



One of a pair of full-sized ceramic 19-20thC French 'Roof Cats' which cost £250 about six years ago.



'Nina' the 1920-30s Lehmann clockwork cat from Germany.



The advertisement for the 'Merrythought Marvellous Cats' of 1938.



A 1950s Beswick cat cost 15/- new. First in the collection? How much is it worth now?



A cat and dog situation. A German tin-plate novelty 'clicker' with animated animals from the 1950s.

A Themed Collection of Cats in the North of England

by Jack Tempest



'Jack the Station Cat' currently raises funds for the Cats Protection League.



A small jacquard rug illustrating six cats, a little reminiscent of the work of Louis Wain.



Dolls-house ceramic cats probably 1930s.



Cardboard cat for a purpose - it once held Mackintosh's 'Black Cat' chocolates in the 1930s, as this label on its base below indicates.



Theme collecting is a sensible way of building up a collection of by-gones. The collector who turns his or her attention to practically any curiosity that takes their fancy is more liable to run the risk of steadily filling every available nook and cranny in their home!

The other day I was invited by an acquaintance to visit her residence and see her cat collection. Visiting such a collection was a new experience and my hostess surprised me by the number of miniature cats that she had acquired over the last dozen years or so. Her interest in this hobby lies in the realms of cats ornamental and cats playful, meaning toy replicas usually offering interesting mechanical movement. Rarely does she have to search for any special cat and her interest governs all types and she accepts anything cat-like, even illustrated books and comic picture postcards of feline interest. If she can afford whatever she sees and fancies, she simply buys it.

'I know that some cat toys, including ceramic figures and even pictures, have extra values because of demand,' she told me, 'but most traders are open to a little bargaining and there are people at the car boot sales who can charge low prices. The browsing around the stalls at such events and the whole aspect of the wheeling and dealing I find most interesting. It is a necessary part of the hobby of collecting! I'm not bothered about the antiquity of my cats, I'm just as happy with today's examples, such as the stuffed 'Jack the Station Cat' which is sold to raise funds for the *Cats Protection Society*. Jack costs only a fiver and is a cartoon character featured in the *British Railway Modelling Magazine*.'

The collection is spread around her home, some of the porcelain cat figures are tastefully displayed around her lounge, whilst others occupy a variety of showcases and cabinets. She has a fine collection of picture postcards illustrating cats, both real ones and artistic representations, including a selection carrying Louis Wain illustrations. Louis Wain cat drawings are famous and highly sought after and there are books with his comical cat pictures and framed pictures. Look for the signature 'Louis Wain' to make sure he was the artist. There are similar framed pictures on sale that imitate Wain's style and my friend showed me a fairly modern woven jacquard mat illustrating a row of six kittens looking over a fence. Designed by Louis Wain? I doubt it, but a nice collectible, that cost only a few pounds.

One of her favourite ornaments features a seated cat that has an alert look in its eyes. It was bought by my friend's husband as a present in her pre-collecting days and I believe that it probably started her off on her collecting career. She told me that it cost 15 shillings

new at the local Co-Op Emporium in pre-decimal days (75p) and is clearly marked 'Beswick' on its base. Staffordshire 'Beswick' ware is quite collectable today and I suppose this cat will be worth much more than its original price today? There are numerous other ceramic cats in the collection, including one or two small items obviously intended to add a little homely character to furnished dolls houses.

There were several little wind-up tin-plate toy cats that could scuttle around apparently chasing a ball in front of them. They were mainly from the 1930s era. A larger example was a rare 6 inch long mouse-chasing clockwork cat made in Germany by Lehmann & Co in the 1920-30s. It is known as 'Nina' but, unfortunately, as is often the case, its mouse had escaped! A rare classic toy, this!

Another seated cat, a peaceful black one, has realistic glass eyes, but a moulded cardboard body. Why? Well, on examination, one sees a printed panel under its base bearing the words: 'Mackintosh's Black Cat'. This label had to be removed to get at the chocolates which the novelty carton originally contained in the 1930s. My friend bought this for the princely sum of £15 a couple of years ago. A bargain? We can only tell this when the day comes when she decides to sell it!

