

Peter Hone

Born 1941. Master plaster caster.

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Compiled by Alex Reid, a neighbour of Peter Hone, in October 2023.

1. Introduction



Peter Hone is a persistent and expert collector, as well as being master plaster caster. The account below was extracted in October 2023, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the website of the auctioneers Lay's and from the Bible of British Taste, www.bibleofbritishtaste.com. Hone has twice consigned his collection to auction, once in 2016 and again in 2023, realising over £1m from the first sale, and over £250,000 from the second, smaller, sale.

For the first sale, the collection was transferred to the auction rooms of Christies. For the second sale the collection was left in place in Hone's fine first floor one-bedroom flat in Ladbroke Square, London W11. The second sale was conducted via the internet by Lay's auctioneers of Penzance – where Hone has a home purchased with part of the proceeds of the first sale. For the second sale the flat was open for a week for the items to be viewed. Over 3,000 people visited the flat in the week, attracted by articles in the Evening Standard and other publications.

2. Lay's Describes Peter Hone

The Lay's auction house website described Peter Hone's second sale, in October 2023, thus:

Casting spells – the magical creations of Peter Hone, connoisseur, collector and aesthete.

Stepping over the threshold into Peter Hone's London home is an unforgettable experience; a sensory overload of the most delightful sort; inside is a curated wonderland interior as enchanting and extraordinary as the man himself.

Peter has lived in his Notting Hill flat since the 1960s. He is a man of many stories, and the next chapter of his life will be in Penzance, where he will relocate to after selling the remarkable contents of his London abode: all the ancient architectural fragments, classical busts, urns, marbles and curios, and perhaps most wondrous of all, Peter's beautiful plaster reliefs, which adorn almost every available wall.

Peter's interest in plasterwork developed during his 15 years at Clifton Nurseries in Little Venice, where he managed an architectural antiques shop for Lord Jacob Rothschild. This is where Hone 'honed in' on plaster, as he likes to joke. But don't be fooled by this insouciance, he is a Master plaster caster, widely regarded as skilled as Brucciani, the great Victorian plaster master.

His desire to remake his home afresh with his own creations, led to a now legendary sale with Christie's in 2016.

Re-creation and renewal seem to be recurrent themes for Peter, his life imitating art and he now wishes to wipe the slate clean once again, and so, quite literally, everything must go.

It is our immense privilege to be hosting this auction, and we will be selling everything, from the tiniest bone-china eggcup to his canopied four-poster bed. Peter's exquisite interior aesthetic makes the mundane seem sublime, and although his large classical plaster reliefs are undoubted show-stoppers, we fully expect devotees of the 'Hone look' to clamour for his charming utilitarian kitchen items as much as his magnificent busts and elegant urns.

It is a unique sale, a phenomenal collection from a unique individual.

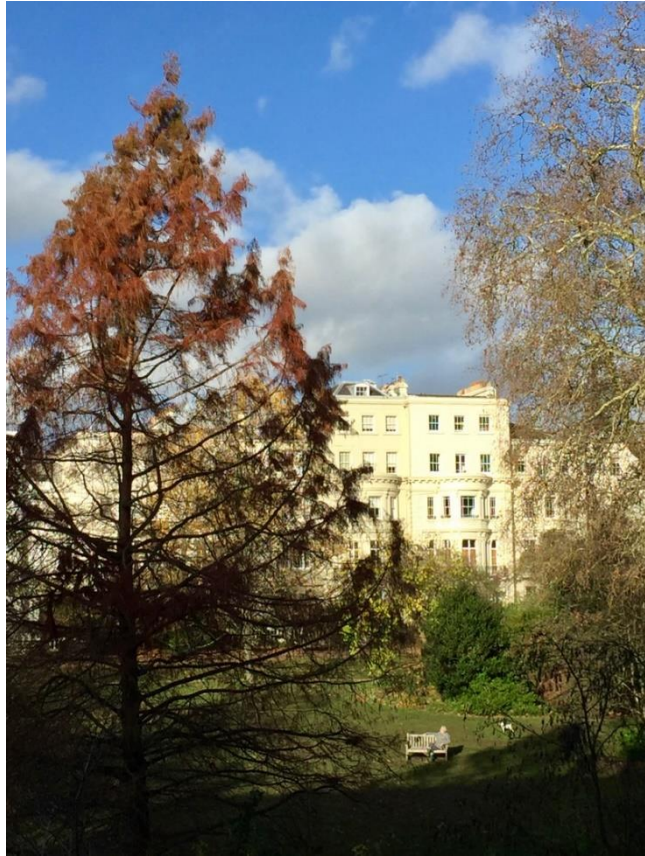
2. From the Bible of British Taste Website



