CONTENTS OF CROWE HALL IN BATH, THE HOME OF LEADING SCIENTIST WHO HELPED DEVELOP THE ‘BOUNCING BOMB’, TO BE SOLD AT CHRISTIE’S IN DECEMBER

London – Christie’s will offer the contents of one of the finest Regency villas in Bath, Crowe Hall, at the King Street salerooms on Thursday, 16 December 2010. Crowe Hall was the home of Sir Sydney Barratt (1898-1975), a chemist whose advice to Sir Winston Churchill and the War Cabinet from 1942 to 1944 helped to secure the development of the ‘bouncing bomb’. The sale is expected to raise in excess of £1.8 million and includes Old Master and British pictures, English furniture, silver, porcelain and Italian ‘Grand Tour’ bronzes bought by Sir Sydney and his son to furnish this remarkable villa, which nestles beneath the Palladian grandeur of Prior Park. Individual estimates range from £500 to £80,000.

Commanding superb views over the city of Bath, Crowe Hall is set in thirty acres of landscaped garden, woods and parkland. Originally built in 1760, the house was remodelled in the fashionable neo-classical style in the early 19th century by the banker George Tugwell, whose family lived there for the next 100 years. It was extensively rebuilt after a fire in 1926, which fortunately left the
magnificent pillared portico intact. In 1961 Crowe Hall was bought by Sir Sydney Barratt, the distinguished chemist, industrialist and connoisseur.

Sir Sydney was born in Bristol in 1898. He served as a signaller in World War I and then joined the chemicals company Albright & Wilson, at the time a rival to ICI. During the Second World War he was seconded to Churchill’s War Cabinet from 1942 to 1944 as a member of the scientific committee advising on the development of air warfare technologies, including the “bouncing bomb” developed by Barnes Wallis.

The sale reflects the other passion in Barratt’s life, his love of the arts. His interest in painting had been sparked at Oxford by his tutor, the physicist Sir Thomas Merton, who was a celebrated scientific advisor to the National Gallery from 1944 to 1969. By the time Sir Sydney bought Crowe Hall, he had already amassed a superb collection. Among the highlights in the sale is a bronze group of a lion attacking a horse after Giambologna, cast from a model possibly by Adrien de Vries (d.1626) estimated at £50,000-80,000 (illustrated right).

A connoisseur of English furniture from the Sheraton, Hepplewhite and Regency periods, Sir Sidney admired the technical virtuosity of craftsmen such as Thomas Chippendale, Mayhew and Ince and especially the firm of Gillows of Lancaster and London. A magnificent Regency mahogany breakfront library bookcase, attributed to Gillows and shown here, is over 5 metres long and is estimated at £40,000-60,000 (illustrated left). Also of interest is a pair of George III porcelain and ormolu-mounted white marble urns and covers by Matthew Boulton and John Fothergill from around 1775 (estimate: £30,000-50,000) (illustrated right). These epitomise the aspirations of the Lunar Society and in many ways represent the nascent Industrial Revolution in Birmingham in the late 18th Century, as they confirm the collaboration between Matthew Boulton and Josiah Wedgwood.
Sir Sidney was a keen collector of Porcelain too – and as well as early Worcester, he amassed a fascinating group of Hispano-Moresque lusterware and Italian Maiolica. The highlight is undoubtedly the rare Istoriato dish from the circle of Baldassare Manova, painted in 1546 with the capture of Carthage after Giulio Romano (estimate: £50,000-£80,000) (*illustrated left*).

Sir Sidney’s taste in pictures was equally eclectic. Like an 18th Century Grand Tourist, he was particularly drawn to *vedute*, such as the views *The Baths of Caracalla* and *The Colosseum*, painted in Rome by Hendrick Frans van Lint (1684-1763; Estimate £40,000-£60,000). He also favoured works from closer to home, particularly English portraiture of the later 18th Century – including Thomas Gainsborough and a remarkable group of five portraits by the Scottish Court Painter Allan Ramsay (1713-84). These are led by his beautifully observed portrait of Sarah Verney (*illustrated right*) (£50,000-£80,000).

Sir Sydney’s son John took over the stewardship of Crowe Hall after his father died in 1975. A much-loved housemaster at Clifton College, Bristol, where he taught History, John Barratt was also an adventurous traveller and a passionate connoisseur of art, wine, theatre and music. His death last year was marked by a tribute in Forbes Magazine headed ‘Requiem for an English Gentleman’. The house and its remarkable Italianate gardens, lovingly enlarged and nurtured by John Barratt, have since been sold.

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*Images available on request*

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