

At the saleroom

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Thomas and Greta Schuster carefully built up their Beatrix Potter collection over forty years, originally intending it to serve as the basis for a definitive catalogue raisonné of her works, but this sadly never materialised. Thomas died in 2013 and Greta died in November (see page 40). However, a lavish and beautifully-illustrated catalogue was produced by Dominic Winter Auctioneers for the 2 October sale. The items were listed in order, starting with books (by date of publication) – including first and signed editions and variant bindings; then autograph letters, greetings cards and ephemera; original watercolours and drawings; and toys, games and ceramics. Some Lots were priced conservatively, others optimistically, and on the day bidding for some was frenzied.

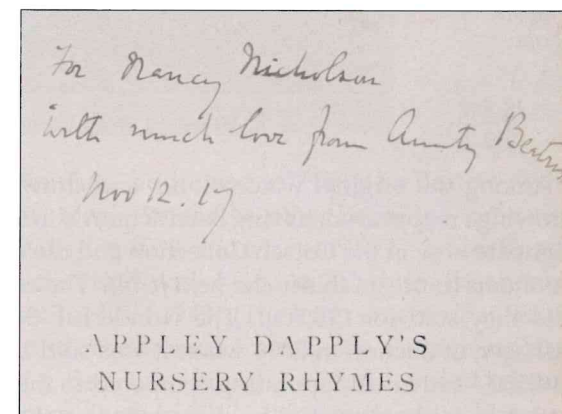
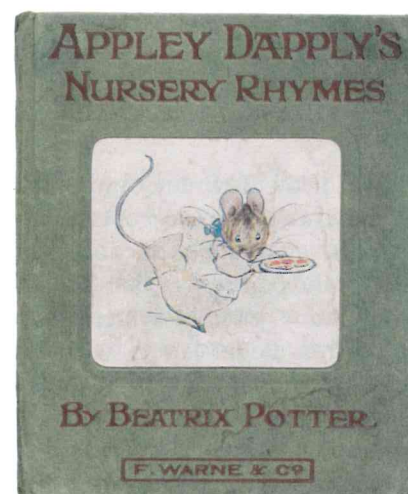
Lot 1 was a rare copy of *A Happy Pair*, originally purchased in 1997 for £38,800, when it was sold by Justin Schiller in the Frohnsdorff sale. The price then was a record for this publication, but only six copies were known to exist at that time. This copy was in reasonable condition, although the spine was badly worn and split in places, but as more copies have materialised in recent years, the prices have fallen dramatically and this time around it made £8,000. Lots 2 to 5 were early Nister books. Prices for these did not reach the dizzying heights of prior years but, again, the condition was not in their favour and even a very decent copy of *Comical Customers* only sold for £800.

Lot 6 was the star of the show. The most pristine example of a first edition privately printed *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (or, in book-dealer terminology, a 'flat back Peter') that I have ever seen. This copy is likely to have come from a box discovered in Castle Cottage upon the death of Beatrix and subsequently sold – mostly to US antiquarian book dealers – by the Dukes. The estimate was an astonishing £40,000-£60,000 and the book quickly sold for £60,000 hammer, which equates to £73,200 with bid premium. An auction record.

Other first edition copies also made creditable amounts. A very good privately printed *Tailor of Gloucester* sold for £3,660, whilst some repaired deluxe first edition *Peter Rabbits* sold for between £1,000 and £2,700, and a leather-bound first edition of *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin*, apparently a trial binding, sold for £2,200. The purchaser also has leather-bound trial editions of *Peter Rabbit* and *Tailor of Gloucester* and there is no record of these books in the Warne Archive. Similarly, a trial edition concertina *A Fierce Bad Rabbit* in unusual red boards sold for £1,830. Given that this copy was heavily restored and the estimate was £300-£500, bidding was clearly competitive.

The auction included a number of signed books, ranging from first editions to much later copies. The general issue with many of them was that they had been restored, either having had spines replaced or pages from other copies inserted to replace missing ones. Consequently, the auction prices varied dramatically. A *Squirrel Nutkin* first edition inscribed to Nellie Wilkinson made an acceptable £3,300, whilst a first edition *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, again inscribed to Nellie, sold for £2,300. The

highlights of the signed books included a rare deluxe copy of *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* inscribed 'For Kate' (possibly Kate Potter, Beatrix's cousin), which sold for an astonishing £7,930. Deluxe first editions inscribed by Potter are rare, but this auction price must be a record. A first edition *Ginger and Pickles*, touchingly inscribed 'For Miss Taylor from Beatrix Potter Nov 13th '09 In remembrance', sold for £5,860. I was rather dismayed at the price, being the underbidder! (Agnes Ann Taylor was the daughter of John Taylor, who managed Sawrey village shop with his wife and was immortalised in the book as Mr. John Dormouse, but sadly died just before publication.) Other notable inscribed first editions included: a *Roly-Poly Pudding* inscribed 'For Mr John "Joiner" Senior! with the author's very kind regards. Nov 25th '08' (£2,560); *Peter Rabbit's Almanac* inscribed for Beatrix Moore – 'For Baby B, with love from Auntie Beatrix and Peter Rabbit – a very merry Christmas Dec 17th 1928' (£2,560 even with the spine very badly repaired); *Appley Daply's Nursery Rhymes* inscribed 'For Nancy Nicholson with much love from Aunty Beatrix Nov 12. 17' (£2,000 and shown here); and quite possibly the tattiest inscribed *Ambleside Fairy Caravan* that I have ever seen. This copy was for Frank Fawcett, a local shepherd, and included a number of 'explains'. It was terribly damaged, with the spine hanging loose and many of the pages insect-damaged, but despite only selling for £1,800 in 1997, it sold for £7,320.



Appley Daply's Nursery Rhymes inscribed to Nancy Nicholson in 1917

The next section featured the highly-desirable autograph letters, early greetings cards and unusual ephemera. Included within the sale were six letters to Millie Warne, which the Schusters had purchased in November 1994 when a huge cache was sold by the Warne Family. These were hotly contested and sold for between £1,500 and £4,300 each. An interesting letter to Nurse Edwards, the new local District Nurse, was dated March 1924 and sold for £2,000, whilst a letter to Hetty Douglas discussing farming business and dogs sold for £2,800 (and was bought by the Society – see page 21). A number of Hildesheimer & Faulkner and ICAA cards featured, and these