I've called on Peter Hone in his Notting Hill studio flat a few times recently. It's always a huge pleasure. After hanging around for a bit, at last I went outside onto the balcony. A few hundred yards off Peter was 'exercising' his terrier Basil in the communal gardens. He offers coffee and some breakfast.

The pink and white striped tablecloth is always scrupulously clean, but on my last visit though the cups were out and the French windows were open, there was nobody about. During my visits he described his past life as a custodian of historic buildings, antique dealer and then a fabricator in plaster and occasionally, coloured resin, in his own very vivid words. 'I came here in 1961. I've been here over 50 years. A friend of mine said, 'Oh my friend Mary, she's moving from her flat, why don't you come and look at it? It was 7 shillings and 6d a week. I took it. I was working in the zoo serving the fellows, Sir Solly Zuckerman and the man who was the Naked Ape man, what's his name? [Desmond Morris] Luncheon, and functions in the evening when they would bring animals up for people to look at, it was very nice!'





Peter is a Master-Plaster-Caster, the only one of his kind. Now he does bespoke commissions and sells some more via Pentreath and Hall's Rugby Street shop. He used to make exquisitely coloured resin plaques as well that Marianna Kennedy sold in Spitalfields, my favourite the violet coloured Hercules tondo propped against his window. People make appointments to call on him here all the time, to buy and commission pieces or just to marvel at it all and take his photograph, like me.

'I worked for the department of the environment, didn't I? In the Banqueting House in Whitehall, in the Jewel Tower, in Westminster Abbey, Chiswick House. As a custodian. I had a hat with a silver crown on it and a suit like a policeman's suit with silver buttons with crowns on it and epaulettes and things like that. Nobody ever went to the Banqueting House, to Chiswick House. That was in between when I had my own shops in Camden Passage.'

'How do you like my beard? It's five days old, I thought when I'm brown, the white, it looks good on the brown, and it goes with the interior. It's marvelous really, I'm a very lucky person, the fact is that I've got this aptitude for learning and remembering things and I've got a natural calmness and unflappability. Unlike Basil.'



‘I was working at Clifton Nurseries, Lord Rothschild’s place. I was running the garden antiques department for him, I designed it.

We used to sit there at the big table. The fireplace we sat in front of was designed by Lutyens. We got all the things at country house sales. I’d been doing it for 20, 30 years before that, I’d had three shops in Camden Passage, we did all beds, Christopher [Gibbs] was there, he had a little stall in the carpet shop, he was in his jellaba and sandals. Then the shop closed, the lease came to an end, I closed the business and went to work for English Heritage at the Banqueting House, Chapter House, Jewel Tower, Chiswick House.

