

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO THE HISTORY OF RETAILING

Retail history is a rich, cross-disciplinary field that demonstrates the centrality of retailing to many aspects of human experience, from the provisioning of everyday goods to the shaping of urban environments; from earning a living to the construction of identity. Over the last few decades, interest in the history of retail has increased greatly, spanning centuries, extending to all areas of the globe and drawing on a range of disciplinary perspectives.

By offering an up-to-date, comprehensive thematic, spatial and chronological coverage of the history of retailing, this Companion goes beyond traditional narratives that are too simplistic and Euro-centric and offers a vibrant survey of this field.

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This volume is an important resource to a wide range of readers, including marketing and management specialists, historians, geographers, economists, sociologists and urban planners.

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COMPANION TO THE
HISTORY OF RETAILING

Edited by Jon Stobart and Vicki Howard

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6

BARGAIN HUNT? SELLING SECOND-HAND, c.1600 TO THE PRESENT

Sara Pennell

Introduction

Let us start with an object: a desk bookcase, a rather flamboyant example of japanned style decoration, on a pine carcass dated to around 1700–1720, which is on display in the so-called pre-Revolutionary room in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York). It is a good place to start this chapter, because by sheer dint of their longevity, most museum objects have a pre-history of *not* being museum objects, and so are inevitably ‘used’ goods, travelling through conduits of retailing, gifting and exchange in which the not-brand-new predominate. Indeed, in its prior life, well before it became museum artefact, the desk bookcase was explicitly sold as a piece of second-hand furniture, by one of the modes of retail that looms large in these second-hand circuits. The bookcase was put up for sale by auction (or *vendue*, as they were called in colonial America), with other household “sundry” goods sometime in the spring of 1754 as a consequence of its owner’s alleged suicide in October 1753 (Westerfield, 1920; Gottesman, 1938; Hartigan O’Connor, 2011: 156–159). Sir Danvers Osborne (1715–53) had, but days before he was found strangled, possibly by his own hand and certainly by his own handkerchief, been invested with the powers of governor, with a remit to clear up a city administration riven with corruption. But this is not a chapter about colonial dark deeds: it is the bookcase which had an after-life (much more so than Osborne), being sold onto Osborne’s successor (and, in the minds of some, his nemesis), Lieutenant Governor James De Lancey at the *vendue*. For the subsequent 180-odd years, the desk bookcase remained the possession of the De Lancey-Verplanck family, who finally donated it to the museum in 1939 (details from Metropolitan Museum of Art online catalogue) (Figure 6.1).

Even before Osborne shipped the desk bookcase to New York, it is quite possible that it was already what would pass in modern parlance as “pre-loved”. Given its Augustan style and the fact that Osborne was only born in 1715, it is likely to have either been a piece he inherited from his own family, or that Osborne had himself purchased at one of the many household auctions already running in London and advertised in the daily and weekly press or from one of the many retailer-makers, operating as upholders, cabinet makers, sworn appraisers and/or undertakers; or from an upholsterer like Mr Rickett, whose late eighteenth-century trade card depicts some of the “modern” styles of furniture he dealt in new and second-hand as an ‘upholder, cabinetmaker, sworn appraiser and undertaker’ (Rickett, u.d.). Today, if ever made



Figure 6.1 Osborne desk bookcase, c.1700–1720

Source: Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

available on the open market, the bookcase desk would be classed as an “antique”, subject to a specific sort of marketing and trade which itself was unknown for furniture in the eighteenth century, but which is now inhabited by exclusive dealers and fine art auctioneers who can claim direct ancestry with the early Georgian brokers and jacks-of-all-trade gavel-wielders, one of whom might have sold Osborne his bookcase.

In this chapter, the focus will be on the evolution of some of these modes of selling second-hand that Osborne’s desk bookcase might have been subject to, and the conditions which created and sustained the markets for such retailing across four centuries, from part-exchange to specialised dealing to auctioneering. As a historian of material culture across the long eighteenth century, I dwell a little longer on developments from between c.1660–1850, but not only because of that: this is the period upon which much extant scholarship also focuses. By starting with an object which now resides in a museum, I want to unpick the enduring but unwarranted connection between second-hand retailing and those “economies of makeshifts” characteristic of the least well-off and supposedly least market-integrated in societies. For much of the four centuries surveyed here, selling second-hand did not mark one out as a Fagin but rather more as the self-confident provincial auctioneer in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871–2), Borthrop Trumbull; or one of the many dealers and salesmen with capital enough to produce a trade card or advertise in the metropolitan or provincial press. The goods sold by these retailers were not by default shabby or outmoded, either: they could as easily be “elegant”, “as new” and “ingenious” goods bookcases to barouches, laundry coppers to Trumbull’s ‘very recherchy . . . trifles’ (Eliot, 1992: 653).

Selling second-hand: historiographies

That markets for second-hand goods existed historically is much acknowledged, but inexplicably understudied. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the enduring appeal of the used has been especially overshadowed within historiographies of consumer, production and commercial revolution of the last five or so centuries, by the lustre of the new. It is the novel, not the pre-loved and familiar, which catches the scholarly light, even though it is abundantly clear that the conditions for mass production and marketing of many such new objects did not exist until the later eighteenth, indeed the nineteenth century (Van Damme and Vermoesen, 2009: 275). Osborne’s desk is a (book)case in point: in the English American colonies domestic manufacturing was minimal and discouraged for a good part of the eighteenth century, so as not to jeopardise the market opportunities offered up by trans-Atlantic trade, ‘the principal *Cornucopia* of *Great Britain’s* wealth’, as one mid-eighteenth-century trade commentator gushed (cited Breen, 2004: 86). Even if tastes for such goods were stimulated across a wide social spectrum, whether by the capricious rotations of a fashion cycle, or the siren call of emulation or the wish for comfort, second-hand retailing was essential to satisfying such tastes, in the absence of an unlimited supply of newly manufactured goods.

