

Photo: Philippa Jane Welgoss

Paul Martin is at Holt Festival on July 28.

## Paul speaks out to help give **CRAFTS OF THE PAST** a brighter future



Heritage crafts need help. And antiques expert Paul Martin is keen to heighten awareness of their plight at the Holt Festival, as **Rachel Banham** reports.

**PAUL MARTIN IS** passionate about safeguarding crafts that are endangered. At Holt Festival, in north Norfolk, on July 28 he will be discussing the renaissance of skills that will be needed to keep crafting alive in the future.

Paul is one of the experts on the BBC series *Antiques Road Trip* and its sister series *Celebrity Antiques Road Trip*. He also presented the BBC series *Flog It!* for more than 20 years.

For four years, he was also a patron of The Heritage Crafts Association.

Explaining what he will be speaking about at Holt, Paul says: “We’re raising awareness about some of the crafts - the heritage crafts - that are at risk and on the red list, meaning they’re not made in this country or they’re going to be suffering if they don’t have a little bit of financial support and some awareness and new blood coming into the industry.

“What we need is young people, or middle-aged people or retired people, to pick up some skills and some tools and start making things.

“During lockdown I think gilding enjoyed a renaissance and now gilding is pretty safe, but

there are lots of things that people aren't aware of which sadly we don't make any more, like cricket balls."

He explains that cricket balls are sent to India to be stitched up now.

"The skills abroad are fantastic," he says.

"We used to have skills, but there's nobody left to teach them or they can't afford to teach them because they're a one man band."

He cites some examples - wheelwrighting, flute making, lute making and violin making.

"They are all threatened. They're still being made, but unless we raise awareness, sadly they will all suffer," he says.

"There are lots of musical instruments which sadly are on the endangered list and we won't be making them unless this is addressed and tackled."

Paul says that glass eye making is not done in this country any more.

He adds: "Gold beating - we don't beat gold any more down to a golf leaf standard. That's done overseas.

"Bell foundries - they're disappearing, casting bells."

Sadly, Paul believes, we may only notice the demise of certain crafts when we feel the effects closer to home.

"It's only when it starts to come to, let's say like stained glass window making and lead working and thatching ... all of these things will gradually suffer unless we keep on top of it," he says.

"The problem is if you don't address it while there's a problem, it's too late once it's gone because you can't bring it back.

"It's just making people aware, in a general sense. I'm not giving a technical talk on anything because it's about antiques of the future."

Paul has an art and antiques gallery in the Cotswold market town of Corsham, called The Table Gallery. He is known for his love of antiques.

"Where I come from on this is the fact that it's hands-on history," he says.

"I love holding things because I love antiques. All of these beautifully crafted items - it could be tapestries, it could be needlework, it could be silk work - they're the antiques of the future.

"That's why I'm heavily motivated to try to do something, because in 150 years' time these beautifully crafted things will survive because they're well made by masters of the genre, and they're going to be looked after because they're quite expensive to buy."

He adds: "If you buy properly, it becomes cheaper, doesn't it? It's like buying a beautiful pair of handcrafted scissors, handmade from Sheffield. You know those scissors are going to last a lifetime and not one year.



Photo: Anthony Kelly/Archant

**ABOVE:**

Paul Martin visited Norwich Cathedral in 2015, with the popular BBC TV series *Flog It!*

"So basically it's sustainable, it's giving people employment, it's keeping employment in this country, it's educating people and in the long run people will save money.

"It won't go to landfill. We're talking about sustainability and 'green'. It doesn't get much greener than some handcrafted things because they use traditional skills and methods, and that's why I love antiques because they're not second-hand or third-hand, they're 15th-hand and, you know, they've lasted three or four centuries and that's why they're expensive, because they've lasted.

"But they weren't made as antiques 300 years ago. They were the crafts of the day."

Paul did a talk in King's Lynn in March 2022 and is looking forward to returning to East Anglia soon.

"I can't wait to come up there. I love it up

there,” he says.

“I’ve been to Holt before as guest in the audience and I’ve filmed one of the festivals there and I’ve been on the stage there, so I know what to expect.

“I love the countryside, I love the heritage up there. I’m very passionate about keeping skills alive, and I believe if everybody could make something or paint something the world would be a better place.

“Times are hard right now and a lot of people are make-doing and mending, so why not now start making presents to give to people? Even if it’s a traditional nesting box for a bird or a bug box or something, or turn a wooden bowl.

