



A cast iron example of a fender which would have been used in a bedroom or nursery. Bygones Reclamation £75.



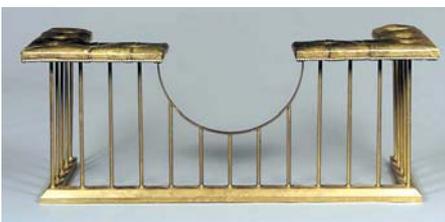
Ornate fire dogs such as these are the most expensive fireside accessory. This early 19th century example sold for £5,875 including buyer's premium. Sotheby's Olympia September 2001.



An elaborate cast iron Victorian fender from Bygones Reclamation, £175.

Fireside Accessories. In many cases original examples cost little more than modern reproductions.

by Zita Thornton



A brass club fender upholstered in leather. May 2002 Sotheby's Olympia, £2,350 including buyer's premium.

We have dipped into our pictures database to produce a further page of pictures and prices of fire related lots which have sold at auction in the last few years. See p48.

Fire irons

On a practical level, fire irons are essential. Normally comprising of tongs and shovel to add coal to the fire, a poker to stir the burning coals, and a brush to sweep up ashes, they were suspended from a matching tripod support. These functional tools were designed to complement the fireplace, the grate and the style of the room itself. Early examples from the Regency period were made from steel with classical urn finials. Later nineteenth century fire irons became more elaborate, with pierced or scrolled finials and claw feet for tongs. Brass took over from steel and as fire grates became smaller, they shrunk in length from two or three feet to 12-18 inches.



When coal took over from wood as a fuel for heating houses, baskets such as this swan's nest example kept the coal together and provided good ventilation from below. A 24" example from Bygones Reclamation, £110.

Grates

Coal was used as a fuel for fires in the late seventeenth century and became commonplace in the fireplaces of Georgian town houses. This led to the development of grates and baskets. They were made from cast iron and kept the coal together allowing good ventilation from underneath. Early grates are the largest while those designed by Adams and Chippendale, with their arched backs and decorative brass fronts, have provided a blueprint for fire grates ever since.

Before coal wood was used as a fuel and this continued in rural areas where wood was plentiful. Burning logs were supported on the open hearth by a pair of andirons, also known as fire dogs. Front upright supports were made of cast or hammered wrought iron or brass, which reflected the light of the fire, with splayed legs supporting a log rest at the back. The basic design changed little over the centuries but they became increasingly elaborate, developing tall, upright front shafts in the Victorian period.

Fenders

Fenders are decorative and functional. They frame the hearth whilst containing cinders which have fallen from the grate. They also prevented long skirts from sweeping the hearth. The most effective shape is the three sided rectangular and this took over from the earlier serpentine design. Fenders are usually made from brass, sometimes of steel, with early examples of copper or brass on an iron base. Copper was again popular in the Art Nouveau period. Like other fireplace accessories they reflected the popular interior designs of the day, so can be found with classical piercing, elaborate scrolls, foliage, crenellations and Art Nouveau motifs.

Practical additions include supports for fire irons or trivets to keep the hot water jug warm. Club fenders provide extra seating close to the fire. They are tall with an upholstered bench seat and were used in libraries and clubs in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, allowing members to stay warm and comfortable in large rooms. Sometimes the seat lifted open to reveal a coal box.



A tole painted Victorian coal scuttle 1860. Sold at Sotheby's Olympia in September 2002 for £258 including buyer's premium.

Coal boxes and scuttles

The use of coal required coal boxes and scuttles to store and transport the fuel to maintain a roaring fire. Coal scuttles were normally only left in bedrooms and nurseries but were used to fill a coal box in the drawing room. The heyday of scuttles and boxes was in Victorian times when a wide variety of decorative devices were used to disguise this functional item.

The basic bucket shaped coal scuttle in cheap brass or copper gave way to a helmet or scoop shape with a small and a taller looped handle, which was lighter and easier to use. The first coal

box was like a vase with a lid, on a small base. Invented by someone named Purdon, so they were known as Purdoniums. Wooden boxes with a metal container inside were attractively finished for the drawing room. They had many different features including paw feet, lion's head handles, hinged lids or drop fronts. Painted metal japanned boxes were made in Birmingham, Bilston and Wolverhampton, the centres of japanning, and exported to the Americas.

