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# Koopman Rare Art

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## **Director's Choice – Timo Koopman**

**A Pair of George IV Silver Tureens, Covers & Stands from The Duchess of St. Albans Service**

**After a design by Edward Hodges Baily**

This extraordinary pair of soup tureens, liners and stands exemplify the magnificence of what was the most valuable service in the country. The lavishness and opulence of the cast and applied decoration of patriotic English oak and acorns together with adorned acanthus would have graced the presence of royalty and aristocrats at the Duchess' residence in Statton Street. The beauty of their design by Edward Hodges Baily and brilliance in execution by Rundell's workshop make these my Director's Choice this week.



**A pair of George IV silver tureens, covers and stands from the Duchess of St. Albans Service**

By Philip Rundell for Rundell, Bridge & Rundell

London, 1821

Width: 22 1/16 in.; 56 cm

weight: 10,960 g.

Each tureen in a fluted oval form on foliage feet, the sides applied with oak-leaves and acorns, with leaf-capped reeded handles, the foliate rim with shells at intervals, the domed fluted cover with a cast acanthus handle, the confirming stand with scroll handles, the tureens, covers and stands each engraved twice with initials below a duchess coronet, engraved inside the covers, under stands and on liners with a crest below a duchess coronet, after a design by Edward Hodges Bailey.

Provenance:

Harriet, Duchess of St. Albans

Thence by descent to her step-granddaughter Angela Burdett, Baroness Burdett-Coutts

Christie's London, 14 May 1914 (The Coutts Heirlooms Sale)

Christie's New York, 23 March 1983, lot 213

Christie's London, 7 June 2011, lot 353

Koopman Rare Art, London, 2011

The Al Thani Collection



A drawing of a silver sauce tureen by Edward Hodges Baily, circa 1820 at The Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Edward Hodges Baily was born in Bristol, the son of a ship's carver. Having been brought to the attention of John Flaxman, he joined the sculptor's studio where he spent seven years, joining the Royal Academy in 1808 and winning the gold medal in 1811 for his *Hercules Restoring Alcestis to Ademetus*. In 1817 he began designing for the firm of Rundell and Bridge where he became chief modeller. He is best remembered for the figure of Nelson which stands at the top of the column in Trafalgar Square.

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Harriet, Duchess of St Albans Monogram

### **Thomas Coutts**

The Morning Post recorded of Thomas Coutts that "some time previous to his death he settled upon Mrs. C. the sum of £600,000 with the house in Stratton-street, all the plate, linen, etc. - the service of plate is said to be the most valuable of any of the country - together with the house in Highgate and all its appurtenances...the whole makes her the richest widow in the United Kingdom."

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### **Harriet Mellon**

This is the story of the illegitimate daughter of a strolling player who became the Duchess of St Albans and one of the richest women in Britain. Famously described by 14th Duke of St Albans as 'A generous character and that is always a special quality'.



William Beechey, Harriet Beauclerk (née Mellon), Duchess of St Albans, Oil on canvas, Circa 1815. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

Harriet Beauclerk, Duchess of St. Albans (née Mellon) was born in London in 1777. She was the daughter of a wardrobe mistress and actress in a band of strolling players. Harriet grew up surrounded by the group of talented performers. Her mother married violinist Thomas Entwisle who taught her how to sing and dance, the desire to perform running through her blood. The family went on to join the respected acting company owned by Thomas Bibby which toured the theatres of the North.

In 1787, Harriet made her debut playing 'Little Pickle' in *The Spoiled Child* at Ulverston. However, her major breakthrough came when she was spotted by playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan. As a result, she worked for a season at the magnificent Drury Lane Theatre in January 1795 as Lydia Languish in Sheridan's *The Rivals*. Throughout her successful career she acted as an understudy to Dorothea Jordan and Sarah Siddons and was best remembered for her role as Volante in John Tobin's *The Honeymoon*, performed in 1805.

Mellon's fame rose in 1815 when she married the banker, Thomas Coutts. Whilst her acting career came to an end; she had found her perfect partner who she described as 'the most perfect being that ever breathed'. Mellon had been Coutts' mistress before his first wife, Elizabeth Starkey, passed away in 1815. As a result of the scandal their marriage was conducted in private so as not to upset his three daughters from his previous marriage. Thomas Coutts did all he could to protect his beloved from his daughter's hostility. Together they threw lavish parties and entertained important guests such as Wordsworth and Samuel Rogers to their properties across the country, her favourite being Holly Lodge in Highgate.