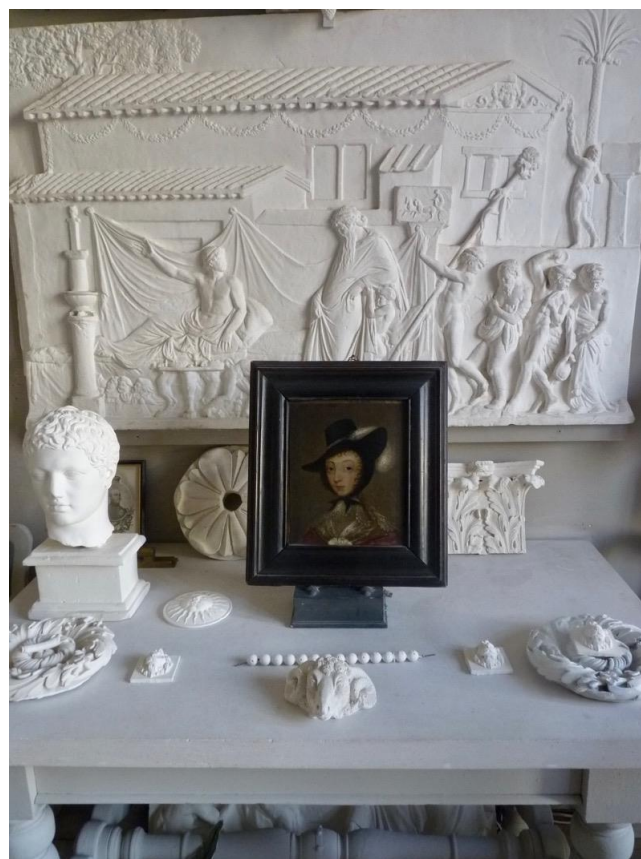
I drove on my bicycle round them all, because it was only part time. It was MARVELLOUS, £75 a week in the hand!’

‘It’s not crammed with stuff any more, it’s as I want it, *grisaille*. It’s my Brexit moment. I’d been building up a collection for 45 years you see. As long as we’d been in the EU, the moment we were leaving they all had to go. I’ve got British Worthies in the hall, did you see?’ ‘The leaves – of Acanthus and Gunnera – are wonderful, and of course each is a one off.’



Peter with Basil his irrepressible terrier, Basil.

‘When they had my sale, they had a sale that was following and I bought the Turkish turban. [an Ottoman grave marker] I got the base from a skip at Clifton Nurseries. It’s rose violette marble.







‘I was making plaster casts for Clifton Nurseries and I was making them for myself. When I left there, retired, I made plaster casts for Jeanette Winterson’s girlfriend. I used to see them when they had the house together in Oxfordshire and she was doing her book on Sappho, I said, I’ve got a plaque with Sappho’s head on it, so I made one for her and she was so thrilled and everybody ordered it, so I started making plaster casts of my own, 87, or something like that.’

‘Miranda Rothschild moved in next door, and she said, You know my brother Jacob (before he was elevated to the peerage) is looking for someone to open the shop? I said, I’m quite happy on my bike, I don’t want to go into antiques any more, it was LOVELY. I’m not ambitious you know!’

He asked again, he said, What’s the matter with him, is he alcoholic? Third time round I said, Come and see me in my flat. We had a fire in those days, and the great bed from Mereworth Castle and the great Wright of Derby. We had tea. It was to take over from my friend Janet Shand Kydd. We sat over there, he said that’s a nice picture is a copy?’



‘When I came to this house in 1961 I was 21. No one knows where I was born! There was a piece in the Telegraph or the Times commenting on the sale in 2016 that said I’d been found in basket in an orphanage. It was vaguely true. In Rochdale. I was born wonderful.’

‘Everyone thinks my hands should be arthritic by now, but they’re not. They’re wonderful hands!’

‘My philosophy is to put big things in small spaces and small things in big places. I think it’s MARVELLOUS! Otherwise you’ve got to bank it like this.’ He got the lovely shell pink on these white linen slip covers by washing them with an old crimson velvet cushion.

‘This stuff, it’s from the Countess of Portarlington, it was huge flags, banners, I got it at a sale. I had it hanging right across this room, I made it into this blind that’s been up there 40 years.’





‘I made that chair, I had the paws and just put it together. The arms and the side frame bit, the paws, were there, they were in a garage off the Marylebone Road. The paws I cast.’





The bedroom used to be a sort of garden room and then a kitchen.





