



AUCTIONEERS & AUCTIONS, TENTERDEN & ASHFORD

Tenterden has attracted Auctioneers, Surveyors and Estate Agents for many years, long before the public started complaining that High Streets were littered with them together with Building Societies, Insurance Companies and their like. Looking back over the last 15 or so years here at Tenterden, the Halifax held regular furniture auctions in their Saleroom (behind the Pebbles), as did Mervyn Carey in St Mildred's Church Hall. Both have now ceased trading, leaving Messrs Lambert & Foster (previously known as Hatch & Waterman) as the only auctioneers in Tenterden. Mrs Pauline Chalk of Hatch & Waterman was one of the very first lady auctioneers. Property auctions were usually held at a local hostelry. The first that I attended was held by Messrs Brackett & Son at the now demolished Old Pump Room in Tunbridge Wells. Auctions of Live & Dead Farming Stock were of course always held at the farm, usually at Michaelmas, the traditional time for farms to change hands. The first one I attended was in the autumn of 1939 at Hartfield in East Sussex. I think this was the occasion when an old-fashioned £10 note first came in my hand and at that time I did not know that they existed.

My grandfather, George Clements of Vidler, Son & Clements conducted an auction at the White Lion in Tenterden of his late father-in-law's properties in Tenterden High Street, some land on the outskirts of the town and various properties in St Michaels. The Saracens Head Hotel in Ashford, the County Hotel at Canterbury and the Star Inn at Maidstone were other well-known venues. The titles to properties were not registered in the past and so were printed in the auction particulars. When I worked in Devon in 1967 the firm's auctioneer used to read out the Title before accepting any bids (which I found old fashioned and I did persuade the firm it was unnecessary as it was printed in the particulars). Nowadays Auctioneers hold collective auctions of property consisting of a great number of lots, the properties of numerous vendors.

Lambert and Foster now conduct their property auctions at a Maidstone hotel and use their Sale Room just off Tenterden High Street for collective auctions of furniture and effects only. Recently they offered many Teddy Bears from a collection. One can never tell what will be coming along next and occasionally an item will come into a saleroom which is unrecognised except by one or two specialist buyers, often selling at a much higher bid than expected and may be important enough to reach the local or national press.

At Ashford there have been a number of firms of Auctioneers, Surveyors and Estate Agents including Burrows & Co, Geering & Colyer, W & B Hobbs, Scott Kendon, Lee & Son, Checksfield & Co., to name but a few, but sadly only Hobbs (now Hobbs Parker) still remain in business. Most of the other names disappeared having been taken over by Insurance Companies who were only really interested in the Estate Agency business. Mr Alfred J Burrows FSI FAI (who later became President of the Auctioneers Institute) had been in business in Ashford at 41 Bank Street since the late 19th century but prior to 1920 auctions had been conducted at the vendor's premises wherever possible and at various hotels. He was also Land Agent for the Dering Surrenden Estate that covered several thousand acres. The mansion house was at Pluckley but other properties and lands were in numerous Parishes with the estate houses being readily identified by their Gothic style stone framed windows that can still be seen around today. On the death of Sir Henry Dering around 1926, Mr Burrows conducted an auction of the entire Estate and also the contents of the mansion. In 1919 he became amalgamated with Messrs Knight, Frank & Rutley of Hanover Square, London, becoming their senior partner and continuing the amalgamation until 1937.

From 1920 Mr Burrows held his auctions at the Elwick Auction Rooms that started life during the 1914-18 War as a cookhouse for Canadian troops stationed in Ashford. It consisted of a solidly built timber frame covered with shiplap boarding, a concrete floor with drainage channels along each side, large windows on all four sides and an unlined asbestos roof that made it hot during the summer and cold in winter. The first auction of household furniture held at the Elwick Auction Room was the contents of Elwick Cottage, Ashford on 31 March 1920 which had been removed to the Elwick Auction Room for convenience of sale, probably due to lack of room at the cottage. Following this, many different types of auction were conducted there including the Ashford Annual Soft Fruit Sale, the Ashford Annual Hard Fruit Sale, the Ashford Annual Timber Sale, Land, Farms, Estates and Houses from many parts of Kent, including Tenterden.