Charles Turner, after Sir William Beechey,  
Harriet Beauclerk (née Mellon), Duchess of St Albans,  
mezzotint, published 1806. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

Within three years of Coutt's death, reports of an impending marriage between his widow and the 21-year-old heir to the Dukedom of St. Alban's were rife. William Beauclerk succeeded to the Dukedom in 1825

and almost immediately proposed marriage to Mrs. Coutts. They were married 16 June 1827. The Duchess was renowned both for the extravagance of her hospitality and her generosity to those in need. She was vilified by the popular press, who lost no opportunity in attacking her, and she appears to have been either wildly hated or greatly loved by all in society, Harriet became subject to a number of sarcastic caricatures and criticism.. The Royal Dukes, with the exception of the Duke of Clarence (later William IV) were all regular visitors.



Henry Heath, The Wedding Day, Etching, 1827. Courtesy of The National Portrait Gallery.

Her close friend Sir Walter Scott wrote to Harriet to congratulate her on her second marriage. Her reply to Scott was quoted in full in his journal for 30 June 1827:

"What a strange eventful life has mine been, from a poor little player child, with just food and clothes to cover me, dependent on a very precarious profession, without talent or a friend in the world – first the wife of the best, the most perfect being that ever breathed ...and now the wife of a Duke! You must write my life... my true history written by the author of Waverley"

Harriet was a keen collector amassing a fantastic collection of old master paintings and silver. She sat for some of the most important artists of the time including Sir William Beechey, George Romney and Sir Thomas Lawrence.



### **Angela Burdett-Coutts**

The Duchess died in 1837, she left to the Duke of St Albans £10,000 a year for his lifetime along with both the properties based in London. She left the bulk of her estate and fortune approximately £1.8 million to Angela Burdett-Coutts, her stepdaughter. Contemporary newspaper accounts gleefully pointed out that her fortune was equivalent to thirteen tons of gold, or if not in sovereigns it would stretch over twenty-four miles and take ten weeks to count. Angela Burdett-Coutts used her wealth to amass a large art collection and to fund numerous philanthropic schemes for which she was created a Baroness by Queen Victoria in 1871. She resisted numerous suitors until her marriage in 1881 to an American, William Bartlett of Plymouth, Massachusetts. Bartlett took the name of Burdett-Coutts in lieu of his own and sat as M. P. for Westminster from 1885 on and gave his wife considerable assistance in her charitable activities. Baroness Burdett-Coutts died on 30 December 1906, and her body lay in state for two days, during which time 30,000 people, both rich and poor, paid their last respects. She was buried in Westminster Abbey on 5 January 1907.



The home of Baroness Burdett-Coutts – as the procession passes along the corner of Stratton Street, Piccadilly, London. Published in the Illustrated London News, 2 July 1887.

After Angela's death the majority of her silver collection was placed in a vault at Coutt's bank until 1914. On 14th May 1914 Christie's, London held the Coutts Heirlooms sale including a service by Paul Storr after the designs by E. Hodges Baily.

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### **Past Examples at Koopman Rare Art**

Many of Harriet's pieces of silver have passed through the doors at Koopman Rare Art including a George III cheese dish made by Robert Hennell II in London 1812, A pair of candelabra by William Pitts, and a wonderful pair of dishes by Henri Auguste to name but a few.



A Pair of George III candelabra by Thomas Pitts

Formerly Koopman Rare Art Collection

This pair of George III candelabra stamped with the maker's mark of William Pitts belonged to Harriet. They are elaborately cast and chased with lion masks, dolphins, eagles, and dragons representing the four elements within swirling scrolls, flowers and rocaille on a matted ground. This pair of candelabra are initialled and not engraved with the full St Albans armorials, a testimony to her strength of character and independence.



A pair of French silver dishes on stands Paris, 1785 by Henri Auguste

Formerly Koopman Rare Art Collection

This pair of Louis XVI French dishes on stands were also part of Harriet's collection. The pair were made in Paris between 1785-1789 by Henri Auguste and Robert Joseph Auguste. Both the covers and bases are engraved with the coronet & monogram of Harriet Duchess of St Albans. A selection of wonderful pieces of silver which do not only represent some of the maker's most prestigious and important pieces but also hold provenance relating to one of the richest female characters of the 19th century.

