

# treasure hunting

## *A Passionate Collector's Search for Vintage Beads in London*

*Diane Fitzgerald*



*I don't need to walk where Shakespeare trod, to see glorious cathedrals, or attend plays in the West End. My ideal London vacation is much simpler. I enjoy strolling through antique markets looking for vintage beads and having a good dinner with my sister Marilyn, who shares my passion for antiques.*



It's hard just to window shop in London.

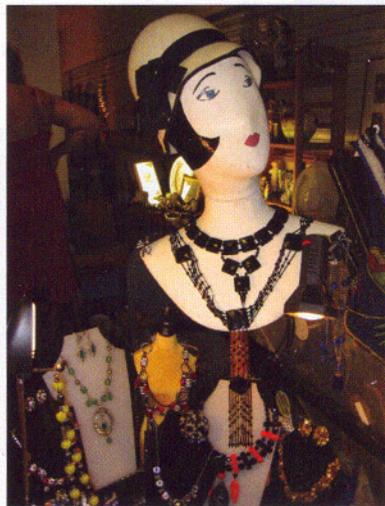


Dreamtime is a luscious shop in the Georgian Market.

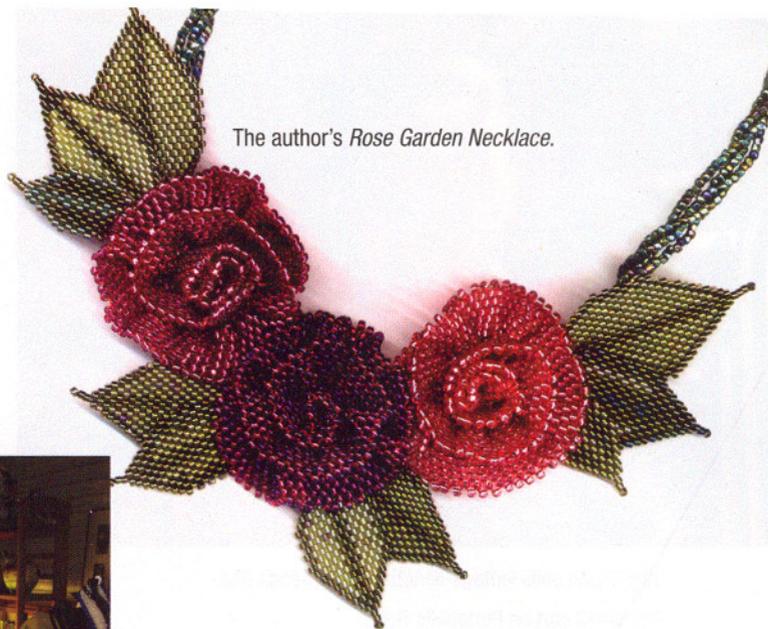


Bargains abound at Bermondsey Market.

*Marilyn and I arrived in London on a Monday* in midsummer after attending the Annual General Meeting of the Bead Society of Great Britain in Bournemouth, where I taught my *Rose Garden Necklace* to English beadworkers. We already had a plan for our week's stay: Each day we would go to a boot sale (flea market), antique fair, or antique center (each venue varies slightly), taking our time to browse, visit with dealers, learn a bit, and possibly make a purchase. Before departing the United States, we did our homework. Using the Internet, we found the dates and locations of several antique markets and pinpointed their location using [www.multi-map.com](http://www.multi-map.com), an easy-to-use Internet site with detailed maps of the winding streets of London and nearby towns. The bead spirits must have smiled upon our venture because each day brought warm, sunny weather. Reminisce with me as I share my diary for the week of July 9–15, 2003.



Art Deco jewelry is displayed at the Kempton Park Racecourse Antique Fair.



The author's *Rose Garden Necklace*.

Pinchbeck, the man who discovered this gold look-alike. The bar-type clasp would have been used on a velvet cuff embroidered in floral patterns with the tiniest seed beads. It was a bargain at only \$15! Further on, I saw a dealer in African trade beads wielding strings of Bohemian pressed-glass beads made to resemble shells. But I didn't buy anything from him—the prices were too high!

## TUESDAY

Kempton Park Racecourse  
Antique Fair

We made our first excursion to the Kempton Park Racecourse Antique Fair at Sunbury on Thames, about an hour's train ride from London's Victoria Station. We knew that to get the best buys here, we would need to arrive around six o'clock in the morning. When we reached this popular market, we saw three or four hundred vendors, so Marilyn and I decided to separate in order to pursue our particular passions. We didn't worry about meeting up again—we always find each other.

