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LASSCO Three Pigeons

Milton Common,

Oxfordshire OX9 2JN

+44 (0)1844 277188

[3pigeons@lassco.co.uk](mailto:3pigeons@lassco.co.uk)

BRUNSWICK HOUSE

30 Wandsworth Road,

London SW8 2LG

+44 (0) 20 7394 2100

[brunswick@lassco.co.uk](mailto:brunswick@lassco.co.uk)



# HENRY BENNET, EARL OF ARLINGTON

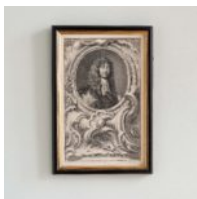
Jacobus Houbraken, 18th Century

A framed copper plate engraving of the courtier, politician and original member of the CABAL, Henry Bennet, first Earl of Arlington by the Dutch engraver Jacobus Houbrackenn, struck in 1739.

DIMENSIONS: 43.2cm (17") High, 29.2cm (11½") Wide, 2cm (0¾") Deep

PRICE: £120

STOCK CODE: AD1598



## HISTORY

**"BENNET**, HENRY, Earl of Arlington (1618–1685), member of the Cabal ministry, was the second son of Sir John Bennet, doctor of laws (Evelyn, *Diary*, 10 Sept. 1678), and Dorothy Crofts, and grandson of Sir John Bennet, the ecclesiastic and civilian [q. v.] He was baptised at Little Saxham, Suffolk, in 1618. After having been to school at Westminster, he was sent to Christ Church, and gained there a considerable reputation for scholarship, particularly for skill in English verse (Wood, *Athenæ*). He was, according to Sheffield (*Memoirs*), educated for the church, and was to have been 'parson of Harlington' (Evelyn). In 1643 we find him at Oxford in Lord Digby's employ, when he was sent on various messages from the queen to Ormond in Ireland (Carte, *Ormond*, iv. 145, ed. 1851). He joined the royal forces as a volunteer, and fought in the skirmish of Andover, where he received a scar on his nose, which was visible throughout his life (Kennet, *Register*, p. 788; *Public Intelligencer*, No. 42; portrait to vol. i. of Arlington's *Letters*). During the war he left England and travelled in France, and afterwards in Italy. Upon the death of the king he returned to France, and in 1654 became secretary to James on the earnest recommendation of Charles, to whom his 'pleasant and agreeable

humour' (Clarendon, 397) had made him acceptable. During their residence in Flanders Arlington was entirely in the confidence of the royal family, and in 1658 was sent as Charles's agent to Madrid, where he showed address, especially at the treaty of Fuentarabia, and where he gained both his intimate knowledge of foreign affairs and a formality of manner which was a common subject of ridicule (Ralph, p. 899; *Mémoires de Grammont*, p. 163, ed. 1812). In connection with this it is to be noticed that in his official correspondence he was always extremely nice in his phraseology (*Lauderdale Papers*, Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 23119, f. 43). He remained at Madrid, having been knighted by Charles, until some time after the Restoration. The delay in his return was due, it is said, though North denies it (North, *Examen*, p. 26), to his fear of Lord Colepepper, who, having seen Bennet in a catholic church with Charles, had threatened that his head or Bennet's should fly for it. When he did return, after Colepepper's death, it was without the customary letters of revocation, and even without the knowledge of the secretaries of state (Clarendon). The king at once made him keeper of the privy purse. It is probable, but incapable of proof, that Bennet was now and throughout his life a catholic. He had, when in Flanders, urged Charles to declare his conversion, and had quarrelled with Bristol on the point ({{sc|Carte's}} *Ormond*, iv. 109), and there is no doubt that he died a catholic (Dalrymple's *Memoirs*, i. 40, ed. 1790). Pepys, on 17 Feb. 1663, speaks of him as being so then. North, however, denies this with fairly strong evidence, which, if true, shows at any rate that his catholicism was disguised. It is certain that in later years he spent large sums upon rebuilding the church at his seat at Euston. Bristol, too, in his articles against Clarendon, 10 July 1663, affirms that in his practice and profession Arlington had been constant to protestantism; and at his impeachment in 1674 he was attacked, not as a papist, but only as a promoter of popery. Carte also (iv. 145) asserts only that he was thought to be a catholic. Probably he was destitute of serious conviction, and acted merely so as best to keep in favour. His knowledge of the king's temper, and of a courtier's arts, and his readiness to serve and encourage Charles in his dissolute habits, secured his position.

