
Koopman Rare Art

Directors Choice – Timo Koopman

The Coventry Vases

The genius of Rundell, Bridge and Rundell was their ability to promote display silver as fine art. The large pieces of plate they were producing were pure sculpture. They were clever in protecting their workshops by running all aspects of the process and thus preventing their new and magnificent designs from entering the hands of rival firms such as Green Ward & Green.

Rundell were unique in making objects for their showrooms on a speculative basis and were able to promote them by exhibiting silver made for the Prince of Wales's new service or indeed the famous Shield of Achilles in 1807 and 1821 respectively.

They were able to draw on their extensive library and every form of antiquity would have inspired their ever-evolving designs for these splendid table sculptures. This magnificent set of table vases exemplify the genius and perfection that the architect, modeller and silversmith could achieve for the royal retailers and are my Director's Choice this week.



The Earl of Coventry's Wine Coolers

London, 1810

Made by Paul Storr and retailed by Rundell, Bridge and Rundell

The arms are those of Coventry, for George 7th Earl of Coventry 1758-1831, who succeeded to the title in 1809.

This form of wine cooler is based on the Roman Medici Krater but some of the decoration has been replaced by the splendid cast and applied coats-of-arms of the Earl of Coventry. The lower bodies cast in sections and applied with palm and acanthus spaced with grapes and cornucopias above square bases. The capes with egg and dart rims above applied grapevine. The stippled bodies with applied cast contemporary arms, supporters, and coronets. The reeded handles rising from bearded Bacchic masks and backed by large anthemias.



Each side of the wine coolers has these splendid anthemias

The flower of Athens, which blossoms on the sacred rock of the Acropolis, the Anthemion, was used by artists in their creations, becoming a popular decorative element in classical, Greek, and Roman architecture. Inspired by the beauty of nature, the Anthemion is established as a symbol of wealth, prosperity, and abundance.



The Medici Vase on Display in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence

The Medici Vase is a monumental marble bell-shaped krater sculpted in Athens in the second half of the 1st century AD as a garden ornament for the Roman market. It is now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

Standing 1.52 metres, approximately 5 feet tall, with a gadrooned everted lip, it has a deep frieze carved with a mythological bas-relief of a half-draped female figure Iphigenia seated below a statue of a goddess on a high plinth, restored as Diana, with heroic warriors on either side, perhaps Agamemnon and either Achilles or Odysseus standing to either side. Two fluted loop handles rise from satyrs' heads on either side of the acanthus-leaf carved base, and it stands on a spreading gadrooned base on a low square plinth.

The vase reappeared in the 1598 inventory of the Villa Medici, Rome, but its origin is unknown. Transferred from the villa in 1780, it has since been displayed in the Uffizi Gallery, today in the first floor Verone sull'Arno overlooking the River Arno. It was often illustrated in engravings, the most famous of which is by Stefano della Bella (1656); he depicted the young Medici heir who would become Grand Duke Cosimo III seated, drawing the vase.

Often paired as garden ornaments since the late 17th century with the similar Borghese Vase, they are two of the most admired and influential vases from antiquity.



Etching by Stefano della Bella (1656); the young Grand Duke Cosimo III drawing the vase at the Villa Medici, Rome

The first table wine coolers were made in the closing years of the 17th century with the use of the wine cistern slowly being superseded. The single bottle cooler was probably at first used on the rare occasion that the master of the great house was dining alone. These coolers were two-handled and vase-shaped having a detachable collar and liner to hold back the ice and to allow for the free insertion of the bottle.

Wine coolers were usually made in pairs or occasionally in sets of four, substantial objects, they were made as much for display as for use. The 19th century saw this vase-shaped form develop with prevailing fashionable details varying in everything from Rococo to Gothic architecture.

TStorr determined what a client should buy instead of patrons dictating the type of goods he or she required.

The twisting vine tendrils, spreading shaped leaves and fleshy bunches of grapes as well as the modelling of such with a Bacchic theme would have been a standard part of an apprentice artisans training from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. With wonderful architects and artists employed to design new items. William Theed R.A, Thomas Stothard R.A, John Flaxman, James "Athenian" Stuart and Edward Hodges Baily were just a few of the great minds helping Paul Storr achieve the wonders that finally graced the table of Croome Court as vessels for wine.