Whilst actual cuddly cats are, of course, still available the collection contains an actual card advertisement for the 'Merrythought Marvellous Cats' which dates from 1938. She also picked up a 'Jack the Station Cat' illustrating a cat story written by a vicar which appears in a railway magazine. She received this as a gift from another collector - of railway memorabilia!

The most lifelike pair of cats standing in the hearth are full-sized white pottery cats, one with a mouse in its mouth. 'These I bought in an antique shop for £250 about six years ago,' she told me. 'I did know what they were, as it happened. They had once served as roof cats in France and you can see the holes in their paws where they were fixed down. Roof cats were traditional decorations in France, and also in other European countries. I once stood them in my kitchen window and was amused to see next door's cat taking a close look at them from the garden!'

As I was leaving she called me back to show me a tin 'clicker' toy. You may remember lecturers once using 'clickers' to signal the projectionist to change the picture on the screen. Pressing a piece of spring steel caused the 'click' sound. The toy she showed me was a novelty version featuring a cat bobbing up and down in a chimney pot with a dog leaping up and down outside! The 'clicker' not only 'clicked' but caused the animation!



Halls Fine Art Auctions, Shrewsbury. A rare Delft tin glazed earthenware cat, 17thC, 5in. £45,000. Mar 03.



Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury, Wilts. A small Samuel Alcock cat and kitten group, '2' impressed c1830-45, 6.5cm. £340. Mar 00.



Gorrings, Lewes, Sussex. 19thC Staffordshire model of a cat with sponged decoration, 3.5in. £100. Sep 00.



Eastbourne Auction Rooms, Sussex. Royal Crown Derby Cheshire Cat paperweight. £1,950. Mar 02.



Kivell & Sons, Bude, Cornwall. Torquay pottery cat, 7in high. £170. Mar 03.



Gorrings, Lewes, Sussex. A Wilkinson Louis Wain 'The Laughing Cat' seated and painted in black with yellow ribbon collar and eyes, 7in. £700. Dec 00.



Phillips, London. Elizabeth Blackadder. Summer Flowers and Cat. Signed and dated 1978, watercolour, 58 x 79cm. £6,400. Sep 99.



Amersham Auction Rooms, Bucks. A Wemyss pottery model of a seated cat, sponged black and tinged grey marks on ivory ground, painted green inscription to base, 12.75in high. £4,000. Oct 02.



Gorrings, Lewes, Sussex. A Wemyss cat painted with pink dog roses and set green glass eyes, one foot restored, 12.25in high. £2,800. Apr 00.

Cat Hammer Prices at Auction in the last few years - Editor

On page stats. 20 lots. Highest price £45,000. Lowest price £65. Average price £3,575!



Gorrings, Lewes, Sussex. Henriette Ronner, watercolour, Sketch of a tabby cat, signed and dated (18)99, 5 x 7in. £2,200. Sep 00.



Gorrings, Lewes, Sussex. Louis Wain, pen and ink 'Cat and Pekingese', 8.5 x 6.75in, signed, label verso. £800. Dec 00.



Gorrings, Lewes, Sussex. A late 19thC Galle style earthenware seated cat with removable head, monogrammed GR on a back foot, 13in. £1,300. July 01.



G W Finn & Sons, Canterbury, Kent. Early 20thC Japanese cat. £800. Sep 99.



Gorrings, Lewes, Sussex. A pair of Galle style figures of seated cats painted with yellow hearts on a blue ground, initialed and monogrammed, 12.5in. £1,600. Mar 02.



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Ambrose, Loughton, Essex. Louis Wain 1860-1939. One of a pair of framed water-colour and gouache cats. £1,400. Nov 99.



Lambert & Foster, Tenterden, Kent. After Louis Wain, print, 'A Cats Christmas Dance'. £65. Feb 00.



Cheffins, Cambridge. A Victorian pepper caster cast in the form of a cat by E H Stockwell, London 1874, 6.25cm. 2.5oz. £950. Dec 00.



Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex. Tony Sutton. A kitten watercolour, signed, 6.25 x 9.25in. £260. Mar 01.



Gorrings, Lewes, Sussex. A pair of Galle style figures of seated cats painted with yellow hearts on a blue ground, initialed and monogrammed, 12.5in. £1,600. Mar 02.