

Diplomat's Chinese porcelain collection restored after family feud

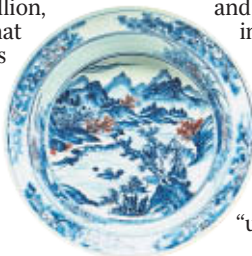
Will Humphries
Southwest Correspondent

The daughter of an adviser to Margaret Thatcher has rebuilt his world-renowned Chinese porcelain collection after a family row led to it being dispersed.

Sir Michael Butler spent 50 years amassing the 850-piece collection, believed to be worth £8 million, during a career as a diplomat that culminated in his appointment as permanent representative to the European Commission.

After his death in 2013,

Michael Butler's collection is worth about £8 million



the collection was broken up in a High Court battle three years later between his four children.

The court decision was a defeat for Katharine, 55, and Charles, 56, who fought to keep the collection intact. Judge Simon Barker found in favour of their elder siblings, Caroline, 70, and James, 57, who wanted to take their share. The case tore apart the family and led to allegations of marital infidelity and favouritism.

Katharine described it at the time as "a cultural tragedy" that was "destroying what it took my father a lifetime to create".

Caroline said she wanted "unfettered ownership of 125

beautiful pieces which I was brought up with". She denied she was seeking to break up the collection in revenge for her younger siblings receiving a larger share of the estate.

It was ruled that the 500 pieces left to the four siblings be divided equally, and that the remaining 350 items stay in the private museum Butler built for the collection in the grounds of the family's country manor house.

The museum, near Blandford, Dorset, was closed after the court case. It is now reopening after Katharine and Charles salvaged 16 pieces from James at auction in Hong Kong. It is believed they spent £114,000 on them. Their brother had put 62 pieces, half his share, up for sale, fetching £1.2 million. "My father would have been very dis-

appointed that we could not agree with each other [about keeping the collection together]," Katharine said. "That was a failure on our part and he was an important diplomat who was all about compromise and resolution."

The younger siblings have also acquired 34 antiques on the market to bolster the 17th-century collection, now totalling 650 pieces, which is being put on show for visitors, including Chinese tourists, at the purpose-built seven-room museum.

Katharine, a businesswoman and academic, has spent the past three years cataloguing her father's collection in a book, *Leaping the Dragon Gate*. She said: "The bulk of the pieces we have acquired are from the market but I also bought some from the old collec-

tion which my brother put up for sale at auction in Hong Kong.

"The response from visitors has been fabulous — people are stunned by the space and the impressive building in the middle of a rural setting. They are incredibly beautiful pieces and every one has a story."

The Butler Collection, which visitors must book to see, includes 50 pieces from the Hatcher Wreck collection, which was recovered from a Chinese junk that sank near Singapore in the 1640s. It had been under water for more than 300 years before its discovery by Captain Michael Hatcher in 1983.

Only 12 visits with a maximum 20 people take place a year, with Katharine leading the tour and explaining the collection's history.

Far right sent leaflet team to stir anger over migrants

Ben Ellery, Dominic Kennedy
Matt Dathan Home Affairs Editor

Britain's fastest growing far-right group delivered hundreds of leaflets attacking migrants to homes on Merseyside days before a riot outside a hotel accommodating asylum seekers.

Patriotic Alternative has denied being involved in Friday night's disorder in Knowsley in which a police riot van was torched.

However, The Times has uncovered a video filmed during the riot by one of its activists, James Costello, in which he accused the police of deliberately raising tensions.

Costello was also part of a Patriotic Alternative contingent that visited the area earlier this month to post leaflets and filmed himself holding a banner that said: "Europe Belongs to the European." During that visit he distributed leaflets to people's homes that said: "5 star hotels for migrants whilst Brits freeze".

Patriotic Alternative is Britain's largest far-right group and is led by Mark Collett, a Neo-Nazi Holocaust denier who once led the youth group of the British National Party.

Commentators believe that Patriotic Alternative exacerbates tensions by hijacking local issues and skates very close to the line of what is legal in an attempt to prevent it from becoming a proscribed organisation.

The group, which wants nearly all non-white people removed from the UK, has attempted to soften its image with "family friendly" events such as litter picks and cake sales.

Refugee charities said they were expecting further protests outside hotels accommodating asylum seekers at the weekend, including one planned in Skegness.

In Knowsley 15 people, including a 13-year-old boy, have been arrested after violent clashes outside the Suites Hotel.

A police officer and two members of

the public suffered minor injuries during the disorder. A peaceful protest and counterprotest had been taking place outside the hotel when a group of people arrived who were "only interested in causing trouble", police said.

On February 4 Costello delivered leaflets to homes in the area that said: "Migrants are being given the red carpet treatment with no expense spared... Just one look at the boatloads arriving on our shores and you see that the overwhelming majority of the new arrivals are healthy young men of fighting age."

"Make no mistake — these are economic migrants who are coming to this country because they know that our government will hand everything to them on a plate..."

"If you want to help the campaign against mass immigration then you can join like-minded people in Patriotic Alternative who are campaigning to close our borders."

In the video filmed on the night of the riot, Costello says to camera: "The police have decided to put a riot van in the middle of the crowd and abandoned it, knowing emotions are high and people might be inclined to damage the van. As it happens, somebody has set the van on fire, the police knew exactly what they were doing to give the people of Kirkby a bad name."

Brendan Cox, the widower of the murdered MP Jo Cox, told The Times: "Police have been playing a cat-and-mouse game with far-right organisations. They are incredibly effective at trying to stay just the right side of the line but their true identity is not hard to spot."

"We need to invest more time and understanding into this threat if we want to counter it effectively."

In 2021 The Times revealed how Collett was profiting from a book he was getting printed by Amazon praising Hitler's Nuremberg propaganda rallies.

Nick Lowles, chief executive of the anti-racist charity Hope Not Hate, said:



Riot police near the Suites Hotel in Knowsley on Friday; Patriotic Alternative had distributed an anti-migrant message, below



"Patriotic Alternative's modus operandi is to try to hijack local issues, stirring up trouble in communities while presenting themselves as the 'authentic' voice of the people. They are a fascist group led by Hitler fetishists and Holo-

caust deniers. Hope Not Hate has repeatedly exposed links between top [Patriotic Alternative] activists and the now-banned Nazi terror group, National Action."

Dame Sara Khan, the former coun-

ter-extremism commissioner, co-authored a report in 2021 with Sir Mark Rowley, who is now head of the Metropolitan Police, which called for content produced by Patriotic Alternative to be criminalised.

She said: "We showed how precisely because of this gap in legislation extremist organisations like Patriotic Alternative were able to operate lawfully and with impunity."

Separately, a letter signed by 180 charities has blamed "inflammatory language" used by Suella Braverman, the home secretary, for provoking the violence in Knowsley. They said that her description of small boat crossings as an "invasion" in November had "demonised" asylum seekers.

The letter, which has been co-ordinated by the Together with Refugees campaign, warned of a "high risk of more premeditated extremist attacks around the country" after the weekend's violence.

The letter has more than 100 signatories, including Liverpool City of Sanctuary, Care4Calais, Share Knowsley and the Refugee Council.

Patriotic Alternative did not respond to a request for comment.

JOEL GOODMAN/LNP