Koopman Rare Art

With the Autumn season truly underway, we will be soon exhibiting at both Frieze Masters 14th– 18th October 2026 in The Regent's Park London and the LAPADA Fair 27th October – 1st November 2026 at Berkeley Square, Mayfair, London W1. This is the perfect opportunity to re-introduce our Director's Choice and highlight this incredibly exciting set of twelve George I octagonal candlesticks commissioned by John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough.

Directors Choice – Timo Koopman
The Marlborough Candlesticks

A historic and unique set of twelve George I candlesticks
London, 1719
Maker's mark of Thomas Farren
Britannia Standard

With Monogram and Coronet for John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough.

Height: (four smaller) 14cm, 5.5 in / (eight larger) 17cm, 6.7 in
Total Weight 5.00 g. 182oz 4 dwt

The union of geometry and precious metal has long been a defining feature of decorative arts, and few examples illustrate this more effectively than silver candlesticks designed with an octagonal form. The octagon, with its balanced combination of straight lines and softened angularity, provides a visual harmony that is both structured and graceful. When rendered in silver, this geometric form acquires an additional dimension of refinement through the metal's reflective qualities and luminous surface.

Unlike circular candlesticks, which emphasize fluidity, or square forms, which can appear rigid, the octagon occupies a sophisticated middle ground. Its eight sides create a sense of rhythm and movement while maintaining architectural stability. This balance makes the octagonal candlestick particularly appealing conveying both elegance and strength.

Light striking the multiple facets of an octagonal base or stem is reflected at varying angles, producing subtle shifts in brightness and shadow. These changing reflections animate the surface, emphasizing the precision of the form while drawing attention to the craftsmanship involved in its creation. The resulting interplay between geometry and light transforms a functional object into a sculptural work of art.

These exceptional dozen Duke of Marlborough candlesticks bearing the touch mark of Thomas Farren achieve this interplay perfectly standing on their stepped octagonal bases which in turn support their baluster stems, bulbous in mid-section, with an octagonal knop below. Their capitals also octagonal in form to keep the whole design in harmony. Each candlestick engraved with a ducal coronet and monogram 'M' on the base.

Literature:
Grimwade, Arthur. 'Silver at Althorp', Connoisseur, March 1963 and republished for The Society of Silver Collectors, pp. 2 of reprint

Exhibition:
A Pair at The Victoria and Albert Museum, London (ACCESSION NUMBER M.53-1981)

Provenance:
Bought by Sarah Duchess of Marlborough from Messrs Shales and Smithin 1st August 1719
Hon. John Spencer
In mid-January 1734, Spencer inherited his father's family's estates in Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire (including Althorp) and Warwickshire and his grandmother, the Duchess of Marlborough's property (including the candlesticks), and Wimbledon Park.

John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough (b. 26 May 1650 – d. 16 Jun 1722)

John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough was born on 26 May 1650 into a family of the lesser English nobility during a period of political instability following the English Civil War. Through military service and connections at court, he rose steadily in prominence, becoming a trusted officer under James II. Although he had long served James, Churchill changed sides during the Glorious Revolution, supporting William III when James was overthrown. While this decision secured his future, it also left him with a lasting reputation among some contemporaries as an ambitious and pragmatic politician.

Churchill reached the height of his career under Queen Anne, who appointed him Captain-General of the English army and created him the 1st Duke of Marlborough in 1702. During the War of the Spanish Succession, he commanded Allied forces against France and achieved a series of remarkable victories, most notably at the Battle of Blenheim in 1704. This triumph prevented French dominance in Europe and established Marlborough as one of the greatest military commanders of his age. He followed this success with further victories at Battle of Ramillies, Battle of Oudenarde, and Battle of Malplaquet, demonstrating exceptional skill in strategy, logistics, and coalition warfare.

