

For Immediate Release  
20 April 2011

Contact: Matthew Paton [mpaton@christies.com](mailto:mpaton@christies.com) +44 207 389 2965

## CHRISTIE'S TO OFFER WORKS OF ART FROM THE PEARSON FAMILY COLLECTIONS

**Gainsborough masterpiece could establish record price for the artist  
and leads an exceptional group of five British portraits to be offered  
at auction on 5 July 2011 in London**

**Three important pieces of silver offered on 7 July in London**

**Works of art from Cowdray Park, the home of Viscount Cowdray,  
and Dunecht, Scottish home of the Hon. Charles Pearson, to be  
offered at the largest country house sale of the year at Cowdray Park,  
West Sussex, on 13, 14 and 15 September 2011**



**London** – Christie's announce an historic series of three auctions from the Pearson family collections. Five exceptional British portraits will be presented in the *Old Master and British Paintings Evening Auction* on 5 July in London and three important lots of silver will be included in the *Exceptional sale of Decorative Arts* on 7 July in London. On 13, 14 and 15 September Christie's will stage the largest and most important country house sale of the year offering over 1,000 lots at Cowdray Park, West Sussex. The sales are expected to realize a combined total in excess of £10 million.

**Orlando Rock, Deputy Chairman, Christie's:** *"Christie's have a long history of offering the finest British collections and we are pleased to continue this tradition by offering works from the Pearson family. This collection is led by an outstanding group of British portraits and it is particularly exciting that this will compliment and bolster the richest offering of British art that has been offered at auction for a generation this summer at Christie's; from the sublime Stubbs from the Woolavington Collection to Lucian Freud's turning-point portrait 'Woman Smiling'; and from Peploe's striking 'Still-Life' to the Pearson Gainsborough. We look forward to revealing the Pearson collections to the public for the first time, and also to a summer where we will showcase a truly outstanding selection of British art to a global audience of collectors."*



Many of the works to be offered from the collections were acquired by Weetman Dickinson Pearson (1856-1927), the first Viscount Cowdray, and his son, Weetman Harold Miller Pearson, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount. Weetman Pearson, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Cowdray, developed his family firm, S. Pearson and Son Ltd., from a small company in Bradford into one of the most successful business empires of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1889 he won the contract to drain Mexico City by means of a Grand Canal and, having gained the friendship of President Porfirio Diàz, Pearson developed vast oil fields in Mexico. His firm became one of the largest construction companies in the world and together with his oil interests, he accrued extraordinary wealth. He was for ten years the Liberal Member of Parliament for Colchester, and due to his regular absences from the Houses of Commons, was often referred to in jest as 'the Member for Mexico'. Weetman Pearson acquired Cowdray Park in 1909. On his death in 1927, an American newspaper described him as 'one of the greatest pioneers ever sent out of Britain'. Pearson PLC exists today as a global media and education company and the largest book publisher in the world.

### **Old Master and British Paintings Evening Auction**

**5 July 2011, King Street**

The auction will offer one of the finest collections of British portraits to come to the market in a generation. Offered from Cowdray Park, the group is led by *Portrait of Miss Read, later Mrs. William Villebois*, an exceptional portrait by Thomas Gainsborough, R.A. (1727 -1788) that has been unseen in public for 75 years. Estimated to realize £4 million to £6 million, it is poised to establish a new record price for the artist (currently \$5.75 million).

**Nicholas White, Senior Director, Old Master and British Pictures:** *"This is the finest group of British portraits to be offered at auction for a generation. Thomas Gainsborough's magnificent portrait of Miss Read, later Mrs William Villebois, is one of the most majestic full-length female portraits by the artist to remain in private hands and we expect that it will establish a new record price for the artist at auction. The group also includes three outstanding full-length Jacobean portraits the likes of which are very rarely seen on the open market which give a glimpse of the elegance of King James I's court. We are excited to be offering these paintings at the evening auction of Old Master and British Pictures in July, where they will undoubtedly attract the attention of international collectors."*

**Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788): *Portrait of Miss Read, later Mrs William Villebois***

**Estimate: £4 million to £6 million**



Gainsborough's full-length portrait of Mrs William Villebois is one of the most important works by the artist to remain in private hands. Mrs Villebois was the daughter of Henry Read of Crowood, Wiltshire, and his wife Frances (née Truman), and the granddaughter of the celebrated brewer Sir Benjamin Truman (1700-1780). This portrait is one of three full-lengths that Truman commissioned from Gainsborough in the 1770s, including a portrait of himself (Tate Britain) and a portrait of his other granddaughter, Mrs Mears (Huntington Art Gallery).

The portrait can be dated to *circa* 1775-7 and shows Miss Read, who was to marry her French dancing instructor William Villebois, dressed in the height of fashion with her hair piled high surmounted by an ostrich feather. Gainsborough, who was particularly aware of contemporary fashion, has lavished particular attention on her shimmering dress which is loosely based on seventeenth century fashions.