Ignoring just how ubiquitous second-hand circulation was has also meant that more modern adherence to practices of material waste and inbuilt obsolescence has leached into our expectations of what happened to goods and possessions, once their initial lustre had worn off. This is particularly problematic for the period before 1800, since, as Laurence Fontaine has argued, ‘the values extolling the new and the need for replacement to keep pace with fashion were late to gain precedence over those of conservation and tradition’ (Fontaine, 2008a: 2). Material stewardship and an abhorrence of waste loomed large in pre-modern societies, and we cannot simply look at pre-modern consumption choices through late twentieth and early twenty-first century lenses. Consuming in the pre-capitalist economy demanded (for all but those at the apex of

societies) moderation and decorum, and the promotion of thrift and good housewifery, rather than an out-and-out thirst for the new (McCants, 1995: 194).

What then explains the tendency to bracket second-hand retailing as part of the “informal economy” of any given society, to see it as a marginal rather than central economic practice, a function of need rather than of desire? Some forms of second-hand circulation, such as pre- and post-*mortem* bequests, gifting and barter-exchange, undoubtedly complicate and blur the boundaries of a neoclassical economic understanding of the “market”, but that market itself has a dubious historical pedigree. Perhaps more significant has been the scholarly attention paid to clothing and other textiles as circulating material through the licit and illicit conduits used to keep poor households afloat and mouths fed. Areas like Rosemary and Petticoat Lanes in late seventeenth-century London and the markets of Temple and Notre Dame in pre- and post-Revolutionary Paris, where no questions would be asked of clothing and linens bought and offered for resale, and the “brokers” who fenced and found buyers for stolen petticoats, waistcoats and greatcoats, have dominated accounts of second-hand dealing in certain regions (e.g. Lemire, 1991; Roche, 1997; Charpy, 2008; Barahona and Sánchez, 2012).

This is, of course, too extreme. As Ilja Van Damme has argued, to see second-hand retailing as a matter of binary and opposing markets, articulating ‘a rigid dichotomy between antique collecting for the rich and economic necessity for the poor’, is to overlook much, not least ‘the complex consumer motivations of the middling sorts, and the continuous distribution of second-hand goods, that were neither “bad” nor “luxurious”’ (Van Damme, 2010: 86). Selling second-hand produced particular forms of retailer, retail spaces and processes, that were neither “informal”, if we take that word to mean without regulation or some notion of professional identity, nor marginal to the local or regional economies in which they operated (Deceulaer, 2008). From sixteenth-century “criers” and “uitroppers” whose business it was to “cry” or advertise the sales of used goods, to the auctioneers, vendue-masters, brokers and general and specialist dealers whose names are scattered across the pages of eighteenth- to twentieth-century European and American newsprint, trade cards and occupational directories, there were distinct and, at times, highly profitable careers to be had in selling second-hand, just as the environs in which second-hand retailing occurred could be fashionable and exclusive – more Pall Mall than Petticoat Lane.

Osborne’s desk bookcase also demonstrates that used goods are not always marginal in a second sense: they do not have to be broken, damaged or worn, but could be “as new”. Even out with the specialist markets for used books, artworks and specific types of antiquities such as coins, medals and sculpture which began to develop across Europe in the seventeenth century, the appetite for “neat” used furniture and soft furnishings as well as for coaches, stock-in-trade and tools in good working condition or of “as new” appearance and feel was met by retailers and circuits that dealt mostly if not exclusively in hardly worn or well-maintained and cared-for goods. These supply chains were, in turn, not just fed by picking over the estates of the needy bankrupt or destitute deceased. Goods flowed into these circuits as fashions shifted and people moved, married or “left off trade”. Indeed, the costs and logistics of carrying bulky goods over even short distances fed directly into the disposal of household goods as a preliminary to moving house. That is why in 1834 Thomas and Jane Carlyle, having decided to move to London to further Thomas’s career as an essayist, planned to rent out their Scottish house and ‘to sell off all the furniture but what will equip a very modest house in the Suburbs of London’ (*Carlyle Letters Online*, lt-18340225-TC-JAC-01).

Even when sales of goods were necessary because of indebtedness or hard times, those implicated were as likely to be Spanish monarchs, as they were impoverished *madrileños*: the need for hard cash could strike the wealthy no less than the indigent. The fact that goods

in the second-hand goods sales in Antwerp and its surroundings studied by Ilja Van Damme sold for prices ranging from fewer than 50 to more than 1,000 guilders, suggests that not only was there a very socio-economically diverse clientele eager to buy such goods, but that such goods came from no less diverse sources (Alvarez, 2007; Van Damme, 2009: 111). Buyers of second-hand goods were indeed socially diverse and discerning, with their purchases intended not just for servants' garrets or impoverished hovels, but for furnishing key rooms in gentry and aristocratic households. Jean Scott Hay (1629–88), countess of Tweeddale's letter, sent from their Scottish seat, Yester Castle to her husband, John Hay (1626–97), the second earl, in London in the 1670s, about sourcing 'a damask bed & if you could get a second-hand one were not soiled and fashionable, you might buy it if it be either a blew or crimson', tells us two things: that such textiles were widely available second-hand in later Stuart London; and that members of the aristocracy had no qualms about buying via this route (Tweeddale Papers, [1674]: fol. 84r). As Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery have shown in recent work on the processes of furnishing, re-arranging and dismantling the country house interior, providing access to select, well-chosen second-hand items for such clientele and also disposing of such goods for them or their descendants, was the remit of highly respectable businessmen, working as upholsterers, furniture dealers and society auctioneers, in the mould of James Christie (1730–1803) and precursors to the superstar *fin-de-siècle* antique dealers-cum-interior designers, like the Duveens of London, Georges Hoentschel at Maison Leys in Paris and the Syphers in New York, serving clients trans-continentially and transatlantically (Sypher, 1992; Herrmann, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Kisluk-Grosheide, Krohn, and Leben, 2013; Stobart and Rothery, 2016).