Croome Court is a mid-18th-century Neo-Palladian mansion surrounded by extensive landscaped parkland at Croome D'Abitot, near Upton-upon-Severn in south Worcestershire, England. George Coventry, the 6th Earl, inherited the estate in 1751, along with the existing Jacobean house. He updated Croome Court with the help of Capability Brown and Robert Adam.

Croome was Brown's first landscape design and first major architectural project, and it is an important and seminal work. Brown started in 1751 and called by him "his first and most favourite child". Adam was brought to the house in 1760 and his long gallery is thought to be the first complete example of his work. Both remained friends with the Earl who was a pall bearer at Adam's funeral. The tapestry room (see below) from Croome is now installed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Tapestry hangings from Jacques Neilson's workshop at the Royal Gobelins Manufactory in Paris based on designs by François Boucher.

Croome and Hagley Hall are considered to be the finest examples of Neo-Palladian architecture in Worcestershire. Notable Neo-Palladian features incorporated into Croome Court include the plain exterior and the corner towers with pyramidal roofs (a feature first used by Inigo Jones in the design of Wilton House in Wiltshire). Robert Adam worked on the interior of the building from 1760 onwards. The house was visited by George III, as well as by Queen Victoria during summers when she was a child, and George V (when Duke of York).



The Long Room at Croome Court

George William Coventry, 7th Earl of Coventry (25 April 1758 – 26 March 1831)



Memorial to the 7th Earl of Coventry (1758–1831) in the church at Croome Court

George William Coventry, 7th Earl of Coventry, styled Viscount Deerhurst until 1809, was a British peer and Member of Parliament.

He was the eldest son of George Coventry, 6th Earl of Coventry and his first wife, Maria Gunning. After his mother's death in 1760 from mercury poisoning from toxins in her beauty regimen, his father married Hon. Barbara St John (a daughter of the 11th Baron St John of Bletso), in 1764, with whom he had a further two sons and a daughter.

His maternal grandparents were William Coventry, 5th Earl of Coventry and Elizabeth Allen. His paternal grandparents were Col. John Gunning of Castle Coote, County Roscommon, and Hon. Bridget Bourke (a daughter of the 6th Viscount Mayo). His maternal aunt, the Anglo-Irish beauty Elizabeth Gunning, was lady-in-waiting to Queen Charlotte, and the wife of James Hamilton, 6th Duke of Hamilton and John Campbell, 5th Duke of Argyll.

Coventry matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford, on 5 January 1776.

On 7 May 1776, Coventry was commissioned an ensign in the 64th Regiment of Foot. On 21 January 1777, he became a lieutenant in the 17th Regiment of Light Dragoons. As Viscount Deerhurst, he was appointed lieutenant-colonel of the Worcestershire Militia on 10 May 1806.

He succeeded his father as Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire in 1808, and upon his death on 3 September 1809, as the 7th Earl of Coventry. He also served as Recorder of Worcester and High Steward of Tewkesbury.

Memorials to Viscount Deerhurst, eldest son of the 9th Earl of Coventry, and the 7th Earl of Coventry (1758–1831) in the church at Croome Court.

On 18 March 1777, he eloped to Gretna Green with Lady Catherine Henley, daughter of the Earl of Northington, leading to a long-standing estrangement from his father, the 6th Earl. This estrangement was strengthened when the 6th Earl was informed of a rumour that his son, had fathered a child with Lady Henley, and was fostered by distant relatives. This rumour was supported by evidence that the 6th Earl's distant relatives had taken in a newborn girl, no verification was ever made about whether this child was indeed the child of Coventry and Lady Henley, however she did go on to marry a wealthy minor aristocrat and orchestrated marriage into the Coventry family for her child. Forbidden to return home, Coventry spent much time with his friend Sir Richard Worsley, 7th Baronet, at Appuldurcombe House, Isle of Wight. Lady Catherine died on 9 January 1779. He had an affair with Lady Worsley and was later involved in her scandalous elopement with George Bisset in 1781, and the subsequent trial.

In 1783, Coventry married Peggy Pitches (c. 1760–1840) at St George's, Hanover Square. Peggy was the daughter of brandy merchant Sir Abraham Pitches and Jane Hassel. They had five sons and six daughters.

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