

## Summers Place Auctions to sell Ralfe Whistler's famous Dodo Collection



Ralfe Whistler (1930-2023) was a British naturalist whose father Hugh (1889-1943) was an ornithologist and collected 70,000 specimens of Indian birds. Ralfe was brought up surrounded by an extensive collection of stuffed birds, which were later donated to the Natural History Museum. Hugh had been given the first bones of a Dodo by the founder of the Hastings Museum, Thomas Parkin, to encourage his interest in natural history. The Dodo bones were passed on to Ralfe after his father's death and sparked an interest in the "funny looking" bird and resulted in a fascinating collection of all things Dodo! The collection is now coming up for auction at Summers Place Auctions on Tuesday, 24th September.

With the possible exception of Tyrannosaurus rex, the Dodo is the best known of all extinct creatures and people all over the world are fascinated by the idea of its existence. There are only few bones left, but Dodos have featured in many books and in paintings and more recently artists and designers have embraced the creature and created mementos of all types including tea towels and ash trays. The Dodo has become such a popular bird that there are thousands of people who collect these intriguing items.



Ralfe Whistler, however, stood out among them and he lived in a house absolutely full of Dodo memorabilia. Even the house itself (which stood close to the site of the Battle of Hastings) was called the Dodo House. Whenever a feature on the Dodo appeared in the news, reporters and cameramen would make the pilgrimage to Ralfe's house to record his view on the matter and describe or photograph his collection. He reached world-wide fame and from time to time parts of his massive collection were exhibited in museums and galleries internationally.



The collection had no limits so long as each item related in some way to the Dodo. It ranged from a wide range of modern Dodo memorabilia with all kinds of ornaments, mugs and textiles featuring the Dodo's image to more serious items - works of art (paintings and sculptures), historical letters, and perhaps most importantly of all - actual bones that once belonged to the living creature and were found on Mauritius around 1900.

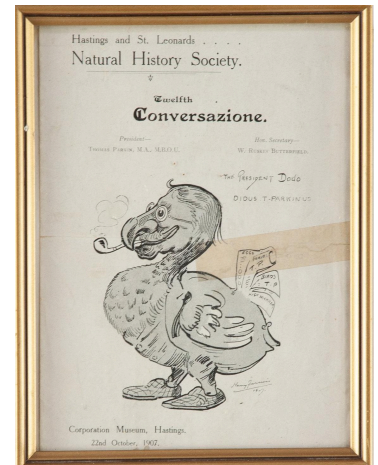
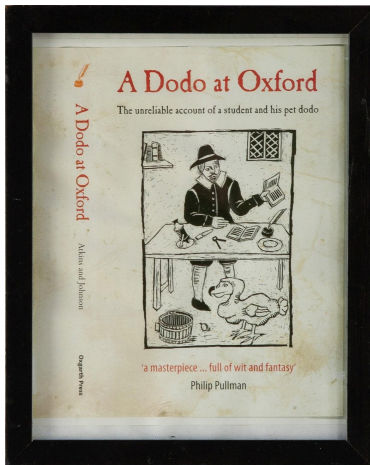
The top lot of the Collection is a Dodo bone (Scapular Coracoid) accompanied by a letter from Edith Clark, the daughter of George Clark, who discovered the first Dodo bones on Mauritius. The bone and letter are estimated at £8,000 - £10,000.

Another letter by Bessie Clark from April 1921 with regards to her father's discovery of the bones is expected to fetch £400 - £600. Two sets of a pair of bones carry an estimate of £4,000 - £6,000 each.

The auction includes two of the most important publications on the Dodo - Strickland & Melville's *The Dodo and its Kindred* from 1848 (estimate £1,400 - £1,600) and Hachisuka's *The Dodo and Kindred Birds* published in 1953 (est. £400 - £600).



The auction includes over 150 paintings, prints and drawings including by artists such as Beryl Cook, Richard Bawden, J. Fenwick Lansdowne O.C RCA and a print dated from 1795 and a recent digital print of one of the first depictions of the Dodo by Jacob Hoefnagel. Other printed material includes an article on the Dodo from *The Illustrated London News*, a Virgin Atlantic print ad, a book cover design for Philip Pullman's *A Dodo at Oxford*, but also stamps depicting the Dodo (both from Mauritius and the USA) as well as a Mauritian bank note.



There are also about 20 sculptures of the Dodo included, made of bronze, wood, ceramic and wire. Memorabilia include tea pots, mugs, vases, plates, tea towels, soft toys and a clock.

Rupert van der Werff says: "We are pleased to be able to sell Ralfe Whistler's Dodo Collection, which was clearly a life's work. Ever since we sold a complete Dodo at Summers Place Auctions, it has been a bird close to our heart and we know how popular the bird is. This auction offers an opportunity to all those Dodo enthusiasts out there to buy a piece of this collection with prices starting at as little as £20. The bones and the accompanying letters are of real importance and we hope that they will find their way into existing Dodo collections or encourage someone to start collecting Dodo materials."

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