The concentration in much of the extant literature on second-hand circulation on clothing, and to a lesser extent, household textiles more generally, may also have skewed approaches to other goods and materials in the second-hand sphere. The development of specific forms of second-hand trading in horses, books and manuscripts, and fine art and antiquities gleaned from the Grand Tour, already suggests that we need to be careful in seeing in the modes and mechanisms for selling textiles and clothing second-hand a universal model of second-hand retailing more generally. As the anthropologists Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe note 'we need to ask in which conditions particular goods might be acquired through the second-hand market, where, how, by whom and for whom' (Gregson and Crewe, 2003: 6). Shifts in fashion and aesthetics, as well as the adaptability of the materials – textiles, especially linens, were not only reusable but recyclable as rags to the paper trade – may have made textiles recirculation faster, with quicker rewards for participants, and without much (or indeed any) capital outlay. After all, clothes and household linens needed but chests to store them, while furniture took up valuable floor space, and coaches yards or stabling.

The specialised conduits for those goods in which producer/production quality, provenance and antiquity or patina were emerging as connoisseurial virtues in the eyes of potential buyers, also had features which were by no means common to *all* forms of second-hand retail. The second-hand selling of books and fine art emerged in key European centres in the late seventeenth century, notably Amsterdam, the Hague and London, with specific formats for selling (the bidding auction rather than the fixed-price sale), and networks for circulation, focused on gentry and elite male-dominated groups, specialist dealers and auctioneers, and the emergence of self-generated value systems for the commodities involved, that depended in part on building and sustaining an informed community of connoisseurs for circulation (Harris, Mandelbrote, and Myers, 2001; di Marchi, 2004; Cowan, 2006).

Finally, we need to think about the geographies covered by extant research, since many scholars have fixed their gazes on continental second-hand trading, rather than extra-European or

even global circuits, with sixteenth-century Italian cities, the Low Countries in the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries and early modern Paris and its environs attracting important studies. The most recent collection of essays on the subject cast its net wider, to include studies of Scandinavia, the colonial South African Cape and imperial British India (Stobart and Van Damme, 2010b; see also Finn, 2010). We nonetheless still lack studies which attempt comparative analyses of how different types of second-hand circuit endured and thrived in some regions but not others; and which explore the legacies of second-hand selling across north America, Africa and the Indian sub-continent (especially given the centrality of second-hand trading and materials recycling in these latter regions today). The roots of the now-global second-hand trade – where decommissioned British railway carriages find a new lease of life on Indian tracks, to use a perhaps extreme example – is just no less a significant part of that tentacular, cross-continental material flow of costly silks, ceramics and comestibles that historians have become increasingly enamoured of tracing in the past decade.

Conduits and occupations in used goods retailing

Peruse any domestic account book from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and you would be wrong to assume that all the goods listed as purchases were new-made. Alongside new items and expenditures on maintenance of existing items – retinning pots, replumping mattresses and mending shoes – there are almost always second-hand purchases. Sometimes these latter entries might hint at the seller (a neighbour, a broker, a shopkeeper) or the locus of purchase (a sale, a shop, the local fair), but, as Fontaine has bewailed, the widespread invisibility of second-hand exchange (for much of early modern Europe at least), where the exchange could be barter, part-exchange or a form of gifting, makes quantifying and qualifying the types and locations of, and values assigned to such exchange like connecting a particularly random, widely scattered set of dots (Fontaine, 2008a: 11). Thanks to particular archival survivals, in this section some of these dots will be brought into sharper focus.

Guilds and state operations

Some of this survival is down to the ways in which the form of corporate governance and nature of economic controls meant that the conduits for second-hand retail were formal components of highly regulated commodity markets. Specialised trade guilds to oversee and control retail practices in a wide range of used goods operated in Italian city-states like Venice and Florence; across early modern Spain, in cities like Barcelona and Madrid, Low Countries' villages (for example Erdemobogen, in modern Belgium) and mercantile entrepôts (Antwerp; Bruges). These corporate organisations and the spaces in which they operated, were either government-run or held state/crown monopolies: Stockholm's city Auction House was established in 1674 and its monopoly confirmed by the crown in 1772 (Lilja, Murhem, and Ulvaeng, 2009). In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, the royal court itself was both organiser of and subject to auction sales of their collections, to enable the extensive *post mortem* testaments of dead monarchs to be carried out (Alvarez, 2007).

The useful archival paper trails left by these institutions enable historians to map the economic value of second-hand trading in such markets, as well as the variety of goods traded in this way, the customer bases involved, and the shape of and challenges to such trade over time. They record the apprenticing and training of officers with expertise in appraising, crying and directing sales developed cadres of specialists, and with political and economic influence to boot; the leading members of Antwerp's *Oudekleerkopers* [literally, "old clothing buyers"], controlled the

city's Friday Market, with its zones for different types of second-hand good, and also leased the majority of real estate around it (Van Damme, 2009). There are also records of the policing and licensing activities that empowered these bodies to manage the quality of goods being sold by their members and proscribe or limit the sale of such goods by non-members, as well as control the profile of their membership.

By contrast, England's archives afford very little evidence of either regulation or geographical zoning of particular types of second-hand trading beyond the City of London, and beyond the fifteenth century, until the passing of the 1777 Auction Duty Act (Ohashi, 2007; Staples, 2015: 298). Although second-hand clothing and other textiles were traded by "frippers" in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the City of London appointed an "outroper" or official crier, to "cry" sales of goods, there is however little other evidence until the late seventeenth century of how such sales were run, whether they involved new or used (or both) commodities, and what sort of goods were sold via them (although we know wine and shipping was being sold by auction in the fifteenth century). The Upholders' Company, the notional occupational "home" of upholsterers, was in decline by the end of the seventeenth century, with only a modest bureaucratic reach: a poor cousin to the *Oudekleerkopers* or the Venetian *arte degli strazzaruoli* (Allerston, 1996: 20; Staples, 2010).

