

All over the map

A chance find at a car-boot sale turned out to be a very detailed survey, made by no less than a royal geographer, of the Oxfordshire village where rare-book dealer Daniel Crouch lives, as Carla Passino discovers

CALL it serendipity. Just as he was preparing to speak to *COUNTRY LIFE* about his most cherished possession, rare-book and map dealer Daniel Crouch chanced upon one he loved even more. 'My answer to: "What would I never part with?" would have been different a day earlier,' he explains. 'But yesterday morning, when I was walking my dog, I got a voicemail from my friend, Heidi. She was at a car-boot sale and found a map of North Hinksey, which is where I live near Oxford. She phoned me and said, "It's £100, do you want it?"'

Pesky telecoms didn't cooperate, however, and Mr Crouch almost missed out. There was little reception up the hill he was climbing, so he didn't receive the call and, by the time he had walked back down and heard the message, his friend had left the car-boot sale—but not before having the presence of mind of getting the map seller's contact details.

'Yesterday afternoon, I took £100 out of the bank and went down to the man in Didcot—and it turned out the map is not only a map: it's about the size of a small door, it's of my parish in Oxford and it's in beautiful condition.'



Local treasure: an 1842 map of his home village of North Hinksey in Oxfordshire is £100 well spent for dealer Daniel Crouch

Mr Crouch spotted his house on it—or rather his houses, as, at the time, the building was split into two, with two separate gardens. He also discovered that the next-door pub

then sat at the bottom of his garden—'which chimes, because, when I tried to dig a fence, I had to dig through quite a bit of pub.'

But perhaps the greatest boon for him was that the map, which dates from 1842 and is in colour, was not printed: 'It's a manuscript and it was done by James Wyld, who was then the royal geographer—goodness knows what he was doing in North Hinksey.'

The village, historically part of Berkshire, although now 'trapped' within Oxford's ring road, must have been very rural and its main claim to fame had yet to emerge: one of its streets—specifically the one in which Mr Crouch lives—was partly built by Oscar Wilde. 'In order to keep his students from misbehaving, John Ruskin, who was Wilde's tutor at Oxford, had them try to build a road between the villages of North and South Hinksey,' reveals Mr Crouch—except that 'they got bored and stopped, so the villages of North and South Hinksey, even to this day, are still not joined.'

Of course, the great playwright had not even been born when the other Wyld, the geographer, drew his map, so there would have been another reason for his visit. It's a puzzle, but one Mr Crouch is determined to solve: 'That's my next job.'

Take five: highlights from Guercino's life

WORKS on paper by Guercino (1591–1666) take centre stage at London Art Week with an exhibition by specialist dealer Stephen Ongpin ('Felicità d'invenzione', to July 26, see *Art Market for details, page 160*). The Old Master was not only an exceptional painter, but also a prolific draughtsman—he accounts for the largest number of surviving drawings from 17th-century Italy, including *A Seated Female Nude* (pictured)

1. Born Giovanni Francesco Barbieri in Cento, near Ferrara, Italy, he was nicknamed

Guercino ('little squinter') after a condition that affected his right eye

2. Mostly self taught, he had his break in 1617, when Cardinal Alessandro Ludovisi called him to paint several altarpieces in Bologna. When Ludovisi became Pope in 1621, Guercino followed the newly ascended Gregory XV to Rome, where he painted important frescos, such as *Aurora* at Casino Ludovisi, then the property of the pontiff's nephew, Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi

3. With Gregory XV's untimely death in 1623, the artist returned

to his hometown of Cento.

Although he was asked to become a court artist in Britain and France, he didn't want to leave Italy and declined to go

4. According to his near-contemporary Carlo Cesare Malvasia, he was a generous soul, always ready to help the poor and those in need. Legend has it that Guercino also painted a Virgin and Child in the kitchen for a cook at a Capuchin monastery, as a sign of appreciation for the excellent *frittata* he served

5. When the leading painter in nearby Bologna, Guido



Reni, died in 1642, Guercino moved to the larger city and became the new top artist in town until his death in 1666

A bird in hand

IN February 1777, a teenage girl stepped into the natural-history museum that Sir Ashton Lever had opened two years earlier in Leicester Square and began sketching an Angola vulture. That young artist was Sarah Stone (1762–1844) and she would go on to paint about 1,000 watercolours of animals,



fossils, minerals and ethnographic artefacts.

