



Understanding British Portraits 1 November 2011

Brief introduction

Christie's auction house has been selling fine and decorative art for nearly two hundred and fifty years to connoisseurs, museums and institutions, art dealers and collectors since 1766. James Christie began his career in London with the auctioneer Mr Annesley in Covent Garden. He then progressed in the world of auctioneering on his own, firstly at his *Great Room* in Pall Mall, St James's and later at King Street, where the auction house has been located since 1823.

James Christie (1730-1803)

Archives

Christie's Archives' collection of annotated sales catalogues spans four centuries, and today, provides the foundation for the history of collecting research at Christie's. The archive houses sale catalogues and auctioneers' books from the very first sale held by Christie at his permanent sale room in Pall Mall, London on Fryday [sic], December 5, 1766 "A Sale of Genuine Household Furniture, Jewels, Plate, firearms....".

Despite extensive damage to No. 8 King Street in 1941 when the entire building was virtually destroyed, the paper-based archive was found intact though slightly water-damaged in a deep basement vault. Today there is an almost unbroken run of sales catalogues available for consultation from every sale held at King Street since the founding of the firm to the present day.

The Archive collection contains historical sales of importance: from such famous 18th century picture sales as the *Thomas Gainsborough* studio contents sold between 1792 and 1797. Moving through the passage of time to the 20th century iconic collection of dresses of *Diana, Princess of Wales* sold in 1997. Following a huge expansion of sale-rooms in the 1970s the archive also possesses auction catalogues for sales held at Christie's in Europe, the Americas and Asia. In the 21st century Christie's sales also take place in China, Dubai & Russia.

Research

The auctioneers' books and sale catalogues stored at King Street are heavily consulted to provide Christie's specialists, interns and advisors with historical information: such as descriptions of lots; provenance; identifying previous collectors; stock number check-ups and releasing old hammer prices for specific lots. The department is also open as a reference library, by appointment, to other scholars, such as, museum curators, fine art lecturers and researchers, art historians, and students.

Contact the Librarian, Lynda McLeod, for further details.

Open to external researchers Tuesday-Thursday 10am-4pm

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Enquiries can also be sent via the company website:

www.christies.com

Christie's Archives