

Pick of the week

Amateur who won the title

Remarkably, given Chelsea FC's modern-day huge spending and multi-year lucrative contracts, two of the squad who helped to win their first-ever league title in 1954-55 were amateurs.

While the professionals in the squad got £12 a week and a £50 for that league triumph, the amateurs received nothing (although apparently plenty of ways of unofficial payment could be found in those days – 'boot money').

One was Jim Lewis, a travelling salesman of thermos flasks, the other Seamus O'Connell, whose main role was cattle farming in Cumbria. The latter made 10 Chelsea appearances in 1954-55, scoring seven goals. Three of those goals came as a hat-trick on his debut against Manchester United – a game Chelsea still contrived to lose 6-5.

O'Connell's league winner's 9ct gold medal, 1955, together with a silver Football Combination medal engraved *WINNERS 1954-55* (for reserve teams) and 15 signed photographs of him, featured at Sworders of Essex in the Out of the Ordinary auction on August 18.



Above: Chelsea FC 1954-55 league title medal awarded to Seamus O'Connell (also shown right), £5500 at Sworders.

The lot estimated at £5000-7000 hammered at £5500 (plus 27% buyer's premium) to a UK collector. They were consigned from the David and Pam McCleave Collection, a source of many lots at various sales held by Sworders. David, who went to football dinners, heard that O'Connell needed money to pay for a leg operation and ended up buying his medal.

O'Connell left Chelsea the season after the title win, with a total of 12 goals in 17 appearances. He had been urged to join Chelsea as a pro but preferred to go back to his cattle and continue as an amateur.

When he died aged 83 in 2013, after emigrating to Spain, *The Northern Echo* newspaper said: "He won four England international football caps, helped Bishop Auckland win the FA Amateur Cup in 1955 and 1956 and Crook Town to lift the trophy in 1959."

That bonkers debut for Chelsea came "the week



after playing for the Bishops in a Durham Challenge Cup tie at Cockfield and being unable by common consent to hit a byre door with a cow prod".

O'Connell also made appearances for Middlesbrough, Carlisle Utd and Penrith.

In that 2013 *Northern Echo* tribute, the Bishop Auckland FC chairman at the time rated O'Connell as of the finest talents even in the legendary side of the 1950s (when the Bishops dominated the league tables, lifting multiple amateur FA cup titles and filling Wembley with audiences of 90,000).

He added: "Many will tell you he was the best ever. He was very much a product of his time – obviously a good-looking feller, a bit of money in his pocket and a fantastic footballer. He was the playboy, and he had everything."

Tom Derbyshire



Precious metals

On Thursday, August 20, Michael Bloomstein of Brighton was paying the following for bulk scrap against a gold trading price of:

\$4505.87 €3837.56 £3288.96

Gold

22 carat: £2909.36 per oz (£93.55 per gram)

18 carat: £2380.38 (£76.54)

15 carat: £1983.65 (£63.78)

14 carat: £1851.41 (£59.53)

9 carat: £1190.19 per oz (£38.27 per gram)

12 Month High: ▲ £48.31

12 Month Low: ▼ £28.66

Hallmark Platinum

£36.27 per gram

Silver

£40.21 per oz for 925 standard hallmarked

12 Month High: ▲ £73.38

12 Month Low: ▼ £22.81

Messina works taken from museum

Four paintings by Antonello da Messina (c.1430-79) have been stolen from a museum in his Sicilian hometown.

The thieves targeted the Museo Regionale di Messina on August 15, entering the premises late at night while the town was engaged in its Assumption Day celebrations.

They took five wooden panels which had once formed the *Polittico di San Gregorio* altarpiece but abandoned two of them just outside the museum. They also stole a double-sided painting showing the Virgin with Child and a Franciscan monk on one side and Christ on the other.

The theft comes after the Italian state agreed a \$14.9m (£10.9m) deal for da Messina's *Ecce Homo* panel which was due to be auctioned at Sotheby's in February.

Paintings found

Meanwhile, Italian police have recovered three paintings by Paul Cézanne, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Henri Matisse that were stolen earlier this year from a private museum near Parma. The works taken by two masked burglars from the

Magnani Rocca Foundation were valued together at over £7m.

Dawson joins US West Coast art team

Auction house Rago/Wright has appointed Lilly Dawson as associate director of Fine Art. She is based on the West Coast of the US.

Dawson has run her advisory business Gray Dawson Art Advisory since 2023 and has more than three decades of experience across both the auction and gallery worlds. During her career she has worked at Christie's in New York, Phillips, de Pury & Luxembourg, Driscoll Babcock Galleries and Sotheby's. She then moved to London in 2016 and was senior sales associate with art dealer Simon Dickinson.

She joins the firm's fine art department on the West Coast



Left: Lilly Dawson.

and will work alongside its affiliate business with LA Modern Auctions.

Rago/Wright is based in New York City and partners with Los Angeles Modern Auctions (LAMA).

Oz auction house moves to bigger HQ

Australian auction house Smith & Singer has bought a new, larger Sydney gallery and head office. The building at 12 Todman Avenue, Kensington, will open in early 2027 and it will retain its operations at its Sydney galleries at 30 Queen Street, Woollahra until the move.

The firm said the building in Sydney is similar in "scale and distinction" to its home in Melbourne at 33 Lansell Road, Toorak and said the Sydney buildings' three levels and its "soaring ceilings, generous proportions, distinguished period interiors, dual street access and parking for at least 21 vehicles provide an exceptional foundation for the presentation, appreciation and exchange of fine art".

Smith & Singer said the expansion follows a strong year



Above: Smith & Singer has bought a new, larger Sydney gallery and head office.

of sales when it reported sales in excess of Aus\$62m (£32.5m) across auctions, exhibitions and private sales in 2025.

Stolen Picasso print recovered

A Pablo Picasso print stolen from a Milwaukee art gallery in 2018 has been recovered.

Art dealer Bill DeLind was contacted by police eight years after the theft to say the artwork was found by a local landlord, Tim Dertz, while cleaning out a vacant apartment after the tenant was evicted.

Dertz said he showed it to an antiques dealer friend who recognised it as a Picasso and he handed it over to police. It remains in possession of Milwaukee police while the

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