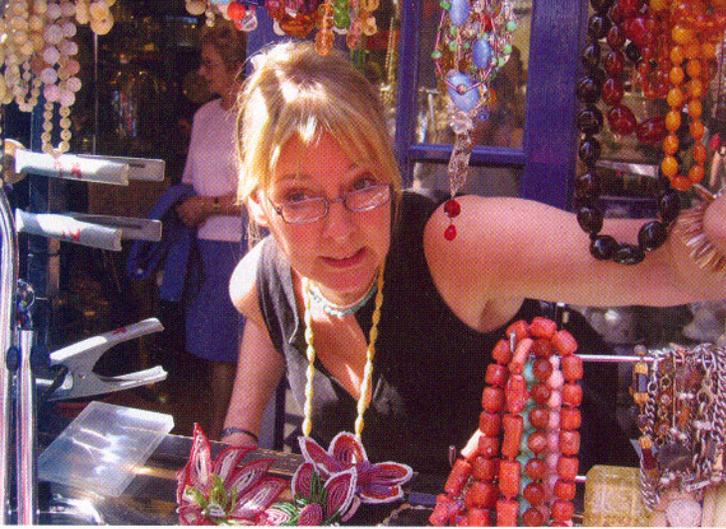
Walking down the first row of vendors, I spied a table of miscellaneous jewelry. To my delight there was a broken strand of tiny pressed-glass bird beads (a good omen!) popular in the Victorian era. I already had some, but I could extend my necklace with these, I reasoned. The price was right, only \$3\*. Then I came across a real gem, a highly decorated Edwardian (mid-1800s) bracelet clasp made of pinchbeck, an alloy of copper and zinc named after Christopher

## WEDNESDAY

Camden Passage and  
Georgian Market

Full of anticipation, Marilyn and I visited Camden Passage. Along this narrow, winding passageway, in addition to shops, vendors set up tables or lay rugs on the sidewalk to display their wares. Linens, silver, glassware, prints, and so much more can be found here. As always, though, buyer beware: Not everything is an antique!

Among the little rows of shops on Camden Passage is Sugar Antiques, a shop covered from floor to ceiling with sparkling brooches of every description. But the prize of Camden Passage is at the end—the Georgian Market. The tiny shops in this two-story building are filled to the gills with treasures, especially 50- to 100-year-old beads—just the kind I like to collect. Each Georgian Market shop is special and reflects the personality of its owner. Lynette Gray, a delightfully funny woman with a nose ring, funky glasses, and thick red pigtailed adorned with perky bows, owns Dreamtime, a shop with a huge selection of items, including vin-



Kay Green sells vintage Venetian glass beads from her small cart on Portobello Road.

tage clothing and hats. Seeing drawer after drawer of beads made it difficult to make a selection. I finally chose a short necklace with large pink and orange beads that looked good enough to eat.

Next door, Gillian Horsup's shop specializes in Art Deco jewelry, which she displays more beautifully than in a museum. Here a necklace of crystal cube beads with blue feathering caught my eye. Marianne Landau, who also specializes in Art Deco jewelry, had many pieces to tempt me as well. Just across the hall, Jeanette Judd entices passersby with her wall of glass bead necklaces. All in all, Marilyn and I spent a delightful hour going through the Georgian Market shops one by one.

## THURSDAY

Alfie's, Antiquarius, Gray's Market, and Davies Mews Antique Centers

Today Marilyn and I visited antique centers with many small vendors. Prices, we knew, would be considerably higher. Our first stop was Alfie's, a large antique mall just a short walk from the Edgware Road tube stop. As we entered, we were excited by the collection of beaded bags and clothing at Tin Tin Collectibles, but few other dealers offered any beads or beadwork so we went across the street to Cristobal's, a shop specializing in bold vintage jewelry by the likes of Miriam Haskell and Stanley Hagler\*\*. While the pieces were beautiful and inspiring to look at, they didn't tempt me.

Our next stop was Antiquarius, an antique center in the Chelsea section of London. Dealers here specialize in par-

ticular types of antiques, and few had beads. As I came around a corner, though, I found a small shop with jewelry. A wonderful necklace almost jumped off the wall and hugged me. We bonded instantly. The necklace has nine two-inch diameter blown Venetian beads in swirls of golden orange, aqua, lime green, and bachelor-button blue. It's wild enough to knock your socks off. I tried to restrain my excitement as I bargained for the necklace with the woman minding the shop, but I'm sure my feelings came through. The price finally agreed upon was \$200 and worth every penny.



Elayne Sugarman's shop Sugar Antiques on Camden Passage has one of the largest collections of costume jewelry in London.