Intermingled commerce

In a striking phrase, Manuel Charpy argues that, in pre-1900 Europe, the second-hand simply 'melted into all other aspects of economic life' (Charpy, 2008: 147). In some locales, there were restrictions on who could sell "new" goods and who could sell second-hand, as in eighteenth-century Antwerp and Stockholm, and early nineteenth-century America. Elsewhere, however, it was very common for artisans retailing their own wares and specialist shopkeepers selling more generally, to hold a small stock of used items alongside new goods (Allerston, 1996: 4). The 1667 inventory of the widow of a Norwich (England) pewterer, Anne Beart, contained a listing of 'one old copper' alongside the pewter, iron and other domestic metalwares in the shop stock valuation, while in early eighteenth-century Oxford, a visit to John Airey, tinsmith's workshop would have furnished a 'second-hand grate' (Beart, 1667; Airey, 1715). By the eighteenth century, this intermingling of old and new was advertised quite clearly on the trade cards of a broad spectrum of makers and retailers, like the clock- and watchmaker Thomas Denton of Abingdon (England), advertising exchange of "old for new" alongside the options of buying new or second-hand on his mid-eighteenth-century trade card (Figure 6.2).

Beart and Airey probably came by their second-hand stock through two routes: buying in "left-off" or used goods, or from customers part-exchanging old wares for new. In communities and markets where specie was in short supply or retained for its own value, and where second-hand goods could be useful supplementary shop stock, part-exchange was an accustomed form of retail transaction, and not just for metalwares. Thomas Mort, a sixty-something bachelor, living in north-west England in the early eighteenth century, recorded his "exchanging" on many types of good alongside pewter and kitchen metalwares, from shoes with his cobbler to books with his bookseller (Mort, 1703–25). Although Clive Edwards has suggested (for furniture) that this was to benefit clients, those on both sides of the counter could profit from this exchange, with artisans gleaming materials and parts to reuse in repairs and to recycle into new goods (Edwards, 2009: 48; Stobart, 2009, 140–141). When Jane Carlyle wanted to buy a second-hand sofa for Cheyne Row in 1843, she balked at the dealer's original price of £4 10 shillings. By supplying her own cushions and giving him 'the old green curtains. . . [which] were become beastly and what was better superfluous', she managed to reduce the price down

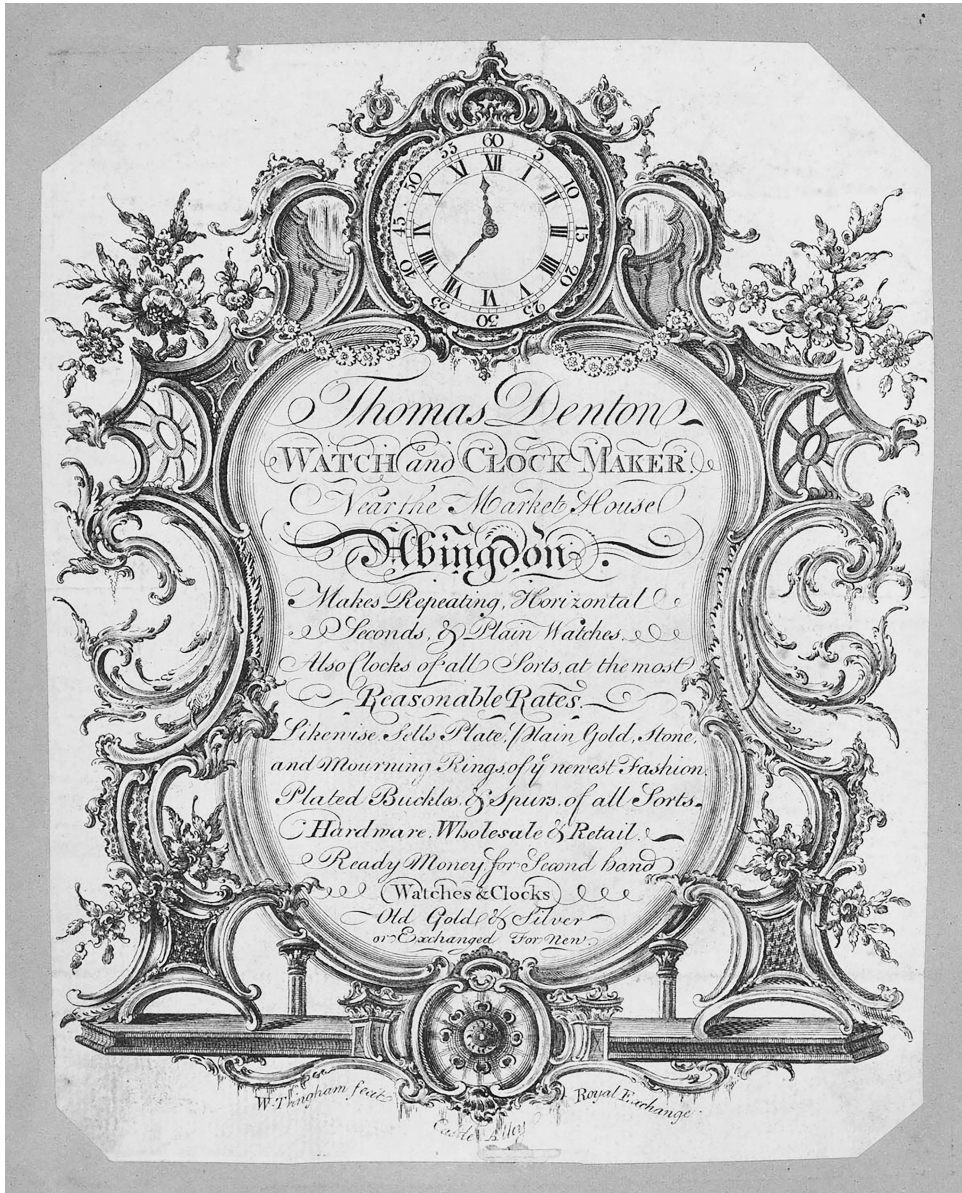


Figure 6.2 Trade card of Thomas Denton of Abingdon, clockmaker [no date]

Source: Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

to just one pound. Although we do not know the dealer's reckoning about this exchange, it was presumably worth his while; Henry Mayhew's account, in *London Labour and the London Poor*, of what second-hand curtains could be turned to by industrious hands suggests that the 'beastly' fabric probably became the cover for someone else's second-hand sofa (*Carlyle Letters Online*: t-18430827-JWC-TC-01; Mayhew, 1968: II, 14).

