

TORQUAY POTTERY

Written and photographed by June Grayson

Beware the country charm of Torquay pottery. Once captivated, you might find that it has taken over your life.

That is what has happened to Debby Lyke and Jean Anderson of north suburban Chicago.

Not that they are complaining. Ten years ago they were homemakers and mothers of small children. Now they are successful

businesswomen with their own company, the Briar Patch Antiques.

They became acquainted at Winnetka Bible Church where they both are members. When their children began to attend school, they planned activities together during the day so that they could get out of the house. Since they both liked country-style furnishings, they attended antique shows to find interesting things for their homes.

They first saw Torquay pottery for sale at a antique show at Randhurst Mall. "We thought - aren't these little mottoes cute?" Lyke remembers. She bought a pair of candlesticks that day thinking they would look nice in her kitchen. Anderson became a Torquay collector only fifteen minutes later when she purchased a Torquay cream and sugar set for her home.

At the time they did not realize that the craze for Torquay was just beginning. Items could be picked up for a few cents then that now cost many dollars.

"The mottoes fit in well with our own ideas about life. Some reinforce right conduct and the work ethic. Other mottoes are just plain silly, and we enjoy those, too," explains Anderson.

"In addition, the predominate colors - cream, greens, and gold - that decorate the items integrate well with many country color schemes."

"We both love to travel to England," continues Lyke, "and now we have to go there on buying trips to find Torquay pottery for inventory for our company. In fact, some of my ancestors come from Cornwall, which is near the Devon area where the potteries were located. We have found that the English people are unfailingly helpful to foreign visitors."

Even their husbands are pressed into service. They have to carry the purchases around England without breaking them before they can be shipped back to the United States.

Potteries sprang up in all of the little villages around the town of Torquay, (pronounced Tor-key by the English), because of the chance discovery in 1870 of red clay deposits. Natural red color terracotta art pieces in classic Greek designs were prized by the Victorians. Those products were even thought worthy of presentation to Queen Victoria as gifts. However, by the turn of the century, terracotta had gone out of fashion and the little potteries had fallen on hard times.

To revive the industry, the potteries began to produce the now well-loved "motto ware" to sell to companies for promotional purposes and to tourists eager to find a keepsake to take home.

"Evidently, they sold all over the world. We have a piece marked

'Los Angeles Farmers' Market' and another one marked 'Washington, D.C.'," Anderson says.

Since the potteries were all separate and privately owned, a collector can find many styles and color schemes, such as the Scandy, the Cottage, the Black Cockerel, and the Blue Kingfisher. Collectors may specialize in just one pattern to go with the color scheme of their homes.

There is even an international society of more than 500 Torquay collectors headquartered in England but with members in the United States, Canada, and Australia. The organization's annual meeting will be held in England this coming September.

Collectors often find themselves with duplicates of the more common items, and need to sell some of them to provide the funds to afford the rare and expensive pieces. That is what happened to Anderson and Lyke. In addition, many friends who trusted their judgment had started asking them to find the different antiques they were collecting or items they wanted to furnish their homes.

That is why Anderson and Lyke went to their husbands two years ago and said, "We want to start our own antique business and we need you to underwrite us. We need x number of dollars

and after that, we want you to stay out of our business."

They spent months deciding on a name and a logo. Their seed money financed their buying trips and the stationery, business cards, and initial inventory.

Because they don't want to be tied down, they do not have a shop. However, they are one of the almost 400 antique dealers who rent a booth at the Sandwich Antique Show held the second or third Sunday of the summer months.

Although the Sandwich Antique Show began in the spring of 1988, it has already become hugely successful. Since Sandwich is only sixty miles from Chicago, it makes a nice summer Sunday outing. The historic buildings on 160 acres of shaded and well kept ground provide room for dealers both inside and outside for the day. The Sandwich Hospital Auxiliary serves a delicious Sunday dinner and uses the profits to benefit the local hospital. Admission charge is \$3.00 per person and free parking is available.

Sandwich Antiques Markets is the only large scale Illinois market showcasing just antiques and collectibles for the new and advanced collector. No dealer is allowed to sell new or reproduction merchandise. All dealers are carefully screened to be honest and knowledgeable. All dealers are required by the

show's promoter, Humberstone Management, to give a ten day money back guarantee if the merchandise purchased is not what it is represented to be.

In spite of what they sell, they both maintain their own private collections that enrich and grace their homes. And like all treasure hunters - which is what antique collectors really are - they are still looking for some additional treasures for themselves. "We know they are out there, but we haven't found them yet: a piece with the Lord's Prayer on it, and another piece with Longfellow's Psalm of Life."

"Tell me not in mournful numbers life is but an empty dream." Life is neither empty nor mournful for Anderson and Lyke with their abiding interest in Torquay pottery and their new business.