

MAJOR AUCTIONS ATTENDED BETWEEN 1950 AND 1960

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1950 | Mapledurham House, nr Reading, Berkshire |
| 1951 | Lypiatt Park, Gloucestershire |
| 1952 | Bowood, Wiltshire
Trebarfoote Manor, Devon
Fawley Court, nr Henley on Thames, Oxfordshire
Cusworth Hall, Yorkshire
Wardour Castle, Wiltshire
Eastleach, Gloucestershire |
| 1953 | Babbingdon House, Frome, Somerset
Hampton Court, Herefordshire
Lee Place, Charlbury, Oxfordshire
Little Sodbury Manor, Gloucestershire
Bletchley Park, Oxfordshire
Bardwell Road, Oxford |
| 1954 | Whitfield Turville, nr Hereford
Coker Court, Somerset
Eyton Hall, Northamptonshire
Onslow, nr Shrewsbury, Shropshire |
| 1955 | Clungerford House, Shropshire
Nether Lypiatt, Gloucestershire
Paulton, Berkshire (Hans Sloane family home)
Ecton Hall, Northamptonshire |
| 1956 | Kinsham Court, Herefordshire (Arkwright Family)
Brympton D'Evercy, Somerset
Stafford Barton, Devon
Hidcote Manor, Warwickshire
Stone Easton, Somerset
Fripp Collection, Bristol
Hazelbury Manor, Box, Wiltshire |
| 1957 | Hinchingsbrooke Castle, Huntingdonshire
Allensmore Court, Hereford |
| 1958 | The Hendre, Monmouthshire (Rolls Family) |

- 1959 Hinton St George, Crewkerne, Somerset 1st sale
Cleobury Mortimer, Worcestershire
Kempsey nr Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire

- 1960 Compton Beauchamp, Berkshire
Flaxley Abbey, Forest of Dean
Whitton Abbey, Wiltshire (first sale)

In addition to the above sales all of which I attended in person for at least part of the auction - remember large dispersals might take several days; I viewed and was able to purchase items at the following sales by leaving commissions:

- 1949 Wentworth Woodhouse, Yorkshire
 All the wooden platters from the Servants Hall branded FW

- Hengrave Hall, Cambridgeshire
 Eighteenth-century plan of the garden in MSS

- Clyne Castle, Swansea
 Sixteenth-century Italian painted frieze
 Carved wood Royal Coat of Arms etc

- 1953 Ashburnham House, Sussex
 Contents of the kitchen (a van full)

- 1954 Dunstall House nr Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire
Life size white porcelain Meissen figure of a lion by Kändler, cost £3,
sold for £520

- 1955 Owlpen Manor, Gloucestershire

Then the following dispersals of dealers' stocks took place, following deaths. For reasons hard to define I have usually done well at such auctions, when unfashionable items stored away for many years would surface.

- 1952 'Granny's' at Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire

- 1955 Foxall Stock at Ludlow, Shropshire

- 1956 Stock & collection of Mrs Lowe, Wigmore Abbey, Herefordshire

- 1957 Penbury Stock, Whitchurch, nr Newbury, Berkshire
Where he had evacuated during the war. At one time the leading

London dealer in Chinese wallpaper. Photos of all he had handled I purchased and gave to the V&A Museum

- 1959 Elsom stock, Bristol
From his premises on Christmas Steps. In his day he had been the leading Delft dealer.
- 1960 Pullen stock, Ramsbury nr Hungerford

While my main purpose has been to try to tell something of what conditions were like in this period when goods were more plentiful than cash, the list of major auctions attended gives a mild indication of the flood of goods coming on to the market. *Illustrated Magazine* wrote up the auction at Fawley Court in 1952 together with prices and illustrations. This is the period when gilt picture frames were being bought up and burnt to salvage the gold off them. In some instances, if the frame was large enough, even if it was of gesso or carved wood, it made no difference, and the destruction of frames of importance at this date is something that should be recorded.

