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Collectors respond to call for earliest phone bidding

Relics from the dawn of the electro-magnetic telephone created a sensation when they appeared for sale in Massachusetts.

The collection of telephone apparatus dating from the pioneering years of the late 1870s came for sale at White's Auctions in Middleboro on April 14 from a deceased estate of a collector.

The story of the development of the electric telephone is famously complicated. Antonio Meucci, Charles Bourseul and Elisha Gray among others, have all been credited with its invention. However, putting all the claims and counterclaims aside, it was

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Right: a model 1886 Bell wood and brass long-distance telephone or transmitter, \$43,000 (£34,500) at White's Auctions.



Left: a Bell Telephone Company bell stamped for Charles Williams Jr, \$35,000 (£28,000) at White's Auctions.

Treasure House hopes to ease Brexit red tape

by Laura Chesters

The Treasure House Fair hopes to tempt more overseas exhibitors to future fairs with a new deal designed to make importing and exporting simpler and cheaper.

Since the withdrawal of the UK from the EU on January 31, 2020 importing and exporting has become more complicated and costly. Many overseas dealers have been deterred from exhibiting at shows in the UK due to the added layer of complexity.

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New owner for Coins of England

The industry-standard reference book for British coins has been sold by Spink to fellow London numismatic dealership and auction house Sovereign Rarities. *Coins of England & The United Kingdom* has been published regularly for close to a century and by Spink since 1996. The new owners plan to move it into the digital age.

Coins of England & The United Kingdom was first published by coin dealership BA Seaby. What began in 1929 as a brochure of coins held in stock and a series of

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Treasure House Fair eases path for overseas exhibitors

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London's flagship antiques fair has agreed a deal with logistics firm Momart. Effectively it means overseas exhibitors at the fair can use the customs procedure known as Temporary Admissions (TA) via Momart to import and export their items for the fair under a single arrangement with the shipping firm.

Exhibitors will get a special



This will make the headache of importing and exporting less of a migraine

rate for the use of the TA and the fair and Momart will jointly subsidise this cost and manage paperwork.

Thomas Woodham-Smith, co-founder and director of *The Treasure House Fair*, said: "The fair will pay the 'Brexit' part of the costs for those overseas exhibitors working with Momart. We have had many exhibitors who are interested to stand at the fair but have been put off by the complexity

of importing and exporting into the UK."

He added: "For the fair to underwrite this cost is unusual but we see this as a great offer to reunite us with our European friends and neighbours."

The deal has taken a while to agree so Woodham-Smith acknowledges that it will have a smaller impact this year. However, once up and running, it will be a bigger help for future years.

He added: "This will make the headache of importing and exporting less of a migraine."

Last month the fair announced it had hired *The Winter Show's* executive director Helen Allen as its development director to boost its presence overseas to attract visitors and exhibitors alike.

The Treasure House Fair returns to Royal Hospital Chelsea for its second edition on June 26-July 2.

Relics from first days of the phone surface in Massachusetts

Continued from front page

the Scottish-born engineer Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922) who had the ideas, the finance and the business plan that proved commercially decisive.

Bell was granted his US patent for a device using a liquid transmitter and an electromagnetic receiver in March 1876. What he unveiled in June the same year at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition was the prototype to the very first commercial units – such as the pair of Bell Telephone Company 'coffin-form' transmitters offered by White's with a guide of \$500-1000. They were hammered down to an online bidder using the LiveAuctioneers platform for \$36,000 (£28,800).

Stamped to the 10in (25cm) walnut cases with patent dates for March 1876 and January 1877, these wall-mounted instruments predate the invention of the switchboard by about a year (the first installed in New Haven Connecticut in January 1878).

Instead, they operated in pairs, united by a single wire for the sending and receiving of audio. Notably they have just one opening for sound (the user listened and spoke into the same camera-like hole) and signalling a call required a blast of a whistle into the transmitter.

The solution to ensuring the user at the other end picked up was to install a



Above: a pair of Bell Telephone Company coffin-form wooden transmitters c.1877, \$36,000 (£28,800) at White's Auctions.

Right: a Charles Williams Jr wall-mounted telephone c.1880, \$35,000 (£28,000) at White's Auctions.



second wire and a bell. Sold at \$35,000 (£28,000) against the same guide was an 1879 wall-mounted brass and walnut bell stamped for both the Bell Telephone Co and the maker Charles Williams Jr. He is an important figure in this narrative.

A manufacturer of electrical telegraph instruments, it was in the attic of Williams' shop at 109 Court Street in Boston on June 2, 1875 that Bell and his assistant Thomas Augustus Watson had first successfully transmitted sound via electromagnetism.

When in 1877 Williams connected his home to his workplace using Bell's device, he enjoyed the world's first permanent residential telephone

service.

From 1877 to the spring of 1879 the Bell Company relied exclusively on Williams to make the apparatus it leased to its customers. By 1880, the factory was making 1000 telephones per week (still not enough to cope with demand) and Williams had registered a series of patents of his own as the competition and pace of development quickened.

Offered here was a deluxe Williams instrument in an Eastlake style case that incorporates into a single wall-mounted unit a bell, a hand-cranked magneto (for generating a ringing voltage in a distant instrument), a hand receiver, a switch hook, and a

transmitter. Dating to c.1880, it too sold to a LiveAuctioneers bidder at \$35,000 (£28,000).

Remarkably from these small beginnings, only a decade later over 150,000 people in the US owned telephones. Standard commercial apparatus from the late 1880s survives in much greater numbers although the search for better ways of transmitting the voice fired the development of increasingly sophisticated devices. In 1886

Bell patented an elegant 14in wood and brass phone which used a platinum diaphragm for better long-distance transmission. These are extremely rare, and the example offered here, numbered 11319 for c.1887 was in good condition. Estimated at \$500-1000, it became the highest-priced lot in the sale when it hammered for \$43,000 (£34,500).

Roland Arkell