

THE WITLEY ESTATE SALE

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Timber Realises £43,000

— PROCEEDINGS AFFECTED BY CRISIS

The darkening international situation had an adverse effect on the sale which opened at Witley Court on Monday, only one section of the beautiful estate which was at one time the residence of the Dowager Queen Adelaide, widow of William IV., finding a purchaser.

The standing timber, however, attracted an exceptionally large number of buyers in the trade, and although bidding was slow at first it gradually improved, with the result that at the end of the sale nearly all the timber lots were sold, realising a total figure of well over £40,000.

The sale was conducted by Messrs. Jackson Stops and Staff, of London and Northampton, by direction of Sir Herbert Smith, Bart., in consequence of the fire which destroyed the state rooms of the mansion in 1937.

The sale was held in a marquee in front of the mansion.

LAND AS SAFE INVESTMENT

Addressing the assembly before the sale, the Auctioneer, Mr. Jackson Stops, said that when they advertised the sale of course they had no idea that they would be faced

on the very day of the sale with a severe crisis in the history of their country.

“But we have this consolation to know that at the head of affairs in this nation we have at the present moment a man whom we can thoroughly trust – a man whom even Italy has called ‘the peace maker’, he went on “If war can possibly be avoided that man will do it. I hope you will say with me that this crisis should not in any degree affect this sale. My train of thought is that if by any chance we have war – then what better investment can you have than a bit of land of England. I think it is absolutely the safest investment you can have?”

TIMBER IN WAR TIME

Referring to timber purchases, Mr Stops said that if there was a war those purchasers would be lucky in a way, because prices would soar. They would remember what the control prices for timber were in the last war – something about 1s. 6d., 2s.6d., 3s. 6d. up to 5s. a foot on oak, aeroplane ash up to 5s. a foot, larch 1s.4d. spruce 8d to 1s., and elm about 1s.3d., so that was far in excess of any prices they were expecting that day.

He explained that what they proposed to do what day was to offer the estate as a whole without the timber. That meant that if they bought the estate they could buy such proportion of the timber as they might wish to. If, unfortunately, the estate did not find a purchaser for the whole they would offer the timber separately. In the case of the Home Farm, purchase of the timber thereon was optional. The timber there

had been valued at a certain sum.

TOWN PLANNING RESTRICTIONS

He pointed out that certain parts of the estate would be sold subject to the provisions of any town and country planning scheme and Restriction of Ribbon Development Act.

With regard to Ribbon Development restriction, the County Council had given information that they had in mind the purchase of the front of the estate to a depth of a hundred feet. The lodges, however, did not come within the hundred feet.

The County Council would have to pay the valuation of any land and timber acquired and compensation might also be payable in addition to the purchase money.

They would realise that this estate was one of the grandest country seats in the Kingdom.

THE EMBELLISHMENTS

Without giving any secrets away he could tell them with regard to the embellishments, which were probably the finest of any in the Kingdom, that there were ladies and gentlemen extremely interested in those.

The mansion occupied a position at the gateway of the west and from it they could see one of the finest panoramas that could be found in England. The house was in the proximity of the great centres – only 24 miles from the great city of Birmingham and near Stourbridge, Kidderminster and Worcester, all having big populations.

He suggested, therefore, that there was a great opening for a country club. Golf courses had been laid out of the estate: they are not there now but the estate did lend itself to such courses.

POSSIBILITIES FOR COUNTRY HOTEL

The estate also lent itself to a country hotel and he thought that if it was properly run people would flock there. It also lent itself to acquisition by public authorities for institutions. Or where they could they lay out such a garden city as there? The garden cities in the London area would not compare with it.

It was very unfortunate that after all these years that estate had to come on the market due to the fire. Sir Herbert Smith, who lived there, loved the place. It had been a labour of love with him. "When he was away the unfortunate fire occurred and I am afraid that he felt so sick that he decided it must go" Mr Stops added.