## FRIDAY

Bermondsey Market

Another early and eagerly awaited day. Marilyn and I got out of bed at four thirty in the morning and made our way to Bermondsey Market. Located near the Thames River on the south side of London, this market is not far from the huge modern Ferris wheel known as the London Eye. Prices here are generally reasonable, so Marilyn and I each came home with a prize. Mine was a choker-length necklace of very large two-tone cube beads in peach and green. Marilyn couldn't say no to a silk love-letter pouch delicately beaded with the tiniest of beads in a floral pattern and tied with a pink silk ribbon bow. She plans to use it to hold our grandfather's love letters to our grandmother.

# SATURDAY

## Portobello Road

Along Portobello Road there are many jewelry and bead dealers. I came across my “find” in a little cart owned by Sacco and Daughter. As I casually perused the hundreds of necklaces, my heart leapt into my throat when one caught my eye. Made of drawn and hand-faceted Czech beads with rainbow hues inside and strung on square, gold-filled wire links, the necklace filled me with delight. These rare beads fascinate me because they consist of three layers of multi-colored glass that are laid individually and give the beads a unique optical quality. At a mere \$40, how could I refuse them?

# SUNDAY

## Royal Horticultural Hall, Chelsea Town Hall, and Dorking Bead Fair

Today we began with the antique show at Royal Horticultural Hall, not far from Victoria Station. Inside the huge hall were aisles and aisles of tables. I decided to begin by quickly cruising the show in search of major bead dealers, but before I could start, a pack of ladies had converged on one table just ahead of me. By the time I got there, the goodies had been snapped up, and I could see exquisite beads dripping from one buyer's hands. I moved on. There would be others, I told myself. Eventually Marilyn caught up to me. She had found a silver Arts and Crafts period necklace set with coveted and somewhat rare peacock cabochons. (Peacock beads and cabs are made with a layer of transparent green glass over foil with a cobalt blue dot in the center.) The vendor was willing to part with the necklace and a pin of the same vintage for \$125.

Next, we jumped on the tube and headed for Chelsea, where another show was taking place at the Chelsea Town Hall. This small antique show is usually worthwhile, but today it was a disappointment so we decided to head for the Dorking Bead Fair in Dorking, Surrey, an hour's train ride away. Here, vendors offered both beadworkers and bead stringers a great selection, including books, old and new beads, and findings. The fair, which has about seventy-five vendors, is held twice a year and was worth the trip because I was able to meet up with old friends and see what is popular with English beadworkers.



The author went home with many treasures.

# MONDAY

## Covent Garden Antique Market

Although we didn't realize it at the time, Covent Garden is one of the best markets in London. Prices were reasonable, the selection was good, and, best of all, most dealers were friendly. Since we were nearly out of money and had many treasures to take home, we took our time strolling through the market without the pressure to buy. My sister spent a bit of time with a linens dealer who recommended a diaper detergent to whiten old linens. There were old and new toys, clothing, and many other things to examine. A jewelry dealer had just finished setting up shop when we stopped to look over her exquisite beads. I would have bought several necklaces were it not for the fact that I was out of money, and the ATM was telling me that I couldn't withdraw any more. A lesson learned: Some banks work on a six-day week schedule, and I had already withdrawn my limit for that “day.” Understand your daily withdrawal limits so that you don't get stuck without funds.

After lunching at Covent Garden and reminiscing about our treasure hunt, we browsed the upscale shops of Covent Garden, then went back to our hotel to pack for our trip home. My task was easy. I had acquired about fifty necklaces, and, although heavy, they fit easily in my carry-on bag. Marilyn and I can't wait to do the trip again!

Diane Fitzgerald is a bead junkie based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Visit her website at [www.dianefitzgerald.com](http://www.dianefitzgerald.com).

\*All prices have been converted to U.S. dollars at the exchange rate of \$1 = .66 English pounds.  
\*\*Please see “Ian St. Gielar, Designer Extraordinaire,” *Beadwork*, June/July 2003, Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 22-24 for examples of Stanley Hagler-style jewelry.



The Georgian Market at Camden Passage...don't miss it!  
Open on Wednesday and Saturday.

***If you've read my article in Beadwork April/ May, 2004 about searching for vintage beads in London, you might want to see some things that didn't make it into print.***

A pillow-top done in needle-point with mauve wool with beads added in the Berlin work style so popular in the Victorian era.



My sister, Marilyn, and me.



The Love Letter case embroidered with the tiniest beads!





Peacock beads and an Arts & Crafts period silver necklace with peacock cabs.



Blown glass beads from Venice, probably 1920s.



Green and yellow drawn glass beads shaped on a grinding wheel to show their inner pattern.



Three gorgeous strands of lampwork beads, probably Czech.