

# All Things Auctioneering

With Cato Crane Valuers & Auctioneers and John Crane Fine Art

Dr John Rae. (1931–2006) Headmaster of Westminster School in central London. was asked in a television interview: "What is the purpose of the school?" He replied: "The pursuit of excellence!" There are many people and businesses these days who still achieve excellence and hold this as a guiding principle and star to follow. A Saturday in March was no exception when a group of former choir members and friends were invited to listen to a duet on the new Boston Grand Piano in Liverpool Cathedral. This was performed by Ian Tracy and Lee Ward and as many of you will know, both are internationally renowned for their talents.

Boston Pianos are made by Kawai in the Far East, under close scrutiny for Steinway. Heinrich Engelhard Steinweg built his first piano in New York in 1853; it was actually his 483rd piano, but the previous ones had all been built in Germany. Steinway pianos are now built in Hamburg and New York. Each piano contains 12,116 parts, it takes a whole year to build each one, and they are considered the best in the world by many concert pianists. Steinway has a bank of 300 grand pianos, many of which it flies around the globe to concert halls with attendant technicians, porters and tuners at the request of international performers. In 1902, a magnificent case was designed for the 100,000th Steinway piano. The inside of the cover was painted with an American Muse receiving the nine classical Muses. This piano was presented to the White House in Washington USA. Ivory has not been used for keys since the 1950s so you won't have to scrap your piano keyboards to avoid a prison sentence when the total ivory ban comes into force in the UK this year!



100,000th Steinway Pianoforte

The Steinway on which John Lennon wrote 'Imagine' sold in Boston in 2009 for £2,000,000. A new Steinway Piano will now cost in the region of £200,000, but they are the epitome of excellence. A 'previously-owned' Steinway instrument refurbished by Steinway will still carry a full five-year guarantee. If you are think about hiring a Steinway concert pianoforte for your family get-together, you just might have to dig into the housekeeping a bit deeper that week!

The great piano suppliers in Liverpool were, of course, the five generations of the Rushworth family and the Cranes. Advice on selling pianos is still available through our John Crane Heswall office on The Mount.

Our Annual Beatles Memorabilia Auction is attracting many high-quality items. A Rushworth's supplied guitar would be a nice discovery! Items for this auction are always invited. Further entries are invited – telephone 0151 342 2321.

'New Lamps For Old'. Aladdin is a fun panto enjoyed by all, but when we go home and switch on the electric lights do we give much thought to early lighting systems? Hardly ever! When the Roman legions arrived in Britain in about 43AD the winters were just as long as they are today and the dark nights required lighting up with an artificial light source. Clay lamps were the answer and they were manufactured in Europe from about 1600BC, mainly in France, Italy and North Africa.

The earliest lamps were nothing more than a floating lighted wick in the middle of an oil-filled saucer. Gradually the sides were turned inwards to enclose the reservoir and spout formed to hold the papyrus or other vegetable matter used for the wick. Lamps were either hand-formed or mass-produced in pottery, chalk or hand-carved limestone moulds (illustrated) in two halves and then joined together with a clay 'slip'. The decoration consisted of flowers, animals, gods and battle scenes, etc. A non-porous glaze was added to avoid fuel loss and the nearly finished glazed lamp was fired in a tall primitive kiln.



Roman C3rd Terracotta lamp and rare Limestone Mould

Olive oil fuel was at a premium in Roman Britain, as it had to be imported so British lamps were mainly used by the military with the ordinary people still using tallow candles for light. These lamps make good inspirational educational research subjects for young people and are decorative to display.

Nice reproduction lamps are available for modest amounts of money. Antique authentic lamps might cost £30 to £150 or more depending upon size and quality and are quite easy to find on the internet, but make sure you are dealing with a reputable supplier before you part with your money!

If you are moving house, our 'downsizing' Advice Service is available and our careful removal team are second to none! We can also sell your unwanted items in our auctions. With or without Roman lamps, Cato Crane can light your way to 'worry-free' removals. We still offer a full house-clearance service when our clients require it, and we are always pleased to receive instructions to assist with your move.

Few of us realise nowadays how fortunate we are to have wall-to-wall 'wrap-around' central heating. I well remember the post-war era when high-ceilinged rooms were draughty places and when we huddled around our Victorian coal-fire fireplace to keep warm. Heavy blackout curtains on windows and doors helped to defend us against draughts and we sat with our backs to a long, six-fold screen to deflect the chilly air blowing through the room!

People living in the north of Scotland solved the draught problem a long time ago. We had 'wing' armchairs, but the Scots had the Orkney chair that went a long way towards creating a snug, draught-free environment! The distinctive feature of these chairs is the very tall back made of stitched and shaped rush that wraps around the sides higher than head height, so it's more effective at keeping out the draughts than the winged armchair. It is said that the original frames were made from driftwood gathered on the beaches. This theory is disputed by some as fantasy, but there were very few trees on Orkney then (as now), so I'm going along with the driftwood theory!

Frames are now made of ash, oak, beech and even mahogany; when finished they are oiled and not polished to a high gloss. One feature of C19th Orkney chairs is the rush seat; earlier Orkney chairs had solid wooden seats, which were less comfortable. Oats for the 'rushes' are sown in March and harvested in September, put into 'stooks' and dried naturally to preserve the golden colour. They are then hand-cleaned ready for the chair-back weavers and stitchers to use.

Orkney chairs occasionally appear in auction. We have an old child-sized version in our auction on the 17th April when we are filming for the Antiques Road Trip. Old chairs in good condition can command high prices.



Orkney Chair

There are several makers still on Orkney and the chairs cost £1,000 to £1,500 each, depending upon the style you like. It is always worth travelling there to sit in a few to test for size and, of course, draughtproof comfort! Some of the early Orkney chairs had very low seats so the smoke from the open peat fire would rise above the head of the occupant so they didn't get smoke in their eyes.

So there's a thought and a plan to keep you warm all next winter and save lots of money on central heating bills, but you do need some authentic peat for your open fire and a tartan rug for your knees! I won't mention the golden liquid, as I am strictly boringly teetotal. Happy hunting when you go north of the border... you won't be disappointed.