BID FOR THE WHOLE ESTATE

The auctioneer then offered the whole estate without the standing timber, but in spite of appeals no further bids. Prices rose from £15,000 to £21,000 were forthcoming and the auctioneer announced that the estate must be split up.

The Home Farm, Witley, of 246 acres and including the historic Woodbury Hill but without the timber, was next offered. At £4,500 the lot was withdrawn.

Lot 2 included Witley Court Stables, garages and grounds, comprising 34 acres and including the embellishments and all garden fittings.

With regard to the embellishments the auctioneer said that if the purchaser did not want to keep them he could sell them. People from all parts of the United Kingdom and abroad had been looking at these and he knew that there were many people interested in them.

It had been suggested to him that the place might be used in the same way as Lilleshall. There was no objection to that, but they wanted to prevent the house being used as a manufactory. They considered that some of this land was suitable for building and they thought that any such usage (manufacturing) would be detrimental.

Bidding rose from £7,000 to £9,500. The auctioneer said he would withdraw the house as a whole.

LOTS WITHDRAWN

He then offered the lot without the embellishments, but it was withdrawn at £4,500.

The auctioneer announced that as Lot 2 was not sold he should withdraw Lots 3 and 6 (Worcester Lodge and a building site adjoining Front Pool, Witley Court).

The other lots offered were as follows:-

Lot 4: Woodland Site, The Wilderness (36 acres) withdrawn at £700.

Lot 5: Gardener's House and kitchen gardens, Witley Court (about 8 acres) withdrawn at £1,500.

Lot 7: Building site adjoining cascade, Witley Court (about 9 acres) withdrawn at £325.

Lot 8: Building site adjoining main road, Witley Court (about 16 acres) withdrawn at £850.

Lot 9: Stourport Lodge and garden, Witley Court, withdrawn at £600.

At this stage the auctioneer said that in view of the fact that the rest of the estate was not sold he did not think he ought to break into the rest with the exception of the last three lots. There were as follows:-

Lot 13: Deer Park House, Red House, Parklands and Woodlands, Witley Court (437 acres) withdrawn at £3,750.

Lot 14: Park and Warford Pool, Witley Court (112 acres) withdrawn at £1,900.

Lot 15: Woodland site, Deerbarn Covert, Witley Court (111 acres) sold for £400.

TIMBER MAKES "FAIR PRICES"

"The crisis has had an enormous effect on the sale," Mr. Jackson Stops told our reporter at the conclusion of the day's proceedings. "It could not have been a worse day. The timber made fair prices. Of the estate only one lot was sold; the rest remains intact and private negotiations are going on. It will be sold all right but people don't know where they stand today".

"Although we were offered as much as we wanted for the various lots it meant breaking into the estate in a way we could not do in the first instance. For example, there were the lodges and various lots along the front. It we accept offers for them it will prejudice future sales. We are negotiating for the sale of the estate as a whole. There have been 3,000 people around the place. It would have been a

marvellous sale but for the fact of this awful business”

A BIG PURCHASE OF TIMBER

The timber comprised 617,915 cubic feet of magnificent oak, ash, spruce, chestnut, beech, larch, sycamore, and a large quantity of softwoods, which had been specially graded and lotted in 53 lots. All of these reached their reserves, with the exception of four lots, realising a total of just over £43,000

The largest purchase was that of Deerbarn Wood, amounting to 115 acres, comprising 245,480 cubic feet, which, offered as a whole, including the freehold, was sold to Mr. Coltman of Claybrooke Magna, Rugby, for £18,400.

BEDROOM FURNISHINGS OFFERED

Bidding was brisk at the sale on Tuesday for the contents of the principal and secondary bedrooms at Witley Court. There were no reserved prices. Much of the superb tapestries, furniture, and priceless Oriental carpets, rugs and embroideries were destroyed in the fire last autumn, but fortunately a lot of the furniture and a large quantity of fine carpets and rugs were saved.

