 **CHESTER ANTIQUES FAIR**, County Grandstand, Chester Racecourse  
 Started from scratch encouraged by Valerie Owen Hughes, local dealer at fairs.  
 Originally February only, with October date added in 2000. 45-55 stands on 3 floors  
 For 2 years a contemporary Art Fair was added next door, but this did not take off.  
 2019 Sold to Sue Ede of Cooper Events, who added "Decorative" to the name
- 1989 **BRITAIN IN HONG KONG SHOW** The new Exhibition Centre, HK  
 Opened by Charles & Diana. 8 exhibitors shared a section. Great fun but financial disaster.
- 1989 **CHELTENHAM PERIOD HOME SHOW**, Pitville Pump Rooms  
 Beautiful but nightmare building to standfit, did not take off. 40 stands.
- 1992 - 1993 **THE LAPADA SHOW** Royal College of Art, organising logistics for LADADA
- 1991 - 1998 **SUSSEX OAK & COUNTRY ANTIQUES FAIR**, Barkham Manor Vineyard, E Sussex.  
 In a lovely Barn, relaxed lovely setting, the barn augmented by add-ons including an art fair (twice). 25-35 stands. The Vineyard was sold & new owners did not want us
- 1993 - 2000 **KENSINGTON ANTIQUES FAIR** Kensington Town Hall W8  
 Acquired from Roger Heath Bullock (t/a Cultural Exhibitions) In partnership with Terry Gasson (dealer)  
 Originally November. Became confused with "West London"
- 1996 A new group of **Contemporary ART FAIRS** was established, Chelsea was the only success:  
 22 years: Chelsea Old Town Hall – 45 stands (B Cooper managed 2013-2017)  
 4 years: The HAC, Armoury House, City – annually, 35 stands  
 2 years: Mid-Sussex, Barkham Manor – in conjunction with antiques  
 1 year: Winchester Guildhall - looked wonderful, but very poorly attended.  
 1 year: Frogmill, A40 Nr Cheltenham – on 2 floors, but we were not asked back!  
 1 year: The Swan at Tetsworth – in a marquee alongside the antiques centre.  
 1 year: Kensington Town Hall
- 1998 - 1999 **THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY SHOW** Chelsea Old Town Hall  
 Well-received, perhaps should have waited till 2000. As Deco etc was so popular, dealers didn't need to show at fairs to sell! Sad!
- 1998 **CITY OF LONDON ANTIQUES FAIR**, Honourable Artillery Co, (HAC)  
 Wonderful building, but not as popular as the Art Fairs in the City. 40 stands
- 1999 - 2000 **WEST OF ENGLAND ART FAIR**, The Pavilion at Bath (with Duncan & Jacki Phillips)
- 1999 **LINGFIELD PARK FAIR** Lingfield Racecourse - non-standfitted, not very successful
- 2000 – present **PETERSFIELD ANTIQUES FAIR**, Festival Hall Established 1973 by Eric Gamlin,  
 taken over from widow, Heather Gamlin. February and September, (plus a June fair, dropped after 2002)  
 2020 Feb a success, Sept cancelled due to Covid 19
- 2001 **BATH ANTIQUES FAIR** The Pavilion, great expectations – but a flop! a one-off
- 2002 **HOUGHTON TOWERS FAIR** Nr Preston Too far from home, too small, so a one-off
- 2003 - 2005 **DULWICH ART FAIR** Dulwich College - contemporary
- 2004 **TYTHE BARN FAIR** Nr Bicester a one-off, 25 stands, not allowed to advertise!
- 2004 - 2007 **BURY ST EDMUNDS ANTIQUES FAIR** The Athenaeum, (no fair in 2006)  
 Attempted upstairs, uneven floors. Downstairs only 28 stands.
- 2004 - 2005 **UCKFIELD ANTIQUES FAIR** Civic Centre Not popular nor profitable, so only two
- 2005 - 2012 **ANGLIAN ART FAIR**. Cressing Temple Essex – 2 beautiful medieval Barns  
 Really beautiful setting, 3 years with antiques in 1 barn, art in the other
- 2006 New **LINDFIELD ANTIQUES FAIR** trying to add standfitting – too small! Not repeated

