

# A tale of two teapots

BY ROLAND ARKELL

**HERE follows a tale of two teapots – both of them seen at Neales (17.5% buyer's premium) of Nottingham on September 29.**

The 8in (20cm) high *Flatiron* or model number 622, c.1876, is perhaps the cutest and most desirable of all of the dozen or so teapots produced by Minton in majolica. Dangling from the cable handle is a white and ginger cat whose gaze is fixed firmly down upon a finial formed as a mouse nibbling on a carrot. Stylised mice run around the side interspersed by florets.

The designer was a talented chap indeed. However, like all but one of the Minton majolica teapots (the exception being the *Vulture and Snake* by H.H. Crealock) the identity of the modeller remains unknown. Dr Christopher Dresser, who provided a number of designs for Minton, has been sug-

gested as a possible candidate but that is unsure.

The *Flatiron* does, however, have plenty of sale-room history. In March 2001, an example in the cobalt ground (it also comes in turquoise) was sold in New York at Christie's East for \$40,000 (£28,570). Just a few months later in June 2001 another was seen at Christie's South Kensington and sold for a mighty £58,000 as the majolica market reached its peak. More recently a Staffordshire couple visited a car boot sale in Tamworth where – forget the cracked handle and damaged base – they bought a Minton *Flatiron* for £2. It sold at Christie's South Kensington in July of this year for £27,000.

Given its condition issues and the recent price revisions to hit the majolica market, this boot-fair discovery provides the best comparison to the teapot seen in Nottingham last month. Consigned by a couple in whose family it had been since the 19th century, it too had a broken and glued handle. It was estimated at £15,000-20,000, attracted five telephone bidders and sold to a New York dealer at £23,000.

Incidentally, the big test of the majolica market arrives in Hatfield, Pennsylvania on October 28-29 when Majolica Auctions sell the collection of Marilyn G. Karmason. The psychiatrist and co-author of the 'bible' *Majolica: A Complete History and Illustrated Survey* has chosen to sell 600 lots from all colours of the majolica spectrum from American-made Etruscan begonia dishes to the finest of Minton and George Jones conservatory pieces.

Her comprehensive Minton teapot collection includes a *Vulture and Snake* estimated at \$30,000-50,000 (the last I can recall at auction was sold by CSK in November 1999 for £30,000) and another flat-iron teapot estimated at \$30,000-40,000.

The 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ in (14cm) high spherical teapot also pictured here is unmistakably the work of James Dixon & Sons and their most celebrated designer Christopher Dresser. The simplistic but radical design was first registered as part of a three-piece teaset in 1880, whose elements carry the shape number 2278. A full set in electroplate was bought by Martin Levy

teapot saw this damaged example realise £23,000 at Neales of Nottingham in September.

**Above right:** the silver spherical teapot made by James Dixon & Sons and designed by Christopher Dresser sold at £12,500.

of London dealers H. Blairman & Sons for £14,500 as part of the Andrew McIntosh Patrick collection sold by Edinburgh auctioneers Lyon & Turnbull in April.

Unusually, however, for a man who mainly addressed the market for affordable domestic metalware, this Dresser teapot is fashioned in solid silver. In addition to the facsimile Dresser signature and a registration lozenge for November 25, 1880, it carries hallmarks for James Dixon & Sons, Sheffield 1882. Including its ebonised wood handle, it weighs a total of 14oz.

Not all collectors care greatly about such things – form comes first with function and material a distant second – but there was clearly a premium to be paid. This teapot had an interesting family provenance but the inscription to the body was undesirable: *Presented to Mr. Frank and Miss Katherine Hodgkinson by the Duke of Portland for the best yearling filly shewn at Welbeck August 2nd 1887*. Nevertheless, it took £12,500, just above the top estimate.