

Australiana

Weekly Times Column

By Warren Joel

The term Australiana covers a wide range of antiques and collectables, from our earliest settlement all the way through to contemporary furniture and design produced today.

From a collectors' point of view there is a large premium paid for our home grown products. Nowhere is this more evident than in "brown furniture". As we noted earlier the sale of traditional mahogany furniture such as dining tables, chairs and sideboards has diminished because of our lifestyle. In other words we are just not using this type of furniture anymore. However, there is still a strong market for Australian furniture, especially that made with the more exotic timbers, such as Huon pine.

To give you a comparison of prices, a similar aged chest of drawers in English mahogany will sell for \$1,000; the same chest in cedar, \$1,500 and Huon pine, \$3-4,000.

Another good example of where our home grown Australiana far exceeds the same English manufactured item is found with sterling silver (solid silver). Your grandfather's running cup from the 1880's, if English manufactured (even with an Australian inscription) will sell for under a thousand dollars, but the same cup by an Australian silver or goldsmith could sell for up to \$5,000.

In the two examples given here there is a very fine line to be able to identify Australiana versus English manufacture. With the furniture one of the clues will be the type of timber used. With the silver, the absence of English hallmarks, may indicate that the origin of the item is Australia.

When doing valuations and trying to identify these items, and their origins, it can often require particular skills to identify the difference between our Australiana and their English cousins. But correctly identifying an early piece of Australiana will add many thousands of dollars to its value.

Next week: More than a penny!

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