- 2006 - 2008 **SUSSEX ANTIQUES FAIR**, a new hotel venue: East Sussex National Golf Hotel  
June 2006, moved to October in 2007, added ART in 2008, but lack of visitors finished it.
- 2006 Celebrated CHELSEA's 100<sup>th</sup> fair in Sept.
- 2006 **SOLENT ART FAIR** Gunwharf Quays, Portsmouth – in a marquee, one off
- 2010 **TOWCESTER ANTIQUES FAIR**, T Racecourse, venue could not offer same space again, one-off
- 2010 The last **WEST LONDON ART & ANTIQUES FAIR** in June, against Olympia & its American Director.
- 2012 **CADA Fair** at Blenheim Palace, working for the Cotswold Antique Dealers Association.
- 2012 **GUILDFORD ANTIQUES FAIR**, newly rebuilt Civic Centre, June & December.
- 2013 - 2017 **CHELSEA ART FAIR** now under Ben Cooper's Directorship – fewer higher priced stands
- 2014 Ben Cooper & Barbara Bell made co-directors of Penman Fairs Ltd with C Penman
- 2015 **MALL GALLERIES ANTIQUES FAIR** logistically difficult & too small – not repeated
- 2016 - 2017 **FIRLE PLACE ANTIQUES FAIR** in Tithe Barn, Lewes, Sx. Small not well supported
- 2016 - 2018 **BURFORD ANTIQUES FAIR**, B School – lower level 40 stands. Passed to 2Cs Fairs 2019
- 2018 **WINDSOR ANTIQUES FAIR**, Royal Windsor Racecourse.  
Eagerly anticipated, but a disappointment, 2019 date offered but no exhibitor support. Sad!
- 2019 **Penman Fairs Limited closes**, Caroline continuing as a sole trader.  
Running Petersfield Feb & Sept Chelsea Town Hall closed for major refurbishments so no fair  
Chester sold to Sue Ede of Cooper Events, Burford passed to TwoCs Fairs.
- 2020 Covid Year Only ran **Petersfield** in Feb. Chelsea cancelled, just prior to lockdown.  
Chelsea offered to new organisers. Eventually found "2 Covet" who bought the fair
- 2021 Covid prevented Feb & April Petersfields. Sept **Petersfield** should go ahead OK.

#### Fairs that never quite happened:

- 1982 Guildford Antiques Drive-In, Rugby Club. Rained off, on the day!
- 1992 Great plans to move Chelsea to Royal Hospital Grounds, but failed to get permission.
- 1995 Great plans for City Antiques Fair at Hon. Artillery Co field, but could not get support
- 1997 Planned but Cancelled ASCOT Antiques Fair
- 2006 Planned but cancelled HOVE and SHERBORNE Antiques Fairs
- 2006 CAMBRIDGE ART Fair proved impractical, on first floor, insufficient parking.
- 2008 June CHESTER ART Fair planned in a different building – cancelled, insufficient support
- 2014 Planned CHILTERN Antiques fair, cancelled, lack of support.

#### Fair organising assistants:

- 1982 - 1989 Jan Cuckoo
- 1987 - 1989 Jonathan Simm – subsequently Jan & Jonathan married
- 1989 - 2019 Barbara Bell, co-director 2014-2019
- 1995 - 1997 Louis Aldred, Stephanie Cripps, James Mudie & Ben Miller, various part time assistants
- 2009 – 2019 Ben Cooper, co-director 2014-2019

#### Much appreciated Contractors to the Fairs:

- Duncan Philips PR and advertising agent (also until 2005, Jackie Philips)
- Dave Donaldson Electrical contractor till 2012
- Roy Farthing Official Photographer till his death in 2014
- Simon Trevan Start Lighting contractor since 2012
- Jacob Pilipenko School of Security 2007 – 2017
- Richard Austin Protegimus Security 2017 – present
- Standfitters: Concept, Midas, Intershell. 2021 onward: Gibson Construction
- Cabinet supplies: Simon & Candy Moss, Casemate till 2020. Charles Youngman, Tableau Display.  
GR Cabinet Supplies from 2021.