Specialists: upholders, upholsterers, auctioneers

The specialist second-hand trader, like his maker-retailer counterpart, cannot be tied to just one stereotype, even though such stereotypes prevailed in literary and visual satires right across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, across Europe and north America. The anti-semitic portrait of the second-hand clothes dealer or fence was a well-worn idiom long before Dickens came to write *Oliver Twist* in 1837–9, or Mayhew his lengthy section on Jewish clothes dealers in *London Labour and the London Poor*. But those who sold clothes “plain” and “rich”, new and second-hand, were not always marginal characters and certainly not always Jewish. Instead, they were often sufficiently well-set-up to have an address at which to advertise their services; and confident enough of their reputations to advertise as “honest” traders (Figure 6.3).

To be an effective middleman in the (legitimate) dealing of used goods, be they clothes or chests of drawers, substantial expertise – in materials, methods of manufacture, current prices – was the entrée to the trade. This surely helps explain the frequency (in England at least), with which retailing artisans such as upholders (who traditionally supplied and sold bedding) and upholsterers (soft furnishings and upholstered furniture), were often also, or became exclusively, associated with selling second-hand domestic textiles and furnishings. Such trades were also often called upon to appraise such items when householders died, because such goods were amongst the most valuable chattels, after plate and cash. These complementary aspects of the trade melded together in the career of one John Taylor, who started out as an upholsterer and “house-broker” in Cow-foot Hill, New York City in 1768, then moved in the same year to “Newfoundland” in the city, to pursue upholstery, before advertising his expertise and business acumen as ‘cabinet-maker, upholsterer and auctioneer’ in 1772, adding that his pedigree in this line of work was substantial:

The buying and selling of all the above recited articles has been his sole study for seventeen years, viz. eight of them under his father, and nine for himself; and farther is at this juncture a sworn exchange broker and appraisor, of the City of London.

(New York Gazette and the Weekly Mercury, 4 June 1770:

see also Gottesman, 1938: 139–140)

The link between undertaking, upholstery and appraising, in particular, speaks to a complicated web of supply, from the mourning textiles and hatchments accompanying death, to the valuation and then, often, buying in, of estate goods: all trapping seen to good effect in the mid-eighteenth-century trade card of Charles Grange and Son, upholders and appraisers ‘at the Royal Bed’ in Snow Hill, who confidently offered ‘funerals furnish’d’ (Grange, u.d.). There was also a small degree of authority vested in (and fees which accrued to) so-called sworn appraisers, who swore under oath to undertake the inventory and valuation of goods and chattels at death for the purposes of probate. Licensing increased this sense of distinction: the exclusive licence granted to vendue-masters in Charleston (South Carolina) and calls for such licensing in early eighteenth-century Philadelphia suggests that even in these frontier states, auctioneers were expected to be men of standing (Hart, u.d.: 14). In England, even though the 1777 Auction Duty Act did not automatically separate out auctioneering as a distinct profession, the licensing requirement did increasingly serve to distinguish the auctioneer from the general second-hand trader (Ohashi, 2013: 193).

Although selling by auction is an ancient practice, used throughout the Roman empire for new commodities, captured war booty and indeed captive people, of all the specialist modes of selling second-hand, the rise of the auction as a European conduit for selling second-hand from



Figure 6.3 Thomas Mayhew, "Petticoat Lane"

Source: Courtesy of Wellcome Images.

at least the sixteenth century onwards is perhaps the most notable (Morcillo, 2013). Auctioneering was not only a specialist type of dealing but also of *selling*, in which prices were not set but agreed *during* the selling process, in concert and competition with other potential buyers. This distinguished the auction from what (in England) were usually termed “open” or “hand” sales in which goods were ready-priced, and bargains struck between seller and buyer without competition. Thus, the London newspaper, the *Daily Post* of Monday 28 May 1733 contains one sale notice of the stock-in-trade of a cabinetmaker, ‘the lowest price being fix’d’, followed by several for household sales explicitly to be conducted ‘by Auction’ (*Daily Post*, 1733: 2).

Despite the long history of the auction, it is clear that across the seventeenth century it became a more widely adopted mode of selling, especially in regions like the Low Countries and (probably influenced by Dutch migrants and by trading connections) England, and, their respective colonies, especially the Dutch African Cape and the American eastern seaboard colonies from the Carolinas to New England. While the origins of the high-value end of this trade – in artworks and antiquarian books – has been the focus of attention by art historians and economic historians alike, the experience of the auction was by no means limited to the elites who sought Dutch masters or old Roman coins (Cowan, 2006: 26; Warren and Turpin, 2007). The inhabitants of the villages of Alost/Aalst (north-west of Brussels) and Troutbeck in the English Lake District, and colonial port towns like Charleston and Kingston (Jamaica), knew how to buy at auction, just as well as any genteel *habitué* of Christie’s Great Rooms on Pall Mall (Van Damme and Vermoesen, 2009; Pennell, 2010).

Indeed, auctioning goods was a mode of selling that specifically suited non-urban environments where other retail opportunities might be a day’s horse- or carriage-ride away, since it needed no fixed premises. As Edward Bird’s 1812 painting, ‘The country auction’ (oil on panel, 1812, private collection, currently on loan to the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, CA), suggests, with its auctioneer set up under the shade of a large tree amidst a throng of keen village bidders, his lots scattered around him, it could be done outside, with a barrel or furniture lot as a makeshift rostrum, or in the house of the deceased or bankrupt owner, or wherever the goods to be sold might be. The auctioneer starting out needed no great capital to launch himself, other than the knowledge of prices and an awareness of the markets to be served: hence the symbiosis with the upholstery and upholding trades. As R. Campbell, writing in 1747, noted of sworn appraisers, whom he explicitly associated with dealing in “old goods”, ‘the trade is learned by experience’ and ‘requires a universal knowledge in the nature of all household Utensils’ (Campbell, 1747: 175).

