

A Unique Auction

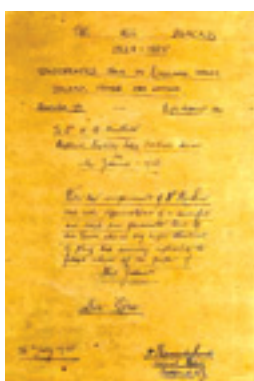
On July 21st Mealy's, Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny auctioned the personal collection of Dr. Karl Mullen which included some very interesting rugby memorabilia.

Report by Fonsie Mealy, FIAVI

In April of this year, Karl Mullen, one of Ireland's greatest sporting legends, passed on to his eternal reward. Dr. Mullen, former Irish Rugby International, was born in Courtown Harbour, Co. Wexford in November 1926. His rugby career began while at school in Belvedere College, Dublin. He went on to play his club rugby at Old Belvedere R.F.C., where he won four Leinster Senior Cup Medals, 1945, 46, 51 & 1952. His Inter-Provincial career saw him play for Leinster 16 times between 1945 & 1951.

In 1946 he gained his first International Cap, and went on to captain Ireland on 25 occasions between 1947 and 1952, during which time he gained the reputation as the best hooker in world rugby. He led his country through the golden era of Irish Rugby when they won their first ever Grand Slam in 1948 and The Triple Crown in 1948 & 1949, followed by the International Championship in 1951. He qualified as a medical doctor, specialising in gynaecology, and had a huge practice in Dublin. He was married with eight children, his wife Doreen predeceased him.

In addition to his many other qualities Karl was a collector of fine items, who had a very keen eye for Art, Irish paintings, furniture, silver and glassware. His large house at Tulfarris in



Lot 414:
A most detailed comprehensive and interesting Scrap Album – "The Invincibles" The Mightiest All-Blacks Presentation Copy to Dr. K.D. Mullen.
Realised: €5,500



Circle of Sir William Orpen (1878-1931)
"Study of two young Girls seated in a library with dolls," O.O.C., bears signature upper right on (book-spine), 39" x 33" (99cms x 84cms). (1) Realised: €10,000.

Co. Wicklow was packed with treasures, and when he moved to Dublin, some items were disposed of, while other items were given to his now maturing family. As he further downsized to a smaller property in Co. Kildare – *Giltown Lodge, Kilcullen*, when he retired, he brought with him his favourite and personal pieces.

After his death, his family, having each received personal items of art, rugby memorabilia etc from their parents, decided to put the entire collection, as he left it, up for auction. While there were a few items which one or two of his children wished to retain, it was agreed the fairest way was to put everything up for auction and let the keenest sibling purchase at the sale.

As was expected the sale aroused great interest from Ireland and abroad amongst art collectors, rugby enthusiasts, and patients of Dr. Mullen alike. The sale was held on the premises, the contents viewed in the house, and sold in a marquee, when thankfully the dismal weather held its patience for the duration of the sale.

In these recession times (there I said it!), this sale was a welcome relief for everybody interested in art & antiques. It again proved that whenever items of good quality, with established names, fresh to the market are offered for sale, there are plenty of clients available, who are prepared to pay a premium price. There is, no doubt, a difficulty in the lesser markets, with huge value for anybody prepared to take a gamble on what three or four years ago was making good money. This market for good substantial, old, and utilitarian furniture and effects will undoubtedly return, and prove a good investment for the shrewd purchaser.

Prices for the paintings, probably the largest single section in the sale, where some fine artists were represented, included: *Lot*

108 Sean McSweeney €8,500 (Est. €5000/7000); Lot 109 €3,000 (Estimate: €3000/5000); Circle of Sir William Orpen, Lot 105, probably one of the most admired in the sale, and the late owners favourite, sold for €10,000 (Est. €7000 /10,000); Circle of Wm. Leech, Lot 110 €2,200 (Est. €800 / 1500); Lot 112, by Nano Reid €2,000 (Est. €1500/2000); Lot 115, Camille Souter, €800 (Est. €800/1200); Lot 242, Markey Robinson €3,000 (Est. €1500/2500); Lot 316, Charles Brady €3,400 (Est. €2,000 / 3,000); a group of 8 Portrait Lithographs after Louis le Brocquy sold for €3,750 (Est. €3,000/4000). There were quite a few paintings by the up and coming artist Karl Mullen Jr., who works in America, and these sold very well, including "Floral Abstract," Lot 269, €1,700 (Est. €1200 / 1500).