Fire guards

As their name suggests, fire guards are used to keep sparks from the fire from falling outside of the hearth. Anyone who has a burn mark in the carpet in front of the fire will confirm the need for one of these. Made from fine metal mesh, they do the job whilst allowing the warmth of the fire into the room. In a decorative frame, the guard either surrounds the entire hearth or just guards the fire itself.

Fire screens are different altogether. These were specifically designed to protect ladies from the heat of the fire. They were used from the early eighteenth century when cosmetics with a high proportion of wax adorned the complexion of a lady. They were portable so that they could be moved to wherever she was sitting.

No Victorian drawing room would be complete without its fire screen so there are plenty of examples to be found today. However, their use is purely decorative. There were two types of fire screen. Polescreens had a shield shape, oval or rectangular screen supported by a pole with a tripod base. Needlework was a popular choice of decoration and hundreds of floral designs were published for polescreens. Cheval screens had a fixed panel, often matching chairs, in a wooden frame. These became sophisticated with the addition of hinged flaps and sliding panels which allowed some parts of the body such as the legs, to be warmed by the fire, while other parts, for instance the face, were protected.

Market information

There is plenty of choice when it comes to original fireside accessories. Individual pieces can be found at local auctions and shops and reclamation yards where fire surrounds are sold. However, matching sets of a number of accessories are more usually found at the larger auctions. Sales at local branches of the London auction houses, are reasonably priced. For instance last year a mixed lot of twentieth century steel fire dogs, a fire grate, fender, two fire irons and some bellows, sold for £84 at Sotheby's Cheltenham branch, including buyer's premium. In the same year at their Olympia branch, a lot comprising a railed brass fender, matching spark guard, pair of bellows and three brass fire irons fetched £705.

Fire dogs

In general, fire dogs cost from £150 for a simple mid nineteenth century cast iron pair to upwards of £2,000 for a later elaborately ornate pair. The more decorative the fire dogs, the higher the price.

Fire grates

Fire grates and baskets from a reclamation yard are from £100-£200.

Fenders

Prices for fenders vary according to the metal they are made from, their age, how decorative they are and whether they adjust to fit your fireplace. Brass Victorian examples are cheapest and simple examples can be found for as little as £50 or less in a local antique centre. Victorian cast iron fenders are from £75 to £175. More decorative fenders or those with extra embellishments such as fire iron supports, are from £200-£700. The most expensive type of fender is the club fender. These sell for £1,500-£2,500.

Scuttles and coal boxes

Brass or copper coal scuttles are from £50-£180 but coal boxes are considerably more depending on how decorative or how much of a piece of furniture they are. Expect to pay up to £300.



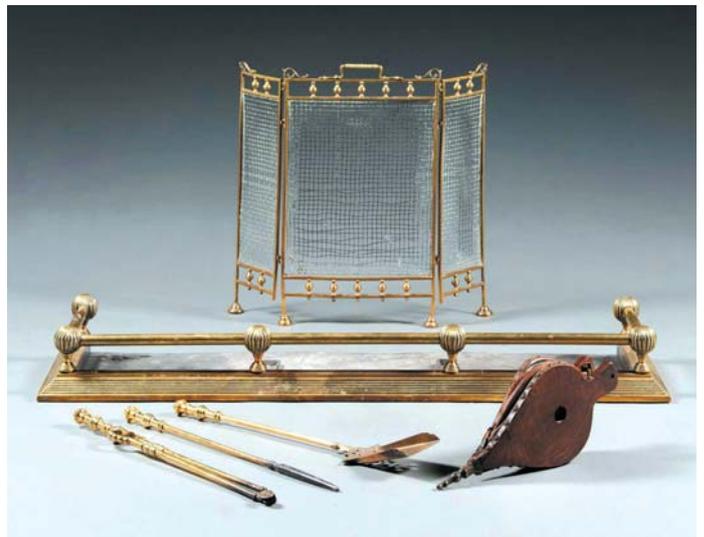
A brass and cast iron fender showing the popular pierced decoration. Bygones Reclamation £95.



Two brass fenders and a copper coal scuttle from the 19th century, sold May 2002 Sotheby's Olympia, £764 including buyer's premium.



Helmet shaped brass coal scuttles were popular in the Victorian era. Bygones Reclamation has a selection from £25.



A mixed lot comprising a brass fender; matching sparkguard, pair of bellows and three brass fire irons. Sold at Sotheby's Olympia October 2002, £705 including buyer's premium.