It should already be clear that different market conditions and settings made for different types of auctioneering. As Emma Hart’s research into the colonial American *vendue* suggests, the exigencies of trans-Atlantic trading relations and wartime disruptions between the 1760s and 1820s meant that the auction sale was the *primum mobile* of much eastern seaboard trade in both new and second-hand commodities. A Briton or Dutchman attending an American *vendue* might have found much that was familiar, but while auctioneering in London, Amsterdam and Paris was already a respectable profession by 1800, in pre- and post-Revolutionary Charleston, New York and Philadelphia the *vendue* was a “sell ’em fast, sell ’em low” phenomenon that threatened to undermine the colonies’ and the Republic’s precarious economy (Hart, u.d.; Hartigan O’Connor, 2011). In rural England and especially Scotland, where the country roup or household sale was as much a social as it was a selling occasion, such sales mixed disposal of real with chattel estate, and domestic with agricultural livestock, equipment and harvested crops; it was only in the later nineteenth century that estate auctioneers specialising in land sales and some agricultural goods emerged as distinct from chattel auctioneers (Walton, 1984; Pennell, 2010).

At the margins? Brokers, general dealers, marine stores and street sellers

If the fast-talking, dapper auctioneer might sit at one (respectable) end of the spectrum of second-hand retailers, the “general dealer” in a small-shop or street-seller out of doors, occupied the other, more down-at-heel end. The shabby general dealers – epitomised by Dickens and by Mayhew in mid-Victorian London, is well-known not just via literary portraits, but also because of the archival traces they left through their appearances in legal records, as accessories or defendants in cases of theft and fencing stolen goods, the targets of institutional regulations to prohibit marginal trading, or in satirical or romanticised genre depictions of street-selling. Looking beyond the exceptional situations in which these second-hand traders found themselves immortalised in the archives, however, and we see a trade perfectly suited to the socio-economic ecologies of larger towns and cities, places where hard cash was often in the shortest supply. This was also not just buying and selling fuelled by textiles and clothing alone, even though they were often amongst the most frequently “dealt” goods. Using part-exchange, barter and credit, dealers provided routes by which almost all types of household and personal goods, as well as tools and stock became fungible currency: old clothes were exchanged for new (or nearly new) ceramics, broken ceramics for new spoons, and handkerchiefs for gin. In an Old Bailey theft case from 1742, Robert Delany and George Campbell were indicted for stealing a variety of shoes, gloves and other clothing, that were alleged to have come into the hands of one of their wives, ‘an earthenware woman’, who took them as exchange for her wares (Old Bailey Online, 1742).

Material circulations such as these are inevitably characterised as shady because they often took place in the street, on doorsteps or in pubs. Yet we cannot know how many such transactions took place that were not based on dishonestly procured goods: probably a great many, as T.H. Breen suggests, oiling the ‘enterprises . . . of marginal although honest men and women’ (Breen, 2004: 104). Street-selling second-hand goods was also a highly organised and complex mode of retailing. Henry Mayhew’s magisterial account of the varieties of and distinctions between who sold what second-hand and where on London’s streets, points to it being highly segmented and specialised – brush-sellers, telescope dealers and old metal men – and also seasonal; sellers might move between a “shop” premises and the street to maximise selling opportunities as the seasons and supplies allowed. Mayhew also records the precise commercial grasp many such sellers had of the products they sold, the people they could sell to, the (slim) profits to be made and when best to make them (Mayhew, 1968: II 5–47). Recent work on “survival strategies” amongst the poor have stressed the flexible and fluid use of material goods in this way, as resources to hold onto, or to lend, pledge or exchange, as and when economic security shaded into precarity. But surely such transactions and behaviours were only possible because of a pre-existent robust market in used goods and materials. To be sure, these traders were themselves often only a few steps from pauperism, as Joseph Samuel acknowledged, when called on to give evidence in an Old Bailey case of arson in 1790: ‘[I am] a general dealer, when I can find nothing else’ (Old Bailey Online, 1790). Nonetheless, this was not marginal but mainstream commercial activity and an essential cog in the operation of many western economies late into the nineteenth century, and in developing economies today (Carbonell, 2000; Fontaine, 2014: 14, 16).

Spaces and strategies of second-hand selling

Second-hand retailing is not easily tied down to one type of space: a Charleston vendue house on the newly built late eighteenth-century Vendue Range, a London street or Venetian square, the country seat of an English aristocratic family or beneath a tree outside an English cottage – all

could be sites for second-hand buying and selling, and all are far removed from the stereotypical dealer's backstreet shop (Hart, u.d.; Welch, 2005: 194–197; MacArthur and Stobart, 2010: 185–192). Few of these sites could claim clientele in common, but certain types of second-hand selling – general household auctions in particular – could bring together miscellaneous potential buyers, from other dealers looking to replenish stock, to those with an eye to what has been labelled “clever” consuming: buying goods that were ‘nearly fashionable’ at competitive prices (Stobart, 2006: 235).

A successful second-hand transaction needed the right conditions to happen, and this was nowhere more true than in the emergence of the auction *house* as a specific site to cultivate brisk bidding up of the lots. Successful eighteenth-century London auctioneers like Aaron Lambe (d. 1777) and James Christie moved on (and up) from *in situ* estate sales to being proprietors of their own establishments, usually moving westward across London. Although Lambe was the first auctioneer to set up shop in Pall Mall, Christie's Great Rooms, established there in 1766–8, featured as a specifically fashionable place of resort, in Regency London. The design, with a soaring clerestory, was (as Christie himself noted in an advertorial of 1768), intended through its ‘repose of light . . . magnitude and desirable situation’ to show off the artworks and furniture coming under the hammer to the best advantage, and to provide for the comfort and convenience of the auction-goers who came to socialise as well as possibly buy (Wall, 1997: 4–6). These features are certainly made much of in Thomas Rowlandson's and Augustus Pugin's early nineteenth-century aquatint of the space (Ackermann, 1808–10: volume 1).