Alongside his military achievements, Marlborough was deeply involved in politics. His influence was strengthened by the close relationship between his wife, Sarah Churchill, and Queen Anne. However, political rivalries, shifting party alliances, and the deterioration of Sarah's friendship with the Queen eventually led to Marlborough's fall from favour. In 1711 he was dismissed from his commands after accusations of financial misconduct, although many historians believe these charges were politically motivated.

After Queen Anne's death in 1714 and the accession of George I, Marlborough returned to royal favour and regained several of his offices. By this time, however, a series of strokes had weakened his health, limiting his ability to take an active role in public affairs. He died on 16 June 1722 at the age of seventy-two.

John Churchill's legacy rests primarily on his extraordinary military career. He is widely regarded as one of Britain's greatest generals, admired for his ability to coordinate multinational armies and win decisive victories against powerful opponents. As a reward for his services, the Crown granted him the estate where Blenheim Palace was built. The palace became the seat of the Dukes of Marlborough and later the birthplace of Winston Churchill. Marlborough's campaigns had a lasting influence on European history by helping to curb French expansion under Louis XIV and preserving the balance of power on the continent.

Thomas Farren:
Between 1723 and 1742, Thomas Farren was subordinate goldsmith to the King, one of the suppliers to the office of state, normally headed by a banker, which dealt with the gold, silver and jewellery requirements of the Monarch. Farren was associated with an important group of men involved with the silver trade as goldsmith bankers, subordinate goldsmiths to the King and Prime Wardens of the Goldsmiths' Company who lived in the same street just off Lombard Street in the City near the Bank of England.

The Marlborough Plate:
The many important pieces of plate in the possession of Earl Spencer, without doubt establish the family collection at Althorp, Northamptonshire, as one of the greatest surviving groups of English ancestral silver. In its most important section, the ceremonial plate of the great Duke of Marlborough is unique. No other single group belonging to so great a man can be put beside it. That it should have its home at Althorp rather than Blenheim is due to Duchess Sarah's fondness for her grandson, John Spencer, the youngest son of her daughter Anne and the Earl of Sunderland. It is clear from the rare and interesting inventories of plate still preserved at Althorp that Sarah gave considerable quantities of silver to John Spencer in her lifetime; and when she died, he succeeded to a large portion of her wealth, which included still more of the Marlborough plate. His eldest surviving brother, Charles, became 3rd Duke of Marlborough in 1733 on the death of his aunt, Henrietta, created Duchess by Act of Parliament after her father's death. But John subsequently succeeded to the Sunderland estates and in this way the Marlborough plate went to Althorp.

Althorp Northamptonshire

This incredible set of twelve candlesticks are recorded and originally were part of an even larger commission. Originally there were ten made by Thomas Farren in 1719, engraved with the initial M and Ducal coronet, to which there was a parallel set of sixteen smaller sticks (5.5 inches high) by the same maker and of the same year.

These latter of which we have four, are particularly interesting since they can be identified with a bill preserved in the Althorp papers showing that they were purchased by Duchess Sarah, who it is clear, from the numerous checking lists of plate which she signed herself, was keenly interested in her plate. The bill is from Messrs Shales and Smithin 1st August, 1719, and reads: 'To 8 pairs of candlesticks & Nozels (square & polished) wt. 42 oz 4 dwts at 61.9 p. ounce £78.14.r°. And on 3rd August; to engraving sixteen candlesticks & sixteen Nossels M & coronet at 8d each [1 1.4°. It will be seen that the arithmetic of the cost of the candlesticks is faulty, since the figure of £78.14.1. at 6/9 per oz. yields a weight of 233 oz. 4 dwts, or an average weight of 12 ounces per candlestick, and they do in fact now weight 219 ounces, giving a loss by cleaning and wear of 14 ounces between the sixteen which is quite acceptable.

For more information on the availability and price of any treasures we mention, please visit our website, email or call us.

All works shown, unless otherwise indicated, are available to view and purchase in our gallery located in 12 Dover Street, London, W1S 4LL.
For all enquiries please do not hesitate to call or email on:
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