A few items failed to sell from this section, most notably Lot 107, Edward Mc Guire's "Portrait of Mrs. Doreen Mullen," a fine example of his work, with Mrs. Mullen wearing a half-length mink coat, against a wall with attractive Wm. Morris wallpaper, (Est. €5000/8000); and Lot 116, Patrick Scott's "Device," a Tapestry Wall Hanging in bright red, purple and green, (Est. €10,000/15,000). *The Auctioneers are happy to report these items were later sold for prices between estimates.*

There were a few fine bronze sculptures as you would expect and prices for these were also very satisfactory, including Lot 277, Bronze Study of a Boy's Head by Jerome Connor, €3,000 (Est. €3000/5000); Lot 319, a large bronze figure, "Lady washing her hair," by Edward Delaney made €8,500 (and was purchased by the artist's family); Lot 317 "Alabaster Head," by Gerda Fromel, €3,000 (Est. €2,500/3500).

The silver section showed great resilience, and some very good prices were achieved; Lot 159, Canteen of Cutlery, €2,400 (Est. €1600/2500); Lot 148, Important set of 4 Irish cast silver Candlesticks €8,500 (Est. €8,000/10,000) and many others.



Lot 148:
An important set of 4 Irish cast silver Candlesticks, George III period, by John Walker, Dublin c. 1770. (4)
Realised: €8,500



Lot 319 - Edward Delaney R.H.A. (b. 1930)
Important large bronze Figure, "Lady Washing her Hair," 49" (125cms). A very attractive Garden Water Feature. (1)
Realised: €8,500

In the furniture section there was spirited competition for all lots, including Lot 61, Set of 10 reproduction mahogany Dining Chairs in the Chippendale style, €5,200 (Est. €2500/3500); Lot 62, good quality reproduction triple pedestal mahogany Dining Table, €2,800 (Est. €1200 / 1800); Lot 63, a matched set of 10 mahogany Dining Chairs, €2,800 (Est. €1200/1800); Lot 181, a mahogany bow fronted Settee, €800, (Est. €800 / 1200); Lot 215, pair of heavy cast iron Garden Benches €1,300 (Est. €300/500).

The Rugby Section at the end of the sale was eagerly awaited, and the crowd that remained knew exactly what they wanted, and were very determined in their bidding. There was representation from the I.R.F.U., private collectors, and former greats of Irish Rugby, including our fellow auctioneer Fergus Slattery, and from the British & New Zealand Rugby Unions. Lot 381, fine collection of approx. 60 original private and press photographs of Ireland's campaign during 1948/49 Season sold for €700 (Est. €400/600), to the I.R.F.U.; Lot 406, €700 (€700 /900) an important collection of approx. 165 original photographs (various sizes), of the Lions on Tour to New Zealand in 1950, was bought by Caleb Kyle, as a present for his father, (the famous Dr. Jackie Kyle), who lost all his own photographs in a house fire some time ago. Lot 392, an Irish Rugby Scrapbook, 1946 – 1949, sold for €1,000 (Est. €700/1000); Lot 414, a large Scrap Album of "The Invincibles, - The Mightiest All-Blacks of All Times," relating to New Zealand's 1925-26 Season, compiled by a Wm. Rankin & presented to Karl Mullen as Captain of British & Irish Lions in New Zealand in 1950, was bought by New Zealand Rugby Union for €5,500 against an estimate of €1500/2000.

Despite the undependable weather, a very large crowd attended the sale. There were approx. **420 lots** on offer, and we achieved approximately 80% clearance on the day. ■