But the preparation of the audience began well before auction-goers took up their seats on the day of sale. Auctioneers used all of the techniques available to an expanding commercial network to whet the appetites of potential buyers. They advertised through newspapers in major centres and via street criers and placards in smaller towns and the countryside; they printed catalogues for free collection at sites like local inns and booksellers; and they purchased tobacco, beer and wine to loosen inhibitions and purse strings on the day of sale (or used an inn or coffee house as the venue, with refreshments on tap). Pre-sale viewing gave potential purchasers the chance to examine and evaluate the lots, as well as decide upon the price one might bid to, while catalogues disseminated the details of what was on offer well beyond the immediate locality. For important country house or city sales, these catalogues found their way over county and state boundaries, and may even have made it overseas (MacArthur and Stobart, 2010: 178–182; Pennell, 2010: 42–44).

Aesthetics and the pursuit of shopping as a practice of politeness surely fed into other forms of second-hand buying, too. Shopkeepers no doubt worked hard to make saleable second-hand wares appealing, through cleaning, small repairs and presentation. In 1703, the father of clergyman Thomas Brockbank voiced what was probably a widely held belief, cautioning that his son should beware buying from dealers or sales what “may seem new”, because appearances at the sale might be deceptive, and the goods rather more worn than at first glance suggested (Trappes-Lomax, 1930: 258). The use of terms such as “hardly worn” and “as new” in advertisements for those selling second-hand goods, or in descriptions of auction lots, offered up items that would pass as new purchases, but at temptingly proportionate prices, just as using descriptors such as “fine” and “genteel” flattered readers that they too might be just the sort of new, discriminating owner for whom these items were intended (MacArthur and Stobart, 2010: 183–184).

Beyond the auction, *how* second-hand retailers presented goods to appeal to potential buyers is not easy to recover, outside of the modes of print advertising already encountered: trade cards and newspaper advertisements. These formats nonetheless tell us that those advertising felt comfortable with conveying the availability of old alongside new; and were prepared to offer incentives to potential sellers of such goods. Samuel Foyster, operating ‘at the Indian Queen’, in the

well-known second-hand textiles district around Monmouth Street and Seven Dials (London) made a point of specifying that he bought and sold ‘all manner of rich and plain second hand Cloathes, pistols, swords & watches’ on his trade card, as well as offering to pay the messenger who brought any such items to him for valuation (Foyster, mid-eighteenth century).

Foyster’s offer, and others like it, speak to the competitiveness of the Georgian market in which he operated. Those with goods to sell or exchange in a crowded metropolis like sixteenth-century Venice or eighteenth-century London had many options for their business, and no doubt sought out those retailers offering up added extras like free collection, or home visits for valuations. Across the eighteenth century, these incentives put pressure on established sellers to change their practices; the Antwerp *Oudekleerkopers* extended their activities beyond the bounds of the Friday Market in the late eighteenth century, in order to compete with the rising number of non-guild sales being organised beyond the city walls, suggesting that for those in the hinterlands of Antwerp, locally organised sales were as productive (and well-stocked) as those held centrally (Van Damme, 2009: 111–112). From the perspective of the buyer, quality, cleanliness and convenience were the desirable attributes of second-hand wares which retailers needed to place front and centre in their strategies for both securing stock *and* selling it. Auctioneers and dealers who could regularly offer up good quality furniture and textiles from respectable bug-free households (an increasingly visible concern by the end of the eighteenth century) on a regular basis at accessible venues, won out over those who could not (Pennell, 2014).

Separating the ‘valued from the valueless’? Changing chronologies and practices

So, at what point did selling “second-hand” become more about junk disposal and charitable ridding, than about “clever” consumption? The enduring association of second-hand retailing with the soiled and sub-standard took root in what were clearly changing market conditions in much of Europe and post-revolutionary America from the late eighteenth century onwards. This was a period of apparent bifurcation in the markets for second-hand goods, in which specialist dealing in fine and decorative arts, fuelled by wealthy private collectors like the Rothschilds and Rockefellers, and public museums like the Victoria and Albert and Metropolitan, laboured to conceal the used nature of the goods dealt in a connoisseurial fog of patina and “taste” (Stobart and Van Damme, 2010a: 4–5; Van Damme, 2010). Dealing in ‘cast-offs and rubbish’, the stuff of Victorian rag and bottle stores in London and the booty of the Parisian *chiffonnier*, was only somewhat less romanticised in paintings like Edouard Manet’s 1869 *Le Chiffonnier* (oil on canvas: the Norton Simon Foundation, Pasadena, F. 1968.09.P), although such lives were hard-won from the detritus, dust and even worse.

Several factors drove this change. First, we must acknowledge the shifting sands of consumer choice and material innovation. The advent of so-called “semi-durable” materials such as ceramics and cottons meant that the resale values of goods made from them depreciated more quickly, while the ‘lure of the new’ finally muted strictures that had traditionally counselled material stewardship and reuse as moral virtues (Van Damme, 2009: 116). This was an age in which rising industrial production across Europe was as yet unfettered by environmental or ecological concerns, and as yet untarnished by concerns about the health effects of new materials, new manufacturing techniques or novel, fashion-driven behaviours.

However, while the decline in the appeal of some categories of second-hand good – notably household textiles and clothing – is clear in the text of advertisements for household sales as well as in accounts of the grubby, shabby milieu of the old clothes dealers and street sellers, the reasons behind this decline cannot be applied to *all* second-hand objects. Concerns about

hygiene and the transmission of diseases via clothing, bedding and curtains certainly curtailed second-hand dealing at the more respectable end of this market, but such concerns were less crucial within the market for second-hand furniture, for example. Although they too describe this market as one also undergoing “polarization”, Clive Edwards and Margaret Ponsonby note that within the furniture trade in mid-Victorian England, patina and the solid construction of some older furniture were highly valued and marked it out for discerning middling buyers, in contrast to the shoddy or shiny furnishings of ‘fateful newness’ favoured by the less well-off and (more pointedly) the less well-educated in aesthetic matters (Edwards and Ponsonby, 2010: 99–102, 104–105). Indeed, even amongst the poor clientele of London’s Petticoat Lane, good quality second-hand items (if affordable) were purchased over new shoddy ware; to deceive such buyers, not just cheap new furniture, but also musical instruments and metalwares were “duffed” to make them seem “second-hand”, a strange inversion of the previous century’s preference for used goods to seem “as new”. Middling and even poor consumers were still in the market for solid second-hand goods, both for necessary purchases like bedsteads, tables and metal kitchenwares (the second-hand market for which did not dwindle until World War I in Europe and the collection of metals for wartime *matériel*); and for “curios” and collectibles, to furnish their parlour mantelshelves (Westgarth, 2013).