Here are a set of salts also from her service which we currently have in the Koopman Rare Art Collection.



### **A Magnificent Set of Four 'Cauldron' Salt Cellars**

George III

London, 1819

Maker's mark of Paul Storr

Engraved with the Baron's coronet and monogram of Baroness Burdett Coutts

Diameter: 11 cm, 4.3 in.

Weight: 1,449.3 g, 46 oz 12 dwt



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I have included below a wonderful account of Harriet's life taken from Chapters from the Family Chest 1887 –By Edward Walford, M.A:

### **Harriet, Duchess of St. Albans**

Edward Walford (1823–1897) was an English magazine editor and a compiler of educational, biographical, genealogical and touristic works, perhaps best known for the final four volumes of 'Old and New London.'

Amongst the ten or twelve ladies who have been raised from the stage to wear coronets, few names stand forth more pleasantly than that of Harriet Mellon. Some eighty-five years ago that lady was taking the town by storm by her performance of Volante in 'The Honeymoon,' at Drury Lane Theatre; and, as it was in the year in which the Battle of Waterloo was fought that she quitted the stage, she must have been at her zenith just at the same time with the great Napoleon.

It is not known who was her father, though probably she had one, and it has been said that he was a chimney-sweep at Sheffield; her mother, a Mrs. Entwisle, was a celebrity in her day upon the provincial stage; and little Harriet first saw the light on the 11th of November 1777, in a small street near the Archbishop's Palace of Lambeth. It is possible that her father may have been a certain Lieutenant Mellon of the Madras Army, who came, saw, and conquered her charming mother, and who, having married her on 'Twelfth Day,' 1777, sailed from Portsmouth for India in the following March, and was never heard of afterwards; and it is equally possible that the said Lieutenant Mellon was a 'nobleman in disguise.' This was a mystery constantly alluded to but never cleared up by her mother, who was a native of the county Cork, and of peasant extraction, and who probably had paid a visit to the 'blarney stone' in her childhood. What is known is that when her little Harriet was two or three years old she took as her second husband a certain Mr. Entwisle (over whose parentage, too, there hung an air of romance and mystery as well), and that the husband and wife used to make the provincial circuits from theatre to theatre on foot, carrying by turns little Harriet and a large Cremona violin. Mr. Entwisle does not seem to have been remarkable in any way either as an actor or as a man; and he contributed nothing to the prospects of his wife and his stepchild, although we must do him the justice to say that he was both fond and proud of her.

When very young indeed, Harriet was the inmate of a fine castle, where she recollected handsome staircases, fine pictures, and ladies in gay attire, by whom she was petted and fondled; and when in her mature years, as Mrs. Coutts, she went as a visitor to that same castle, she at once recalled it as one of the haunts of her early childhood. Her mother, a woman of high spirit and passionate temper, appears to have treated her as a child with great severity, and even harshness; but this she repaid only by kindness and substantial acts of benefit, a long catalogue of which may be found in the life of the Duchess, by Mrs. Cornwall Baron Wilson.

It would be tedious and unprofitable to give here a detailed list of the various provincial stages on which young Harriet Mellon had appeared before she was eighteen. But when she was about that age she had been brought into contact with Sheridan, who first saw her at Stafford, and who urged her to come to town and try her fortunes on a more ambitious stage, promising her that he would give her introductions which would ensure her an engagement at Drury Lane. She, or rather her parents, followed Sheridan's advice. Though they were driven into serious straits for a time in the metropolis, yet luck came in its own good time, and during the season of 1795 she made her debut on ill, boards of 'Old Drury,' as Lydia Languish. It was not, however, her fate to take the town by storm, as some have done before her and after her; in fact, it was only by gradual steps that she rose to become a favourite either in the town or in the country; but before the commencement of the present century her name was in everybody's mouth as one of the best of the rising generation of comic actresses. Mrs. Siddons knew her and admired her; and so did the stars of lesser magnitude who revolved around that centre of theatrical attraction.