In particular he shared with his intimate friend, Sir Charles Berkeley, the management of the royal mistresses (Burnet, i. 182, ed. 1833); and in November 1663 we find him acting with Edward Montague and Buckingham in the shameful scheme 'for getting Mrs. Stewart for the king' (Pepys, 6 Nov. 1663). In alliance with Lady Castlemaine he fostered the king's growing impatience with Clarendon, in opposition to whose wishes he was, in October 1662, on the

enforced retirement of Nicholas, made secretary of state, while Berkeley succeeded to his office of keeper of the privy purse. In February 1663 Clarendon, at the king's wish, made him M.P. for Callington, though he declares that Bennet knew no more of the constitution and laws of England than he did of those of China (Clarendon, *Life*, 400, 404). He never appears to have addressed the house, though Sheffield (*Memoirs*) says that none spoke better when obliged, and from being so silent was believed to be a man of much smaller parts than was really the case; but he is mentioned as serving on committees (*Commons' Journals*, 21 Feb. 1662-3). Burnet says his parts were 'solid, but not quick,' and Carte speaks of him as very fit for business, but a fourbe in politics. De Grammont declares that 'Arlington, à l'abri de cette contenance composée, d'une grande avidité pour le travail, et d'une impénétrable stupidité pour le secret, s'était donné pour grand politique.' By nobody is he mentioned with trust or affection, but appears to have been regarded throughout life as a selfish schemer.

There is no doubt that he was concerned in advising the Declaration of Indulgence in 1662, though Burnet alone relates this (i. 352). He now became the centre of the opposition to Clarendon (*Parl. Hist.* iv. 395; Pepys, 1 July 1663) in alliance with Buckingham and Bristol, though there is nothing to connect him directly with the attack on the chancellor. He boasted to Charles of the use he could be to him in parliament, and how he had collected a party of country gentlemen in the house who would vote according to the king's wish. During 1663 he was made a baron by the title of Lord Arlington, though in the first warrant the title was drawn as Cheney (Clar. 604). In 1664 he served on the committee for explaining the Act of Settlement in Ireland (Carte, iv. 207), and in March 1665 on that for Tangiers; and he was the principal person connected with foreign affairs, with which he was better acquainted than any politician of Charles's court. His intimate knowledge of the languages of the continent no doubt greatly conduced to this influence; according to Evelyn (*Diary*, 10 Sept. 1678), he had the Latin, French, and Spanish tongues in perfection. 'He has travelled much, and is the best bred and courtly person his Majesty has about him, so as the public ministers more frequent him than any of the rest of the nobility.' Clarendon asserts that he brought the first Dutch war upon the nation, and there is little doubt that he was the adviser of the attack on the Smyrna fleet before war was declared (Echard, p. 157). In 1665 he urged the king to grant liberty of conscience as being the best means of union during the war, and the readiest way of obtaining money (Clar. 583). This, however, is scarcely consistent with Burnet (i. 412), who says that he

had at this time attached Clifford to his interests; for we know that Clifford was doing all he could to pass the Five Mile Act. At this time Arlington lived at Goring House, where Arlington Street is now built (Evelyn, 9 Feb. 1665). On the death of Southampton he hoped for the treasurership, for which he was always trying, and which he never obtained. On the dismissal of Clarendon in 1667, Arlington's influence appears to have declined, in the face of the enmity of Buckingham and Bristol; Buckingham, in particular, took pleasure in slighting him (Pepys, 12 July 1667). Towards the end of the year, however, they were reconciled, and on terms so intimate that Buckingham asked his assistance in his attack on Ormond. Having, however, married Isabella von Beverweert, daughter of Louis of Nassau, and sister of the wife of Ormond's eldest son, Lord Ossory, he was forced in this matter to use all his faculties for trimming (Carte, iv. 347). In January 1668 he sent Temple to conclude the triple alliance; in this affair Temple gained such credit as to earn Arlington's jealousy for the future, which was first shown by his endeavour to get him sent out of the way on the embassy to Madrid. Scarcely was the triple alliance concluded when Charles wished to break it, and Arlington, who expressed his entire devotion to Louis, and who, though he cautiously refused to accept a bribe himself, allowed his wife to receive a present of 10,000 crowns from Louis (Dalymple, i. 125), was one of the few persons, all catholics, entrusted with the secret. He was now a member of the Cabal, and at the meeting at Dover in 1670 was again reconciled to Buckingham, with whom he had once more quarrelled. The secret treaty with Louis contained a clause by which, for a large sum, Charles was to declare himself catholic; this he dared not show the protestant members of the Cabal. Buckingham, therefore, who was one of them, was duped by being allowed to employ himself in arranging a sham treaty, every article of which, except that mentioned, was the same as in the first, of which he was ignorant. In this trick Arlington had the chief part, and carried it out with great astuteness (Dalymple, i. 95 and following). He was, too, closely concerned with the designs which Charles entertained of using military force against his own subjects, and in especial with Lauderdale's operations in Scotland, by which an army of 20,000 men was raised, ready to march and act as Charles pleased within his dominions (*Lauderdale MSS.* British Museum). In 1671 he is spoken of as being in chief esteem and affection with the king (Dalymple).