Over the last fifty years I have been fortunate enough to view, if not to attend or buy at many of the more interesting auction dispersals. What opportunities there were and how much excitement! Stone work and garden ornaments from Brocklesby Park, Lincolnshire spring to mind, where Robin Eden, buying a long stone obelisk, walked out into the road, stopped an RAF trailer which was going back to near his home area, and did a deal for its delivery to him.

Notable was the Fripp collection, Bristol, 1956, which contained the largest collection of oak fragments and bygones I have ever seen together, and the sale at Ashton Court, Bristol, where my representative failed to buy a horseshoe shaped dining table on which I had left a price of £48. The bidding started at five shillings and rising slowly to fifty shillings, he thought my commission must have been shillings and not pounds, and stopped bidding.

There was a sale of original items from Hampton Court, Presteigne, Herefordshire, the house which was furnished in the reign of William and Mary by the army officer who had accompanied William III at the battle of the Boyne. It was held by Phillips, Son and Neale, 21–22 June, 1972. The story goes that the first shot fired skimmed the King's arm, blood spouted, and the officer whipped out his clean pocket handkerchief and staunching the wound. King William shouted, 'Let battle commence', but at the end of the day, enquired as to who had saved his life that morning. On discovering who it was, the King rewarded the officer with much largesse, which he spent on restoring his then near derelict home, calling it Hampton Court, Herefordshire, and furnishing it at the same time as the King was furnishing Hampton Court, London.

It was the custom, prior to 1800, when a mansion was sold, that it was sold lock, stock and barrel with contents, many of which would remain undisturbed in the house. So it was at Hampton Court, until the Arkwright family - of spinning jenny fame - sold it. This was in the 1920s, and when it was time for them to leave, they retained much of

the furniture, which was scattered around the family. One member, who lived abroad, had his selection stored, and it was only after his death that it came out of store and was sold at auction. Among the items at that curious sale was a large black lacquered mirror, which appears as figure 20 on page 318 of the three volume edition of the *Dictionary of Furniture*, and Figure 13 on page 354 in the one volume edition. This I was able to buy.

Another curious dispersal in 1938 took place at a house called Formakin, outside Glasgow. The uncompleted premises had remained boarded up for a period of some forty years following the collapse of the cotton market. At that time the owner of the property found himself ruined, and had told the workmen to stop work because he was unable to pay them. They had literally stopped there and then. Walking up the field to the baronial house, sticks poking out of the ground proved to be the handles of wheelbarrows that had become buried over the years.

I have already mentioned the Fripp collection in Bristol. Mr Fripp had begun collecting tram tickets at the age of six, and was later to become a prominent Bristol solicitor. Each morning, walking down to work in the centre of Bristol, he looked into all the antique shop windows, and those of interest he would then visit on his return home that day. After his death, the Bristol museum had the first pick of his vast and varied collection, that eventually took some eight days to sell. I know I arranged with the auctioneers to have a private view, and so large were the lots that I only managed to examine some two hundred and fifty that first afternoon, and never really examined anything sufficiently as there were over fifteen hundred lots. After three days' selling all the antique trade got so short of cash, that we all decided to stay away the following day when the collection of glass was literally given away. However, when news of this leaked out, everyone rushed back for the later days of the sale.

Among memorable purchases made by me at the Fripp sale was a collection of no less than twenty two horn books, sold together as a single lot. These were the first ABCs with which the children of Europe would be taught the alphabet. Sometimes they incorporated the Lord's Prayer. A printed sheet was mounted on a small oak board, usually covered with a sheet of talc, but among those I acquired were some of silver, though not hallmarked. Horn books are now of the greatest rarity, the name being derived from the talc, which was really a sheet of horn, now usually much yellowed and sometimes difficult to look through. I also bought a virtually untouched English gothic throne type chair, one of the only two I have ever handled. These were not dissimilar to the coronation chair found in Westminster Abbey, but of smaller size. The one purchased at this auction is believed to be of West of England provenance.