It must have been about the year 1810 that she was first introduced, whilst on a professional tour at Cheltenham, to the gentleman whose acquaintance most largely influenced the entire rest of her life. Mr. Thomas Coutts was well known as a rich septuagenarian, who was 'taking the Cheltenham waters' for his health. He saw and admired Miss Mellon whilst she was walking with her mother on the Parade; and one evening he sent her an order for a box, with five guineas as an enclosure. These guineas she always regarded with religious, not to say superstitious, reverence, as five pieces of luck, and treasured them to her dying day. Mr. Coutts forthwith became a frequent visitor at Mrs. Entwisle's lodgings and introduced his daughters--Lady Guildford and Lady Burdett--to the reigning and accomplished actress and her mother. On returning to London the intimacy was kept up; and Miss Mellon and her mother were equally constant and acceptable visitors at the great banking house in the Strand, of which Mr. Coutts was the head.

It happened that at this time Mrs. Coutts was an invalid; her mind was overcast by mental disease: she rarely appeared at table, and if she did her memory played her lamentable tricks. On one occasion she asked the Duke of Clarence, afterwards William IV, if he were not the father of his Majesty King George III.

In the first month of 1815 old Mrs. Coutts exchanged this life for a better one, and her husband at once offered his hand, thus released, to the charming actress, who had been his daughters' friend, and in whom he thought he should himself find a true friend and a kind nurse in his declining years. At first Miss Mellon was strongly inclined to reject the offer, on account of the disparity of age; but at length she yielded to the importunity of one of Mr. Coutts's oldest friends and advisers, and her marriage was celebrated privately at St. Pancras Church, in the following month, the ceremony being performed by a Mr. Champneys. The union was publicly notified in the Times of the 2nd of March. She had retired from the stage at the time of their union. That, in spite of the recent death of the first Mrs. Coutts, his family did not disapprove of the new bride may be inferred from the fact that not very many months had passed by before Harriet Mellon, once the actress, and now the wife of the richest untitled commoner in the land, was presented at Court by her own stepdaughter, Lady Guildford. The Prince Regent and the other members of the Royal circle, it was observed, took especial notice of the new debutante at St. James's Palace.

During the seven years that she presided over Mr. Coutts's dinner table and drawing-room at Stratton Street few hostesses excelled her in the highest qualities of tact, kindness, forethought, and courtesy. She seemed in a manner born to the situation. But all this ended at Mr. Coutts's death in 1822, which left her once more at her own disposal. Mrs. Coutts, both as the banker's wife and as his widow, paid frequent visits to Edinburgh; and the good people of our 'Northern Athens' were not slow in accepting invitations to her parties, and then abusing her. But even this did not chill her kindly feelings or set a limit to her invitations. Sir Walter Scott went out of his way to rebuke some of those who, after accepting her hospitality at Edinburgh, would give her the 'cold shoulder' at Abbotsford. She was a guest at that house in 1825, when the young Duke of St. Alban's was pressing his suit vigorously with the amiable and wealthy relict; and it is certain that Sir Walter did his best to bring matters to a satisfactory conclusion. 'If the Duke marries her,' he writes, 'he ensures an immense fortune: and if she marries him, she has the front rank. If he marries a woman older than himself by twenty years, she marries a man younger in wit by twenty degrees. I do not think he will dilapidate her fortune: he seems good and gentle. I do not think she will abuse his softness of disposition-shall I say? or of heart.'

When she had risen by her second marriage to the highest point of her ambition, the unthinking world expected to see vulgar display and bad taste in her dress, her style of living, and her equipages; but in all this they were grievously disappointed; and her assumption of the strawberry leaves led to no alteration in externals. The coach of his Grace of St. Alban's was in no way more dashing from the wealth which she had brought into the house of Beauclerk. These may be trifles to the eye and ear, but they bespoke the good sense of the Duchess.

At the coronation of William IV. and Queen Adelaide in 1831, her Grace was seated with the other ladies of ducal rank on the front seat on the floor of the transept. Just before the anointing of the Queen a sealed packet was presented to her; the three Duchesses on one side of her, and the next Duchess on the other side then rose to hold the canopy over Her Majesty, leaving her Grace of St. Alban's seated and passed over. The incident made not the slightest impression upon her, nor did the colour come into her cheek at what many ladies would have looked on as an affront.