In 1937 the firm became known as Alfred J Burrows, Clements, Winch & Sons with the amalgamation of Mr Cecil Winch's office at Cranbrook. Auctions continued through the 1939-45 war with controlled prices for

certain items of furniture and agricultural machinery being introduced during this period. This caused difficulties as frequently more than one person was willing to pay the controlled price, in which case the names of the bidders were placed in a hat and the person whose name was drawn out became the lucky buyer. In order for the name to go into the hat a contribution of 10/- (50p) was made to the auctioneer's clerk in aid of the Spitfire Fund. By this means, Mr Burrows collected quite a large sum for Spitfires.

In late 1945 the firm was able to purchase the much larger adjoining building and small yard which had been used for very many years as a second-hand furniture saleroom by Mr A J "Tubby" Laker (a well known local character). The building had some small sections partitioned off and let to other persons including Lloyds Bank in the corner nearest to the Ashford Market for use on Tuesday market days. Security was a deep hole in the floor into which any cash could be tipped in the event of a bank raid! The name of Lloyds Bank could still be made out underneath the paintwork when the building was demolished in 1972. The building required considerable repair before it could be used, including a completely new floor which brought the firm into conflict with the authorities as it breached the building regulations in force at the time. The first collective furniture auctions were held in this larger saleroom in 1946, after which they were held usually at three weekly intervals and would consist of from 350 lots to as many as 900 when both rooms and the yard would be used. These auctions attracted an influx of dealers from London, the southern counties and from abroad. London dealers were attracted by the closeness of the saleroom to Ashford Railway Station.

Auctions of properties continued to be held in the smaller "old cookhouse" building and included properties from a wide area. For example, when the Chemical Works off the Smallhythe Road in Tenterden was auctioned it failed to sell but was then soon sold by Private Treaty at a price that today would be unbelievably low. The late Richard Tuttle FRICS, who actually lived in Smallhythe Road, dealt with this sale.

The most prestigious contents auction held by Burrows in recent times must be the sale of the contents of The Old Palace at Canterbury in 1974 for Archbishop Ramsey on his retirement which attracted attention from BBC Television. Other sales of note which required two or more days to cover were the contents of Hole Park at Rolvenden in 1953, Maytham (Wittersham) in 1958, Lympne Castle in 1959, Great Maytham (Rolvenden) in 1961 and Harrietsham Manor in 1968. This latter two-day auction realised a total of about £48,000 – a remarkable sum even at that time. Auctions continued to be held at the Elwick Auction Rooms until the buildings were demolished and sold for redevelopment in 1972. Collective auctions of quality antiques, silver, jewellery, porcelain, glass, paintings, oriental rugs and collector's items were then successfully held at approximately three-monthly intervals at Kempton Manor Hotel, Hothfield. Auctions of general household furniture and effects were then held at regular three-weekly intervals in Ashford at the Victoria Crescent Saleroom. This saleroom was not very large, having originally been built as a garage for two furniture pantehnicons. Even so there were often up to 400 or more lots. Around this time, as far afield as Rhodes Minnis and Beckley, auctions of standing underwood that consisted mainly of chestnut were held annually around the beginning of November at Public Houses close to the wood being sold. The wood was cut, converted on site by the buyers and cleared before fresh growth appeared from the boles in spring. This wood was in demand for pit props, fencing, hurdles and other agricultural purposes.

During this period the name of the firm changed from time to time as the partnership changed, becoming variously known as Burrows & Co, plain Burrows, then as Burrows & Day until 1986 when it was acquired by a group of companies known as Cobbs. The General Accident Insurance Group acquired Cobbs in 1988 and after two years the Ashford Office was gradually dispersed and Furniture Auctions (or the Fine Arts Department as it was then called) was transferred to the Canterbury Saleroom of Worsfold and Hayward, which had also become part of the General Accident Group. In 1991 Mr Anthony Pratt (previously employed at Burrows) acquired the Canterbury Saleroom and with Mr John Williamson runs a successful business that attracts buyers from all over the world.

Burrows and Co had a full and dusty storeroom in their office at Ashford where they kept records of all auctions held by the firm since its incorporation in the late 19th century. These included sales of furniture, farming stock, hard and soft fruit on the trees, standing timber and underwood as well as houses and land. The Sale Bundles, as they were referred to, held the Sale Clerk's catalogue marked with all the prices realised and the buyers names as well as several unmarked copies of the sale catalogues or auction particulars, all wrapped in several copies of the sale posters (which used to be pasted on boards around the county by the local billposter a few weeks before the auction). The bundles were all numbered and carefully indexed in two very large ledgers but unfortunately these record have long since disappeared. What a wonderful record they would have been if they had still existed!