

The Edinburgh Reporter meets Charles Graham-Campbell of Bonhams

Charles Graham-Campbell is the newly appointed Managing Director at Bonhams Scotland, succeeding Miranda Leslie in the position who is off to pursue new projects after ten years in charge.

Charles has been Head of Bonhams Valuations team in Scotland for the past 13 years and is a member of the company's UK Board. He has conducted valuations the length and breadth of Scotland and the North of England and is well known as a charity auctioneer in Scotland.

The many outstanding pieces he has uncovered include a yellow jade carving of a tapir from the reign of the Qianlong Emperor which sold in Hong Kong in 2016 for HK\$2,700,000; a pale green jade figure of Buddha which made £482,500 in London in 2014; a painting by William Scott which sold for £197,000 in London in 2016, and a 1923 Bentley that has been in the same family since 1954 and which made £150,000 at the Important Motor Cars sale at Brooklands in 2010.

Born and raised in the Highlands of Scotland Charles first qualified as a Chartered Surveyor.

Bonhams Global CEO Matthew Girling said, "I know Charles will bring to the job of Managing Director, all the qualities of leadership and sound judgement that have made him such a valued member of the Bonhams team in Scotland. I would also like to thank Miranda Leslie for the way in which she has given such a firm foothold to Bonhams in Scotland. She leaves behind a wonderful legacy."



Charles Graham-Campbell took over as Managing Director of Bonhams Scotland in September 2017

The Edinburgh Reporter spoke to Charles in the auction room on Queen Street.

He told us : “I have been at Bonhams now for 13 or 14 years nearly. I have always worked in the auctioneering or valuing business. I suppose I started at college studying auctioneering and valuing, fine arts and became a sort of chartered surveyor on the antiques side of things and then joined a small firm and then worked for another international auction house based in Scotland – who are no longer based here and now work for Bonhams.

“And now I am running Bonhams, that’s right. I don’t necessarily want to give up my day job of doing valuations, but yes, there is a lot more that I have to think about now. I am responsible for 25 people here on Queen Street where we are based and I am the one looking after them.

“I am also working with colleagues who are in London and literally around the world, having meetings with them and talking to them about paintings or whatever it is we are selling and working with.”

Bonhams in Edinburgh is a big auction presence in the city with lots of sales scheduled between now and the end of the year.

Charles explained : “Yes it will be busy for a while now and then it will quieten down for Christmas.”



Martin Green checks on the contents before the Bonhams Whisky Sale on 4 October 2017

We asked if shows like the Antiques Roadshow have made people feel as if they know a lot about antiques.

Charles replied : “Yes but people now like to collect certain things. They are far more educated now than they ever used to be when I first started in this business 25 or 30 years ago. Then, yes you used to watch the Antiques Roadshow on a Sunday just so that you knew what people were going to bring in on the Monday!

“It was rather a fun way of doing business but that’s what used to happen. You would get queues round the block for teddies or toys or other unusual little bits and pieces, but now I think people are generally aware. We have information at our fingertips and it’s so easy now to know what a bottle of wine is worth or a fishing reel – maybe not a diamond as you probably need a bit of expertise to tell you about that and that’s why you come to specialist valuers and auctioneers to get the complete picture.

“With the Antiques Roadshow a lot of my colleagues are the specialists on the show, and we see them on a Sunday evening. We also have colleagues here in Scotland who do valuation days and also some of our specialists from elsewhere come here to put on a special valuation day. Coins arms and armour, books we will have a valuation day for it!

“We are an international auction house and will be happy to sell anything that moves just about in a house. Also things that are not in a house – motor cars are a big part of our business at Bonhams. We sell a lot of cars.

“We are open 9 till 5 and being an auction house we are open to the public. We love them to come in and bring their items of jewellery or whatever, and of course for bigger items we will go out and see them at their houses. My job has been very much in other people’s houses valuing their possessions. We can then put them in touch with the right place to sell their items

“I sent a small little piece of jade over to Hong Kong to be

sold and that was sold for the price of a flat in Edinburgh!



Clementine (4½) shows that you will need a bit of room for Twaig if you want to take him home. Twaig was sold at Bonhams Edinburgh in October 2017.

Charles reflected on the way auction houses have had to adapt by introducing technology on the floor so that bids can come in from all four corners of the globe. He said : “I thought that going into a business like this that it would never change.

“They always say that your job will change unbelievably through your lifetime and I wondered how this could happen with antiques. I have to say that the modern information technology world that we live in has really really changed it.

“Ten years we didn’t have whisky sales. We now have these and last year we sold a bottle for £68,500! That is a huge amount of money.

“Then we sell watches – they are going through the roof at the moment with people loving these sort of things.

“Paintings are not quite so popular at the moment though some will come back in value.

“People will always collect things. It’s in human nature to collect things.

Now with the internet you can now be at the other side of the world and bid live in an auction. You can see the auctioneer up there on the rostrum with his gavel. You can hear him and you can press a button at home in Sydney or Vancouver or wherever you happen to be in the world. We have a lot of buyers in China now. That is a growing market, and we expect bidders to come from Delhi very soon in large numbers. So we

have to be ready for this.

“People know about their subject. If they have collected paintings by a certain artist then they will know a lot about that person, and they will be very very keen to bid on those particular pieces.

“We also have Asian sales in Scotland with Japanese and Chinese items in them. The Far East has often been a rich seam for us as Europeans have travelled to the Far East for centuries, bought things and brought them back and now Asians are buying some of their heritage back again.”

One senses that Charles is much more hands on than his position might allow in future. But his first love is really conducting the auction it seems.

He concludes : “I am often up there on the rostrum conducting sales. It is my business and my life. I started selling some very humble pieces at a country roup and have sold some priceless objects on this rostrum and other places too.”

And we think he rather likes it up there!

List of Bonhams Edinburgh Sales Autumn 2017:

Sale Name	Date	Specialist
Asian Art	5 December	Ian Glennie
Whisky	6 December	Martin Green