After Truman's death the picture descended in the Truman-Villebois family until it was acquired privately, together with Gainsborough's portrait of her sister, by the celebrated connoisseur and collector Alfred de Rothschild (1842-1918) who hung it prominently at Halton House. The picture was acquired by the 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Cowdray in 1919 after Alfred De Rothschild's death. It was last seen in public in 1936.

**Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (1561-1636): *Portrait of Frances Howard, Countess of Hertford, later Duchess of Richmond and Lennox***

**Estimate: £1 million to £1.5 million**

Marcus Gheeraert's was one of the most important artists to work at the courts of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. This portrait is one of his greatest works and was last shown publicly in the celebrated exhibition *Treasure Houses of Great Britain* at the National Gallery of Washington in 1985. Painted in 1611, during the reign of King James I, it shows Frances Howard, Countess of Hertford, one of the most interesting women of her generation. Her paternal grandfather, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Norfolk, was one of the most powerful and influential figures at the Court of Henry VIII and the uncle of two of his wives; Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard. Through Anne Boleyn, Frances Hertford was a cousin of Queen Elizabeth I. She had three husbands, and through her marriage



to the Earl of Hertford and later to the Duke of Lennox and Richmond she became one of the richest women in England. She is shown in a particularly elaborate embroidered dress which emphasizes her elevated social status.

**Robert Peake the Elder (c. 1551-1619): *Portrait of William Pope, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Downe (1573-1631)***

**Estimate: £1 million to £1.5 million**



Alongside Marcus Gheeraerts, Robert Peake was one of the most important painters at the court of King James I and is best known as the painter to the heir to the throne Henry, Prince of Wales, of whom he painted a series of magnificent portraits. His portrait of the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Downe, who was among Peake's most significant patrons, is one of the most flamboyant portraits of a Jacobean courtier.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Downe was the only surviving son and heir of John Pope of Wroxton and Wilcot, in Oxfordshire, and his paternal uncle Sir Thomas Pope was the founder of Trinity College Oxford. The Earl of Downe was made a Knight of the Bath at the coronation of King James I in 1603 and is shown in this portrait in the costume that he wore at the ceremonies attendant upon his creation as a Knight of the Bath. William Pope was to inherit the Wroxton estate which his uncle had acquired in 1537 following the dissolution of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century foundation of Wroxton Abbey, where he initiated the construction of a new house *circa* 1610. He is commemorated in the church at Wroxton in a magnificent funerary monument.

*Portrait of a Lady with two children, circa 1620*, is attributed to Gilbert Jackson and is expected to realize £300,000 to £500,000; and the magnificent *Portrait of the Earl of Morton in the dress of the Royal Company of Archers* by Sir William Beechey, R.A. (1753 - 1839) carries an estimate of £500,000 to £800,000.

**The *Exceptional* sale of European Decorative Arts**

**7 July 2011, King Street**

The auction will offer three exceptional lots of silver from Cowdray Park. A magnificent set of four George III silver-gilt wine-coolers, collars and liners with the mark of Digby Scott and Benjamin Smith, London, 1805, after a design by Jean-Jacques Boileau, and retailed by Rundell, Bridge and Rundell, is expected to realize £400,000 to £600,000.



An important Queen Anne silver sideboard-dish and an important pair of Queen Anne silver wine-coolers, both from the Speaker Hanmer service, and with the mark of Lewis Mettayer, London, 1713, are expected to realize £150,000 to £250,000 and £300,000 to £500,000 respectively.

## The Cowdray House Sale

13 to 15 September, Cowdray Park, West Sussex



This three day auction will take place at Cowdray Park, West Sussex, and will offer over 1,000 lots, with individual estimates ranging from £100 to over £250,000. The auction will offer works from Cowdray Park, the home of Lord Cowdray (*illustrated left*), and property from Dunecht, the Scottish home of Lord Cowdray's brother, the Hon. Charles Pearson (*illustrated below right*). Presenting a diverse and fascinating selection of furniture and works of art; old master paintings; tapestries, arms and armour, European porcelain and glass, textiles, books and manuscripts, silver, clocks, carpets and Oriental works of art and porcelain, it is expected to realize in excess of £4 million.

Full details will be announced at a later date. Early highlights include a magnificent early seventeenth century portrait of a lady thought to show Catherine Carey, Countess of Nottingham, in an extraordinarily richly embroidered dress (estimate: £250,000 to £350,000); *Self-portrait, seated, in black*, by celebrated Irish artist Sir William Orpen, R.A., R.H.A. (1878-1931) (estimate: £150,000 to £250,000); an Elizabethan Revival Oak Four-Poster Bed, *circa* 1920 (estimate: £10,000 to £15,000); and "*Starsbot*" – *A polo pony in the grounds at Cowdray, with Cowdray ruins beyond* by A.E.D.G. Stirling Brown (British, fl. 1920-1929) which carries an estimate of £1,000 to £1,500.



###

*Images available on request*  
Visit Christie's Web site at [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com)

- The current record for Thomas Gainsborough was established when *A wooded landscape with a herdsman, cows and sheep near a pool* sold at Christie's New York on 15 April 2008 for \$5,753,000 (£2,905,556).