

Historic Treasures Unveiled:

Sworders Fine Art to conduct 'Holkham: The Attic Sale'

For the first time in its long history, Holkham Hall in Norfolk is to offer selected contents from its storerooms and attics at an on-the-premises auction. Under the instruction of Thomas Edward Coke, 8th Earl of Leicester, Holkham: The Attic Sale will be held by Sworders on February 11.

since 1994 by Bill Gates. However, this is the first time an auction house has been invited to conduct a sale on the premises.

"Over the centuries, items have been replaced as fashions evolve or as rooms change use" says

Lord Leicester. "However, there has always been a reluctance to dispose of the unneeded straightaway and so inevitably 'stuff' accumulates. As you can imagine in a house such as Holkham Hall there is plenty of space to store those myriad items that, for whatever reason, are no longer used."

Some of the items in the sale come direct from the family's private living quarters in the hall. They include furniture from the bedrooms of Lord and Lady Leicester's four children and porcelain services from living rooms. A Sevres 'beau bleu' ground dessert painted with named botanical specimens made during the first years of the Republic in 1792 is expected to bring £10,000-20,000.

However, much had been in storage since the 1970s and 80s when Lord Leicester's father, the 7th Earl, oversaw the modernisation of the Holkham Estate and began the process of making the collection more accessible to the public.

In 2019, prior to the Covid 19 pandemic, Holkham's collections co-ordinator and its art advisor were tasked with cataloguing all the furnishings within the estate's bulging attics and cellars and make recommendations. Lord Leicester then went through the list and added or omitted items.

"I undertake this exercise with mixed feelings" he says. "I am, like some of my ancestors, something of a 'hoarder', though equally it is wonderfully cathartic to be able to say goodbye." He took the decision to work with Sworders who held the highly successful Guinness Sale at Elveden for Lord Iveagh in September 2023.

At the core of the Holkham dispersal is a large quantity of classic English country house furniture. Pieces of obvious quality include a pair of William IV mahogany library tables with crisply carved foliate decoration and bold paw feet, expected to sell for £4,000-6,000 and a Regency giltwood fire screen in the Egyptian revival taste that was likely made in the workshops of Thomas Chippendale the Younger. The latter, offered with a guide of £5,000-8,000.

Classic country house estate items



A pair of William IV mahogany library tables. Estimate: £4,000-6,000. Sworders



ABOVE: A Sevres 'beau bleu' ground dessert service. Estimate: £10,000-20,000. Sworders

CIRCLE: A plaster bust of the Punic War General Marcus Claudius Marcellus indistinctly inscribed 'JS April 28, 1848'. Estimate: £800-1,200. Sworders



also come under the hammer with more modest expectations. Bidders will have a chance to buy an automobile trunk from the classic age of motoring by Brexton (estimate £150-250) and a pair of electric-powered servants bells by Cowton & Sons of Oxford Street (estimate £200-400).

Souvenirs of royalty include a photograph of George V at a shooting party at Sandringham c.1905 (estimate £250-450) and a silvered oak and blue velvet chair from the 1953 Coronation (estimate £300-500). It was used by Anne Tennant, Baroness Glenconner, the daughter of the 5th Earl of Leicester, who was one of Queen Elizabeth II's Maids of Honour.

The sale includes a number of pieces made at Holkham Pottery, the once thriving local studio active on the estate between 1951 and 2007. The pottery was the idea of Lady Elizabeth Leicester, the wife of the 5th Earl, and was sited in 19th century buildings that had been Holkham's laundry and a bowling alley.

A lot comprising two large table lamps, one with a lapis lazuli glaze made and signed by Holkham Pottery's chief potter Cyril Ruffles, is guided at £80-120.

■ **Auction Viewing: Friday 7 - Monday 10 February, Holkham Hall, Holkham Estate, Wells-next-the-Sea, NR23 1 AB (NR23 1RH for sat nay)**

Holkham: The Attic Sale takes place on Tuesday 11 February at Holkham Hall, Holkham Estate, Wells-next-the-Sea, NR23 1 AB (NR23 1RH for sat nay)

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Around 450 lots from the north Norfolk estate, many of them Coke family heirlooms in storage for half a century or more, are expected to sell for between £300,000-400,000.

Lord Leicester, who has run the estate since 2006 and succeeded into the earldom in 2015, says he hopes buyers "will see these with a fresh pair of eyes and give them a new lease of life".

Holkham Hall itself was built by Thomas Coke, 1st Earl of Leicester (1697-1759). As a young man in 1712, he embarked on a six-year Grand Tour during which he amassed an extraordinary collection of works of art and made the acquaintance of the Palladian architect Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington and William Kent.

However, the core collection at Holkham today remains very much as the original builder had intended. The 1st Earl's Grand Tour acquisitions - his cache of classical marble sculptures and a library of illuminated manuscripts - were carefully documented and are still largely intact. The collection and house, described by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner as 'the most classically correct house in England', is today open to the public for 130 days a year.

Most of the items in Sworders' sale were purchased for the estate by subsequent generations - the descendants of Wenman Coke (c.1717-76), MP for both Derby and Norfolk, and his son Thomas William Coke (1754-1842).

Occasionally revered items from Holkham have appeared at auction in the past century - a Titian painting in 1921 (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art) and a Leonardo manuscript, the Codex Leicester, first sold in 1980 and owned



A Regency giltwood fire screen in the Egyptian revival taste that was likely made in the workshops of Thomas Chippendale the Younger. Estimate: £5,000-8,000. Sworders