Rather than “bifurcation” and “polarization” of second-hand circuits across the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, we might instead be looking at temporary disruption and segmentation within some types of second-hand commodity and retailing organisation; and changes of scale of operation in others. As Henry Mayhew observed in London, what had found a ready market some years earlier (glass and crockery, small woodenwares such as knife boxes and tea caddies), could no longer make money because of the ready availability of cheap new products; other goods (stuffed birds, small telescopes), were simply no longer desirable. By contrast, used clothes and textiles constituted such a large proportion of the second-hand trade at the time that two used clothes exchanges were set up in Spitalfields in the late 1840s; and a substantial export trade—in used clothes and textiles to Ireland and the continent (especially the Netherlands) transacted. The specific regional variation in what one might find in what Mayhew called ‘marine stores’, general dealers’ shops, suggests that even amongst poor labouring communities, the second-hand offer was highly attuned to the demands of the local market (Mayhew, 1968: II: 25–28).

As yet, few scholars have written about the period between the middle of the nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century, from which point on social scientists and anthropologists have turned their attention to contemporary practices of buying and selling second-hand, and environmental historians have started to take stock of past resource uses and abuses. But this is perhaps the most crucial period of change in how second-hand goods were sourced, marketed and retailed, an age in which the novelty of the shiny spectacle of the department store as purveyor of novel marvels to the middle classes, and the cheap and cheerful aesthetic of the retail bazaar for the less well-off, surely wore off. Since at least the end of World War I, during the economic downturns of the 1920s and 1930s, anxieties fuelled by periods of recession-driven austerity as well as engagement with newly debated notions of environmental and civic responsibility, particularly around the disposal of waste, reshaped attitudes to consuming the already used (e.g. Strasser, 1999; Gregson and Crewe, 2003; Cooper, 2010).

It was in this period too, that the moral indigestibility of untrammelled consumption began to be offset by attempts to channel disposal and sales of second-hand goods towards what Jennifer le Zotte has called ‘philanthropic capitalism’ (Le Zotte, 2013). Church jumble sales and charity bazaars raised money as a source of welfare for local communities or sometimes for more distant or elevated ends (supporting missionaries or the victims of natural disasters), and

became a model for later, more permanent forms of charitable second-hand collection and retail (Richmond, 2010). In *fin-de-siècle* America, Goodwill stores grew out of a Methodist campaign in Boston in 1902 to provide employment and resources to the poor and needy through the mending and distribution of used goods collected from wealthier householders. In Britain, the modern charity shop, the twentieth-century successor to Victorian ventures like the Salvation Army's clothes collections for the poor, first opened its doors in 1947–8, when Oxfam used a storefront in Oxford to dispose of excess donations gathered for sending to postwar Greece. These collection and retail institutions dominated the Anglo-American second-hand trade in non-luxury clothing, furniture and books, amongst many other items, until the advent of the two online sites which have come to dominate second-hand trading in the twenty-first century, eBay and Craigslist, both founded in 1995. In Britain alone, charity shops still account for over £270 million in revenue to the charities they support, while a 2014 report on the involvement of British households in charities identified purchasing from a charity shop as the most frequent type of engagement with a charitable organisation (Charity Retail Association, u.d.; Glennie and Whillans-Welldrake, 2014: 15).

New commodities in the twentieth century also created opportunities for furthering specialist second-hand trading and information circuits around second-hand goods. The rising ownership of cars in interwar America and post-1945 Europe brought with it opportunities for a second-hand market that shared some features of pre-modern practices (part-exchange, the selling of old alongside new stock in car showrooms), but which also created specialist retailers and new cultural stereotypes. Second-hand car sales outstripped new-car sales in America as early as 1927, providing the stimulus for sales outside of the networks run by the big car companies such as Ford and Packard (Gelber, 2008). It also fuelled a new archetype of the disingenuous dealer, in the cultural trope of the used car salesman (used on a Democratic campaign poster to such devastating effect to question the ethical standing of the Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, in the 1960 American presidential election).

Cars, like coaches before them, also enabled owners to be sellers themselves, cutting out the dealer-middleman altogether. This type of person-to-person transaction was not entirely new, of course, but it developed quickly in this period, fuelled not only by improved transportation and mail networks, but also by the lengthening classified columns of provincial news organs across nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain and America, and new specialist classified periodicals. The British weekly paper, *Exchange and Mart*, launched by lawyer-turned-publisher Edward Cox in 1868, grew out of a segment of the upmarket mid-Victorian women's magazine, *The Queen*, which gave column space for readers to advertise goods that they had for sale or exchange. The paper, to which modern online person-to-person market places for second-hand goods such as Gumtree, Craigslist and eBay, owe their *modus operandi*, continued in hard and then electronic formats for over a century, finally closing in 2005 (Brake and Demoor, 2009: 149–150).

Conclusion

Certainly the marketplace for second-hand goods *looks* very different now to that of the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, and we have the advent of the Internet and social media to thank for that. But while environmental concerns and recalibration of the second-hand as “retro”, “vintage” and (my favourite American euphemism) “gently used” have made buying such goods ethically and aesthetically valid for generations whose parents and grandparents before them would have shunned them, many methods of selling and distributing second-hand goods have deep roots in the past four centuries, from the thrill of winning with that last-minute bid on eBay, to the eagle-eyed hunt at the car boot sale and *marchés aux puces*. The Victorian rag

and bottle storeman would claim the house clearance “man and van” as his direct descendant, while the charity shop is but a cleaner version of the marine store, albeit with an admittedly different economic agenda. The second-hand trade in goods and materials and its diversified wholesale and retail conduits, from artworks to worn-through clothing waste, has never ceased to be economically and culturally central across the developed and developing world – understanding the complexity and evolution of its histories, never more important.

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