

For Immediate Release

28 January 2003

Contact: *Catherine Fenston*

0207 389 2982

cfenston@christies.com

THE CAPEL BASKET IS ACQUIRED BY THE NATION

London – Christie’s has negotiated the sale of The Capel Basket, a highly important piece of silver, to the nation in lieu of tax. The offer in lieu was made on condition that the basket is allocated to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

The basket was created in 1686 and it is an exceptional example of the technical and artistic skill of the foremost Huguenot silversmith, Pierre Harache I. A number of Huguenot craftsmen came to England in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, fleeing religious persecution in France. These craftsmen, who also included David Willaume, Paul de Lamerie and Pierre Platal, had a profound influence on the techniques and designs of English silverware.

Harache was one of the most talented and innovative silversmiths of his time. Originally from Rouen, he was the first Huguenot craftsman to become a member of the Goldsmith’s Guild in 1682. His work was prized in fashionable society, and his patrons included King William III and William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Devonshire. Due to the highly individual nature of Harache’s creations, the basket is unique among his own works and also among English silverware of the period.

Of elongated octagonal form, this type of basket is sometimes associated in Holland and England with childbirth and is referred to as a layette basket, in which the clothes and linen of the newborn are placed. The arms on the basket are those of Henry Capel, second son of Arthur, 1st Baron Capel of Hadham and brother of Arthur, 1st Earl of Essex. In 1692, Henry was created Baron Capel of Tewkesbury. He was one of the three Lord Justices of Ireland in 1693 and was created Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1695 until his death in 1696. His father had been a loyal supporter of Charles I and was condemned by Parliament in 1649 and executed.

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Images available on request