'She was the first female British painter of birds to work professionally,' explains art dealer Karen Taylor, who has had a particular passion for Stone ever since she chanced upon a book of her drawings when working at Sotheby's in the early 1990s. 'Like many female artists of the earlier period, she was the daughter of an artist—her father, James, was a miniaturist.' From him, she may have learned to make pigments and miniature technique emerges in her extraordinarily detailed depictions of birds' feathers, 'which almost look as if they were done with a single hair'.

A little after Stone had completed her vulture drawing, Lever began commissioning her, becoming her most important patron (another was naturalist Thomas Pennant). He even held a solo exhibition of her drawings in 1784, as looming bankruptcy forced him to sell his museum by lottery. Many Leverian specimens came from James Cook's voyages and, for some of them, Stone's watercolours are the only remaining record, as they were lost after Lever's successor, James Parkinson, dispersed the museum's contents by auction in 1806.

Not all of Stone's pictures were true to life, but that was hardly her fault: 'When working on a watercolour of a mounted zoological specimen in the museum, she was concerned, perhaps over-concerned, to record precisely what was in front of her, consequently reproducing all the inadequacies

of 18th-century taxidermy,' wrote Christine E. Jackson in *Sarah Stone: Natural Curiosities from the New Worlds*.

What they may lack in accuracy, her pictures make up for in brushwork skill and flair for colour: 'I sold the most beautiful drawing by her of a parrot to the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada. It's currently in an exhibition of female artists and, apparently, it's proven to be a bit of a crowd pleaser, because it's such a compelling image of this amazing blue-and-yellow macaw,' says Ms Taylor.

Unlike other female artists, the hugely prolific Stone continued to work even after marriage, albeit at a slower rhythm: her husband, Capt John Langdale Smith, supported her career and even brought back from his journeys live birds for his wife to sketch—including 'the Bird Topial', a West Indies troupial that became the family pet. Ms Taylor is presenting a different Stone bird, a striking mandarin duck (above), as part of her London Art Week exhibition, 'British Women Artists 1750–1950' at 8, Duke Street, SW1 (June 28–July 5; www.karentaylorfineart.com; www.londonartweek.co.uk)

A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN



BRITAIN'S past and present meet at 'The Reign', a new exhibition marking the 150th anniversary of the Society of Antiquaries' move to Burlington House, London W1 (June 28–July 5; www.sal.org.uk). Artists Adam Dant and Dan Llywelyn Hall found inspiration in the learned society's vast archive to create 20 new artworks. Responding to the royal portraits at Burlington House, Mr Llywelyn Hall painted his take on several British monarchs, such as *The Timid King* (above), based on a posthumous painting of Henry IV. Mr Dant conceived a series on the myths surrounding the origins of London that references objects from the society's collection. The pieces will eventually go under the hammer (partly online and partly at a gala evening on July 4), with proceeds helping fund the indexing and digitisation of about 25,000 prints and drawings.

WEIRD & WONDERFUL

TRAGEDY marred the early childhood of George, 7th Earl of Coventry and scandal his youth. His mother died of mercury poisoning when he was only two and, 17 years later, in 1777, the restless young man, then Viscount Deerhurst, eloped with the daughter of the Earl of Northington, Catherine Henley, sparking the ire of his father, who banished him from the family's grand Worcestershire house, Croome Court. Lady Catherine died in 1779, but the Viscount continued to flirt with disgrace. First, he engaged in an affair with Seymour Worsley, the wife of the man who had given him shelter after his eviction. Then, he found his name dragged into court as part of a 'criminal conversation' lawsuit that Lady Worsley's husband, Sir Richard, launched against her latest lover, George Bisset. By the time



the 6th Earl of Coventry died in 1809, however, the Viscount had settled down, having married Peggy Pitches, daughter of a brandy merchant. It was a year after he had inherited his title that

Paul Storr, one of Britain's finest silversmiths at the time, made a set of wine coolers fit for the glorious setting of Croome Court. The vessels, designed by royal goldsmith Rundell, Bridge & Rundell, were partly modelled after the Medici vase, a garden ornament sculpted in Athens in the 1st century AD, but with the 7th Earl's coat of arms replacing some original decoration. Having remained with the family for more than a century, they were sold by Sotheby's (and mentioned in *COUNTRY LIFE*) in 1935. Koopman Rare Art will present them at Treasure House (June 27–July 2; www.koopman.art; www.treasurehousefair.com)