The Duchess, however, had her little weaknesses, not to say superstitions; and she was so afraid of ghosts that she always had a maidservant to keep watch in her chamber at night. From her youth she cherished a belief that the dead visited the living in the shape of birds. On her deathbed she received her stepdaughter, Lady Guildford, calmly and placidly remarked, 'I am so happy to-day, because your father's spirit is breathing upon me, as he promised; he has taken the shape of a little bird, singing at my window, just as he said he would come back if he could.' In the hope that such a belief would be realized, she often threw out food to the birds, and opened the windows of her boudoir at Holly Lodge that they might come inside.

In spite of the grandeur and state of receptions in Stratton Street, it was in Holly Lodge, Highgate, the country spot where she had fixed her home as Miss Mellon, that she still especially delighted. There she

had the sight of green trees and of flowers and the song of birds to cheer her; and to these she returned with a sense of relief when the pleasures of the London season fatigued and oppressed her. Here, in spite of her marriage, she gave a home for a few months to her mother, till that mother was called away by the hand of death, and afterwards to her unthrifty and reckless stepfather, whose later years were made happy by her care and her generosity, which gave him the possession of a cottage on the Thames and a comfortable annuity. To the relations of Mr. Coutts's former wife, who were in poor circumstances, she was equally, indeed, even more, liberal; for it was calculated that in the seventeen years after she became Mr. Coutts's widow, her donations to them amounted to several thousand pounds. Indeed, the sum total mentioned by Mrs. Wilson would scarcely be believed, even if the last 'O' were struck off. And this is the woman whom some of those who had sought to hang upon the skirt-tails of the wealthy banker, maligned as unprincipled and dishonest both in her lifetime and after her death!

Sir Walter Scott was not the only literary celebrity whom the Duchess of St. Alban's reckoned in her list of friends. Southey and Wordsworth both visited her at her hotel at Ambleside, and Samuel Rogers was one of her most frequent guests at Highgate. She also entertained at Holly Lodge, both as Mrs. Coutts and as Duchess, the best society; and on one occasion at least four Royal Dukes sat down at her dinner table. I say 'her' table advisedly; for Holly Lodge was not settled on her by Mr. Coutts or by the Duke of St. Alban's, but had been purchased by her out of her own earnings when she was plain Harriet Mellon. To that house, as I have said, she was much and its walks, its terraces, its shrubberies, and its internal arrangements all bespeak the taste of its first gentle mistress. She was particularly fond of the room in which Mr. Coutts had breathed his last, on account of its tender and sacred memories. 'Let me die in the room in which Mr. Coutts died,' was one of her last requests when she found herself near the end.

Mr. Coutts, at his decease in 1822, had left her in round figures some £1,800,000: but this she regarded so far as a trust and not a gift, that she did not hand it over, as she had the right and power to do, and as most ladies in her place would have done, to the Duke of St. Albans and his relatives, the Beauclerks, who certainly were not rich for the 'collaterals' of a ducal house. On the contrary, she resolved that the money should go back to the descendants of him from whose hands it came to her; and, accordingly, when her will was read it was found that she had bequeathed it to one of the daughters of Mr. Coutts's younger child, Lady Burdett, coupled with the instruction that she should take the additional name of the banker of the Strand. To her also she bequeathed both Holly Lodge and the house in Stratton Street and whatever interest she owned in Coutts's bank. That lady is now Lady Burdett-Coutts, thanks partly to the kindness and goodness of the Duchess.

Of Harriet Mellon's early days, the pleasantest record is perhaps her fine mezzotint portrait as Volante in 'The Honeymoon,' which is engraved as a frontispiece to her memoirs by Mrs. C. Baron Wilson. 'Well do we remember,' writes a well-known author, the exquisite archness and rich sunlight of her brilliant features, now, alas? extinguished in the dark tomb.' He speaks of her truth and justice in all her dealings; of her kindness and liberality to tradesmen and humble dependants; and of the generous impulses which she obeyed when she bestowed a part of her great wealth on those who needed it. Mrs. Wilson goes further still, and commends her piety, her charity, and her truth as highly as her wit. This life, it should here

be stated, was written owing to the non-appearance, of two biographies-the one distinctly hostile and offensive and the other perhaps too partial and eulogistic, but thoroughly authentic-which were announced for publication shortly after her Grace's death, but neither of which actually appeared. It only remains to add that the duchess died at her house in Stratton Street, Piccadilly, on the 6th of August 1837, and was buried at Redbourne, near Brigg, Lincolnshire, the seat of her second husband, the Duke of St. Alban's.



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