The bedroom ceiling is a work in progress, more panels going up and more leaves coming

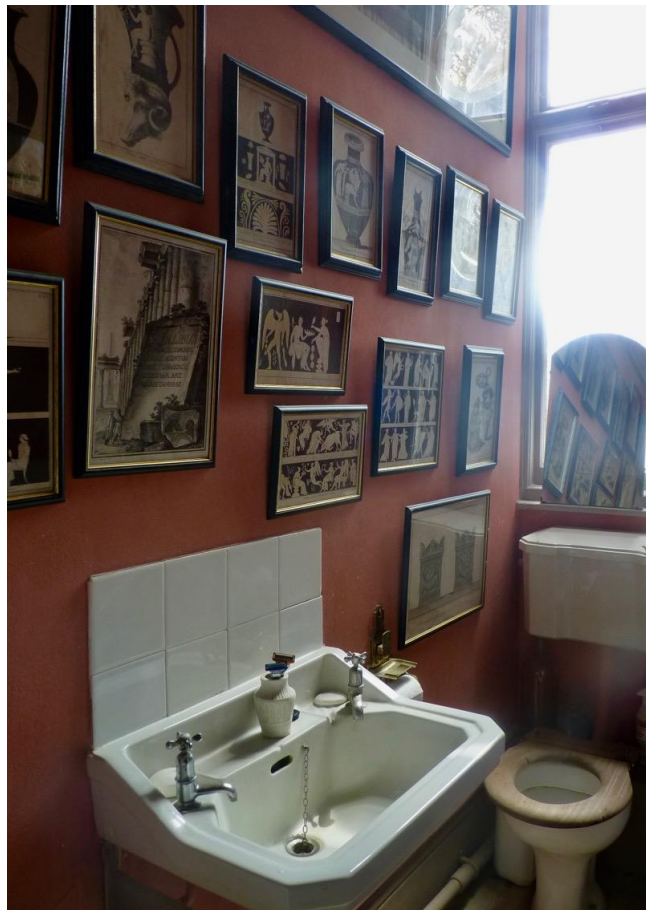
That's Lord Leighton and that's Augustus John, a more recent acquisition. It's a study for a lost painting, unfinished, you can see there's just a cat sitting there in the folds of her thing, pencil, crayon, white chalk. On the back where it was folded back to fit into a frame there was a tiny stamp the size of a petit pointe, the initials 'FAS'.

When Leighton died the Fine Art Society sold all his collection of drawings. It's after Ariadne. There are oleographs of it, I had it under this bed a long, long time. It was bought by Angus and David Bourne from the sale of Ivor Novello in '53, sold in a lot of picture frames. Then David gave it to me about 35 years ago.'

I took it to Christie's, Sotheby's, Bonhams, they all said, 'Oh no no no nothing...!' I was so infuriated I took it round to Leighton House. And they just went bananas. It was on view in Christie's sale with all of my stuff, they said, 'We must have it, it'll be 35,000!' I said, 'No you won't!'



‘The table in my bedroom, it’s early C18th, probably by – I always forget his name. It’s absolutely marvellous!’



The Hone Collection – Peter’s sale of plaster casts and works of art, was held at Christie’s in October 2016. ‘Getting rid of all these things, it’s not going to be the end of the world: it’s the beginning of a new world... A grisaille world. It’s not going to be minimal here: in fact it will be more than what’s here now, it will be the essence of me, the essence of my love for things,’ he said at the time, anticipating the rooms as they look now.

‘They asked me, What is the most unusual thing you’ve ever bought? I said, It’s Camilla Parker Bowles’s bikini. I said, Don’t you print that! And they did. It’s in the cupboard there, its ‘60s. Well, Camilla’s sister is an interior decorator and she was at my sale view. And she said, You did mention my sister, about her bikini? I said, I’m terribly sorry, I’ll be in the Tower! And she said, What’s it like?’

My friends the Edens lived next door to the Parker Bowles’s. They used to sell all their cast-off things for charity on their lawns, Miranda Eden kept it because it was so smart!’