He was nearly concerned with the closing of the exchequer and with the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672, which, however, in opposition to his colleagues in the Cabal, he urged

Charles to withdraw when it was attacked by parliament in 1673. Meanwhile, on 22 April 1672, he had been raised in the peerage; he was now Earl of Arlington and Viscount Thetford in Norfolk. On 15 June he was made knight of the Garter. Jealous of Clifford, who had been made lord treasurer, Arlington now turned to the Dutch interest, disclosed the secret of the real and sham treaties to Ormond and Shaftesbury (Dalymple, i. 131), and used all his influence in the House of Commons to pass the Test Act, whereby Clifford was ruined. He also advised Charles to dismiss James, incurring thereby the latter's extreme enmity, and induced the king at the end of 1673 to conclude a separate peace with the Dutch, from whom he had long been believed to be receiving bribes (Pepys, 28 April 1669). Shortly afterwards he went with Buckingham and Halifax to treat for a general peace with Louis at Utrecht.

On 15 Jan. 1674 he was impeached in the House of Commons as being the great instrument or 'conduit-pipe' of the king's evil measures. The charges against him were under three heads: (1) the constant and vehement promotion of popery; (2) self-aggrandisement and embezzlement; (3) frequent betrayal of trust. On the previous day, Buckingham, when himself attacked, had charged Arlington with frustrating all protestant and anti-French plans, with having induced the king to send for Schomberg and try to govern by an army, with having been the author of the unwarrantable attack on the Smyrna fleet, and with having appropriated large sums of money. Arlington, in defence, showed that the house was dealing with presumptions rather than proofs, and in the end, a result due in a great measure to the personal efforts and influence of Lord Ossory, the vote to address the king for his removal was rejected by 166 to 127, and further proceedings were dropped (*Parl. Hist.* iv. 642).

His general want of success, the enmity of James, the mimicry of Buckingham, and the rising power of Danby, who was reintroducing the principles of Clarendon which the Cabal had opposed, viz. the strict alliance of the Anglican church with the crown, now caused Arlington to lose ground rapidly. On 11 Sept. 1674 he resigned the secretaryship for 6,000*l.* to Williamson, and was made lord chamberlain instead. To regain favour with the parliament he revived some dormant orders prohibiting papists to appear at court (Echard, p. 369), opposed the French interest, and in December 1674, hoping to supplant Temple at the Hague, got himself sent with Ossory to treat with Orange for a general peace, and to suggest his marriage with James's daughter Mary. In this mission he completely failed, and earned with William the reputation of

being arrogant, patronising, artificial, false, and tedious (Kennet, *Hist.* iii. 330). His credit declined more rapidly; his solemn face and formal gait laid him open to the jokes of the court, which could now be indulged in safety; it became a common jest for some courtier to put a black patch upon his nose and strut about with a white staff in his hand (Echard, p. 369) to amuse the king. Nothing was left to him but to foster his grudge against Danby, who, like Clifford, had excited his jealousy by gaining the place he was ambitious of filling. He encouraged Danby's enemies in the House of Commons, and the quarrel caused such inconvenience that Charles, unwilling to dismiss one who, after Ormond, was his oldest servant, asked Temple to mediate. Danby expressed his willingness for reconciliation, but Arlington sulkily retired to his country seat at Euston, in Suffolk, where he had indulged his one 'expensive vice' of building to the limit of his fortune (Evelyn, 9 and 10 Sept. 1678; Echard, p. 389). He remained lord chamberlain, though without influence, until his death on 28 July 1685. He was buried at Euston. His only child Isabella, 'a sweete child if ever there was any' (Evelyn, 1 Aug. 1672), was married on 1 Aug. 1672 to Henry, earl of Euston and duke of Grafton, the son of Charles II and Lady Castlemaine"

- Dictionary of National Biography