

All Things Auctioneering

With Cato Crane Valuers & Auctioneers and John Crane Fine Art



Have you hugged a rare Penguin recently? As I write these pages by atmospheric old-world candlelight in the antique attics at Cato Gables, it is certainly cold enough to hug anything to get warm. Winter is here!

John Lane (1854 –1925) was a book collector. Collectors rarely make good dealers or businessmen or women. John Lane opened a bookshop in Vigo Street off London's Regent Street in 1887 selling second-hand books. He also published books in his shop called The Bodley Head – named after Sir Thomas Bodley who curated the Bodleian Library in Oxford. John Lane had married well, which kept the business afloat for many years. He was joined in his enterprise in 1919 by his nephew Allen Lane. But by 1934 all was not well at The Bodley Head and debts were rising. John Lane had died and there was lack of funding.

Allen Lane was looking for a new reading public and saw at Exeter Railway Station that shoddy, badly written novels and low-quality popular magazines were the only reading matter available to people of limited means. Allen decided that the ordinary working man should be able to afford to buy good classic and contemporary literature, hitherto reserved for the wealthy classes who frequented the expensive bookshops of the day. A new distinctive, affordable, recognisable brand was designed with bold colours and a penguin for the logo, with the contents written by prestigious authors.

Ernest Hemmingway's *A Farewell To Arms* was in the first ten publications as was Penguin No. 1, *Ariel* by André Maurois. Agatha Christie was another well-known authoress who contributed to the success of 3,000,000 copies sold by 1936. Department stores, including Woolworths, enabled rapid distribution and sales. The Bodley Head Publishing Company and Allen Lane were now not only out of financial trouble, but flourishing and expanding rapidly.

Nowadays a fine quality first edition of *Ariel* might cost you £50 to £100, but most titles will cost only a few pound coins for a reasonable copy. Do your homework first, though, and try to collect first editions and very fine condition copies without tears or torn spines. Copies without mildew stains are actually quite rare!



find, as the early copies were on cheap paper to keep production costs down.

A two-hour drive on the A55 from Liverpool to the village of Llanystumdwy near Criccieth in North Wales may not be everybody's idea of an exciting day out with the family, but if you're interested in political history, one reason to go to Llanystumdwy would be to visit the Lloyd George Museum.

Political collectables can be big business and – more importantly – some political figures in the past can be enormously inspirational to young people, especially if they had humble beginnings.

David Lloyd George was a truly inspirational political genius. His mother was widowed when he was very young and he was raised by his uncle Lloyd, a shoemaker, in Llanystumdwy in a tiny cottage. The young Lloyd George was extremely bright and became a solicitor, but politics beckoned. He disliked injustice and spent his whole life fighting it, introducing pensions and a health service for all.

During the First World War, Lloyd George was Prime Minister. Food to feed the country was in danger of becoming in short supply and a whole series of pottery was produced in Staffordshire with a message from the Prime Minister imploring everyone to avoid waste and to be frugal with food.

Just as nowadays, many political souvenirs were produced and are probably worth collecting from this era of great social change. I have illustrated a small butter dish and a plaster model of Lloyd George entitled on the reverse: 'The Welsh Wizard'.

The Lloyd George Museum is well worth a visit. There are thousands of exhibits there – a film to watch and his shoemaker uncle's cottage open for visitors to see. You will need about three hours for the visit as there is much to see. And no visit is complete without a stroll along the banks of the River Dwyfor, a favourite walk of mine, where you will pass the last resting place of the only solicitor to become prime minister.

Our next generation needs inspiration now, so take a day out, you will not be disappointed.

Note: Due to lack of funding this wonderful museum is under threat of closure!

A recent visit to the busy NEC 'Art and Antiques For Everyone' fair in November had an interesting picture on show with a link to the subjects of the previous paragraph. It was entitled *Castle on a Rocky Coastline* 24 x 36 inches and painted by Henry King Taylor in about 1860. It is, in fact, Criccieth Castle in

North Wales where Lloyd George practised as solicitor before entering politics. HK Taylor lived in London and specialised in coastal subjects, both in the UK and abroad. The dealer was asking £5,250 for the picture, which was not an unrealistic asking price considering today's market. The great JMW Turner also painted Criccieth Castle but turned the castle around 180 degrees as he felt it was a more pleasing image that way around! That, I think, is artistic licence pushed to its limits maybe?



Big is not good these days! Small is now very good and flat is even better.

Not such a long time ago you would join a local firm for a lifetime of work and probably not move far away from your home district – also probably not changing jobs often, if ever. Those were the days of accumulating a large property in which to live and fill it with large pieces of good antique furniture and pictures – size did not matter.

Accumulating furniture to fill a twelve-room house was all good fun... until you needed to move, when it became a monster of a task. It could also be quite emotionally disturbing to have to part with much-loved familiar pieces and see them taken off in removal van to the auction rooms.

People these days might have up to a dozen or more home relocations and travel the globe in search of employment, but they still have the urge to collect and accumulate. My advice is this... keep it small!

The first matches were originally called 'vestas' after Vesta, the Roman Goddess of the hearth and fire. She is often depicted holding a mystical eternal flame in the palms of her hands; hence the brand of 'Swan Vestas' matches.

I recently accepted two fine vesta cases for our forthcoming auction. They were used for carrying matches around and often attached to a gentleman's watch chain. Vesta cases have a serrated striking plate where the vesta would be rubbed to activate it – bursting into flame to light your cigar or pipe of neatly tamped aromatic tobacco... ah, happy days! Be that as it may, these animal-form vesta cases are really collectible now. One is silver in the shape

