



Expert opinion

From **Chris Yeo**, Valuer at Clevedon Salerooms and regular expert on BBC's *Antiques Roadshow*

Georgie Porgie pudding and pie

I'm quite sure that by the time you read this you will have had quite enough of opinion polls, so I'll keep it brief. A few years ago, for reasons best known to itself, English

Heritage conducted a poll to find 'Britain's Most Useless Monarch'. Shakespeare's great bogeyman Richard III, scored highly but top of the rubbish heap came George IV AKA the Prince Regent. To my mind this was a complete travesty. Okay, he was extravagantly self-indulgent, greedy, lazy and irresponsible, preferring a life of luxury over the tedious business of governing but (as the joke goes) he had his bad points as well. Personally, I'm happy to overlook Georgie Porgie's shortcomings for one good reason: without a doubt, George's crowning achievement was to give his name to the style of decorative art known as Regency.

In the decorative arts it's customary for a stylistic epoch to take the name of the current ruling figure; we think of Victorian or Elizabethan in England, or any number of Louis in France. Yet few played such an active role as George IV. He was arguably the best patron and collector of art ever to sit on the English throne. In a time when wealth and privilege counted for everything, George was the undisputed leader of fashion and he defined the taste of a generation. His appetite for collecting art and antiques was prodigious. In three years he spent the vast sum of £160,000 on furniture alone.

Those of us in search of Regency elegance need not to part with such sums. At Clevedon Salerooms' latest Fine Art auction, a very stylish library armchair sold for £680 proving that good, well-made and well-proportioned examples of Regency furniture can add style and elegance without breaking the bank. ■



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