Addressing the attendance prior to commencing the proceedings, the auctioneer, Mr. Jackson Stops again referred to the depressing international situation, saying that it was an ill wind that blew nobody any good, and they would be able to buy the furniture cheaper than under ordinary circumstances.

The carpets, the majority of which will be offered for sale next Friday, comprised perhaps the finest collection in the world.

A plain grey carpet to-day was knocked down for £4. There was keen competition for a Sheraton mahogany capstan writing table, which realised 23 guineas.

SATISFACTORY PRICES

Bidding was brisk before the luncheon interval, but in one or two instances afterwards the auctioneer found fault with the size of the bids and put the lots aside to be offered on another occasion. On the whole, however, the prices realised were considered satisfactory, a number of Spanish mahogany bedsteads, wardrobes and early 19th century mahogany dining chairs on cabriole legs carved with lion mask heads and claw feet meeting a ready demand.

A Louis XV style Kingwood and Parqueterie writing table realised eight guineas and a Sheraton mahogany capstan writing table made the highest figure of the day – 22 guineas.

There was an excellent attendance on Wednesday and the auctioneers were satisfied with the bidding.

The remaining contents of the principal and secondary bedrooms, and furniture from the reception rooms, were offered for sale.

Some of the prices were as follows:- Louis XV style Kingwood and Ormolu writing table, 22 guineas: Sheraton mahogany and inlaid secretaire bookcase, 30 guineas: Louis XVI style Boule

cabinet with finely chased and engraved Ormolu mounts and mouldings, 23 ½ guineas: Louis XV style carved and gilt salon suite upholstered in crimson and gold Genoese velvet, 24 guineas: pair of Chinese cloisonné enamel and gilt bronze Koros, 25 guineas: full size billiard table, 20 guineas: Louis XV style Kingwood and Ormolu mounted cabinet in two heights, 35 guineas: Louis XVI style Kingwood dwarf bowfront cabinet, mounted in chased ormolu, 16 guineas: Louis XV style writing table, of Kingwood and tulipwood mounted in ormolu with caryatide figures, masked heads and massive mouldings, 50 guineas: French Marqueterie encoignure, with chased ormolu mounts 15 ½ guineas: figured walnut and banded two-flap sofa table. 29 guineas.

THURSDAY'S SALE

The result of Thursday's sale of the contents of Witley Court was particularly satisfactory, a large company being present, and all the lots finding purchasers.

Some of the principal prices, were as follows:- A Louis XVI style Kingwood, Harewood and marqueterie cylinder front bureau, 50 gns: A Louis XVI style writing table mounted in ormolu, 19 gns: a bronze group of Herculean figure carrying a bearded man holding a statuette and leading a child, 30 gns.: an 18th century Italian walnut and inlaid cabinet with a shaped cornice with carved and gilt coronet and trophy centre piece, 70 gns.: an 18th century marqueterie and Boule Flemish cabinet, 100 gns.: a 16th century Florentine carved

and gilt carrone, 80 gns.: a companion cassone, 90 gns.

Exceptionally good prices were realised for the sculptured marble statues, as follows:- A pair of large massive groups, with dogs and cherub, by Auguste Lechesne, 1853, 50 gns.: a figure of boy sculptor, Michael Angelo, by E. Zocchie, 1850, 30 gns.: a large group of a woman tending a sick child, by Lazzerini, 1896, 50 gns.: a large group of two newspaper boys by G. Focardi, London, 1880, 40 gns.: a classical nude female figure, seated on a rock, with flowers and drapery, 30 gns.: a classical figure of a dying woman, holding a cross, 40 gns.: a pair of French classic urn shape vases, carved with figures and cupids, gathering corn, the bowls carved in heavy relief with flowers, fruit and foliage, by Eugene Cornu, 100 gns.;

Mrs. Van de Elst and Mr. Charles Boot were the chief buyers.