At this distance of time I cannot now be sure which of all the auctions attended I would most like to see repeated, but possibly that at Abney Hall, near Manchester, was in a curious way the most memorable sale I ever attended. The sale was conducted by Brady and Son, Stockport, 17–21 and 24–28 March, 1958. The house had barely been occupied since the visit of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at the time of the 1857 Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition. There were immense numbers of pictures, all of which had been acquired during the first half of the nineteenth-century. Many were of considerable quality, some much admired by Prince Albert. Certainly one seventeenth-century portrait on oak panels that I bought and decided to keep, proved to be in almost

untouched state after over-painting had been removed. I believe the same technique must have been used on many of the pictures to brighten them up before the royal visit. I remember one of the lots - which I was unable to buy - being a set of the christening robes of Oliver Cromwell.

Over a period of fifty years, during much of which time I was constantly viewing or attending auction sales, both in sale rooms and in private houses, it is perhaps surprising that only about forty now appear to have been of any real importance to me personally. Undoubtedly the break-up of any old untouched house is a unique event, and each on-the-premises dispersal carries an individual stamp of its own, that so far as I am personally concerned, this never carries on into the sale room. It may well be that one's attitude to a sale to some degree depends on what one had for breakfast or on other outside reasons. Seldom is it possible to give sufficient time to careful viewing. The time consumed (particularly with distant sales) with the viewing, deciding how much of a sale lasting several days is worth attending in person; the prolonged wait at the end of a sale with delays in paying and clearing purchased lots, and finally the safe transporting of goods home to the shop, possibly make other forms of buying more attractive. However, arriving home with interesting items of new stock is one of the highlights that I look back on with most pleasure.

Reaching Burford in the evening, I sometimes had the problem of how to off-load heavy items of furniture from the roof rack of my car. Driving back up the High Street, I might spot a tourist walking up, pass him, jump out, open the shop door and, as he reached me, say, 'How strong you look, would you give me a hand'. I think that only on one occasion was I told that he was just recovering from a heart attack and better not do lifting. In this way I would get my heavier goods into the shop.

While I have tended to avoid doing valuations for fire insurance, probate or family divisions, due to the time it takes, it has not always been possible to avoid them all. It was through a series of rather strange accidents that I was asked to go to a house in East Anglia. The owner of the house was in a mental hospital, her ill son in Devon, and the solicitors in Manchester, and I was thought of as being a suitable person to check the fire insurance valuation. It was a large house not very far from the sea, and as soon as I arrived the housekeeper said, 'You do realise this is my afternoon off; here is the key. I will get it from you tomorrow'. Then I was on my own left to cope. The more interesting items in the house proved to be modern paintings, a subject I am not good at, but there was still a lot to look at. I had booked myself into the local hotel and, dusk falling, I thought I would stop for the evening. Crossing the hall I realised the wall on one side was filled with fitted cupboards with solid doors, and opening one there was a sudden crash and out of it poured about five hundred rolls of toilet paper, which rolled in every direction. Over a long period of time the owner of the house had developed a strong sense that she was going to be invaded by visitors and must buy sufficient supplies of every kind. In addition to the toilet paper, there were tins of soup and baked beans filling the kitchen cupboards. I can remember working till about 8.30pm that night, dinnerless, trying to get those rolls stacked again.

Sometimes valuations were not done by me personally, but I would be called in to help a local auctioneer. This was sometimes for their benefit, and sometimes to enable me to

get into what might prove to be an interesting house. On one such occasion in Herefordshire, even though the house was not very big, the contents were good. After we had had our picnic lunch a gardener walked in and said, 'Sir, are you going to do the gardens or houses next?'. We suggested we did the gardens next, but he said it would be better if we went with him to the houses, and we imagined we were going to be taken out to a large conservatory or greenhouse. Walking down beside a long brick wall, a door was opened, and we stepped in to a temperature of nearly one hundred degrees Fahrenheit. There inside were girls in white overalls pushing tea trolleys with dripping pipes and humming-birds all on the wing, getting their nectar as it dropped. My auctioneering friend looked at me, and I looked at him, and our minds went blank, as neither of us had ever had to do a probate valuation of humming-birds before. Fortunately, however, it turned out that we were not expected to do this, and, returning to the house discovered, in one of the bedrooms, that wonderful set of books on the humming-birds of America.