A monumental pair of George IV silver-gilt four-light candelabra

Benjamin Smith

REF: 11847

Height: 68 cm (26.8") Width: 47 cm (18.5") Weight: 22.1 kg

hallmarks for Benjamin Smith III, London 1827

Each featuring a tapering fluted column topped by acanthus leaves, the whole gilded, with detachable branch section, with three ornate scrolling floral and foliate branches issuing from a central light, all with detachable drip pans, each main column flanked by three cast figures after the antique, one with Hercules wearing a lion skin, a goat at his feet, and two Bacchanalian maidens playing instruments and dancing, the other featuring Diana the Huntress, Eros playing the double flute and a maiden joyously playing the tambourine, each on a circular plinth naturalistically cast with flora and fauna.

Benjamin Smith III's father, Benjamin Smith II, was closely connected with the leading silver

craftsmen and manufacturing firms at the turn of the 19th century, and was recognised as an "ingenious chaser". In 1790 he was introduced to Matthew Boulton (1728-1809), with whom he started his career. Boulton's company produced plate, buckles and buttons, and had embraced the mechanical innovation of the industrial revolution. Described as a button maker in 1794, Benjamin Smith made the move to London in 1802, forming a partnership with his friend, the draughtsman, Digby Scott (1753-1816). They were appointed to direct the acclaimed and prolific workshops of Rundell and Bridge (after 1805 known as Rundell, Bridge and Rundell) based in Greenwich. As such, Smith's collaboration with Scott was a particularly fruitful one, given the high profile work that poured into Rundell and Bridge. It was at this time they were commissioned to create 'The Duke of York Baskets' for Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany (1763-1827), the second son of George III, previously exhibited in the Powerhouse Museum in Australia; and also the 'Jamaica Service', created in 1803 for William IV (1765-1837), then Duke of Clarence, which is still in The Royal Collection today.

A shift however occurred in 1807, when Paul Storr (1771-1844), the most celebrated English silversmith of the period, was also asked to open a workshop for Rundell, Bridge and Rundell in Dean Street, Soho. Scott at this point left the partnership with Benjamin Smith, and Smith (who was a somewhat irascible fellow), registered a succession of marks dependent on who he was partnering, and additionally the times when he worked alone. Through circumstance, Benjamin Smith worked alongside Paul Storr through their mutual alignment with Rundell, Bridge and Rundell. What is evident is that their silver designs often appeared interchangeable and at times difficult to distinguish between.

The reason Rundell and Bridge were so influential, was their close association with the Crown. They were one of the chosen goldsmiths and jewellers to George III in 1797, and appointed 'Principal Royal Goldsmiths and Jewellers to the Crown' in 1804, proudly holding the Royal Warrant until 1843. By operating their own workshops, Rundell's could safeguard their own designs, and also exert control over their equipment and raw materials. Their modus operandi was to employ the best workmen available and combine their expert skills with first rate artists. Amongst their employees were the well-known artists John Flaxman (1755-1826) and Thomas St...