

Lyon & Turnbull sell rare Imperial Glassware

Rare Collection of Russian Glassware From Exiled Member of the Russian Imperial Royal Family Makes £48,000 at auction.

A large collection of 19th century Russian Imperial Glassware belonging to Grand Duke Michael Mikhailovich grandson of Tsar Nicholas I and first cousin to Tsar Nicholas II was sold at Lyon & Turnbull this week for £48,000.

The rare collection of glassware descended through the family of Grand Duke Michael Mikhailovich to his daughter Countess Anastasia de Torby, later Lady Zia Wernher of Luton Hoo. The Grand Duke, was exiled from Russia after entering a morganatic marriage with Countess Sophie de Meckenberg. Emperor Nicholas II banished them to England, unwittingly saving the couple from the maelstrom of the Russian Revolution which proved fatal to so many Romanovs.

Douglas Girton Specialist at Lyon & Turnbull said "In the context of European Royalty, a morganatic marriage is a marriage between people of unequal social standing which prevents the passage of the husband's titles and privileges to the wife and any children born of the marriage. Now rare, it is also known as a left-handed marriage because in the wedding ceremony the groom traditionally held his bride's right hand with his left hand instead of his right."

The collection appears to come from three separate banquet services. Banquet services were made by the Imperial Glass Factory for use in the Imperial palaces and bear three different monograms or ciphers, one being for Grand Duke

Michael Nikolaevich, the father of Grand Duke Michael Mikhailovich.

Grand Duke Michael Mikhailovich was the third child and second son of Grand Duke Michael Nikolaevich and his wife Grande Duchesse Olga Feodorovna and a first cousin to Tsar Alexander III and grandson of Tsar Nicholas I. In 1892, as a result of his morganatic marriage to Countess Sophie of Merenberg, later Countess de Torby, he was stripped of his military titles and exiled from Russia, living for a time in Germany and then more permanently in the South of France and England.

In Great Britain, he leased Keele Hall in Staffordshire and later Kenwood House in Hampstead. His eldest daughter, Countess Anastasia Mikhaolovna de Torby married Sir Harold Wernher, son of diamond dealer Sir Julius Wernher, in 1917. Known as Lady Zia Wernher, they resided at Luton Hoo on the Bedfordshire/Hertfordshire border. This collection of Russian Imperial glassware has descended through the family.

In 1777 Empress Catherine the Great presented the glass factory in Nazya as a gift to Prince Grigory Potemkin who moved it to his private estate. After his death in 1791, it was renamed the Imperial Glass Factory. In addition to works made exclusively for the Imperial Court, the factory also produced glass services for the pantries of the Emperor's and the Grand Duke's palaces. The present group of glassware consists of items from at least three separate banquet services.