“I learned to turn a bowl on many of the shows I’ve been on and I thoroughly enjoyed it. And that’s what got me involved really in the heritage crafts. It’s about getting



Photo: Archant

## TELL US YOUR MEMORIES

Paul’s comments encouraged us to look through the Let’s Talk photo archives.

We found pictures of wheelwrights, musical instrument makers, bell foundry workers and more. And we would love to hear

your memories of such craftsmen and women from the past.

Please write to: Let’s Talk, Prospect House, Rouen Road, Norwich, NRI IRE or email: [letstalk@archant.co.uk](mailto:letstalk@archant.co.uk) or you can call us on 01603 772464.

hands-on history and making in a traditional way where you use hardly any electricity. It’s all handmade and what you make is so unique, it’s wonderful. It’s got its own personality and it’s a little treasure. You make it with love to give to somebody with love.”

Paul recently featured in the Channel Five series, *Big Antique Adventure With Susan Calman*, and is set to be on our screen again.

“There’s plenty more work coming through the grapevine, with the *Antiques Road Trip* and *The One Show* and loads of other things,” he says. “I’m busy this year.”

First though, he is relishing getting his passion for crafts across to the audience at the Holt Festival this July.

“That’s what I thrive on really,” he says.

“There will be lots of questions. I’ll bring a few items up and a few examples. It’s about people becoming aware of what we can make and sadly what’s being endangered.

“We just need to safeguard our heritage.” ■

**Paul Martin is at Holt Festival on July 28 at 6pm, at The Venue. He will also sign books at the event.**

**For tickets, visit the website: [www.holtfestival.org](http://www.holtfestival.org)**

**Find out more about The Heritage Crafts Association at: [www.heritagecrafts.org.uk](http://www.heritagecrafts.org.uk)**

**See Paul on *Big Antique Adventure with Susan Calman* on [www.channel5.com](http://www.channel5.com)**

***Flog It!* is broadcast on BBC2, *Antiques Road Trip* is on BBC1 and episodes of both series are also available on BBC iplayer: [www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer)**

**ABOVE RIGHT:**

Cart making at Ashwellthorpe in October 1952. Wheelwright William Garwood, second left, talks to blacksmith Hugh Howes in Messrs Goodrum and Garwood carpenters and wheelwrights. Mr Goodrum stands centre back in a suit and trilby Photograph C7017.

**RIGHT:**

*My World of Antiques*, by Paul Martin, was published by John Blake in 2018. Paul will be signing copies at Holt Festival.

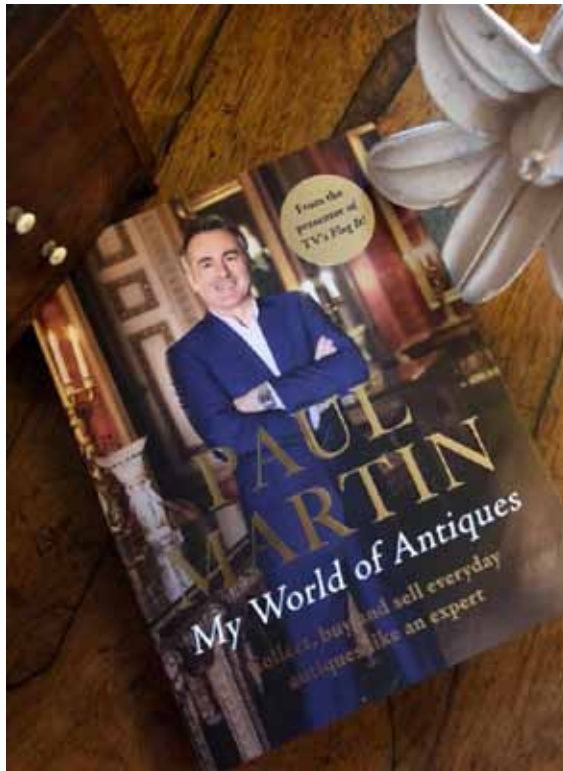


Photo supplied by Philippa Jane Wielgos

## FUNCTIONAL ANTIQUES

Explaining the appeal of antiques to him, Paul says: “They’re just handcrafted, they’re beautiful to look at, they’re practical, they’re decorative and they’re functional.”

He adds: “An antique should be functional. It’s echoing the ethos of William Morris – have nothing in

your house which you know not to be beautiful or useful.

“For me, if you’re investing in an antique you want to find something that’s going to be practical, and that when you see it every day and you use it, it puts a smile on your face every day.”