

PRESS RELEASE

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THE AIRLIE TIARA ACHIEVES £189,000 AT LONDON JEWELLERY AUCTION

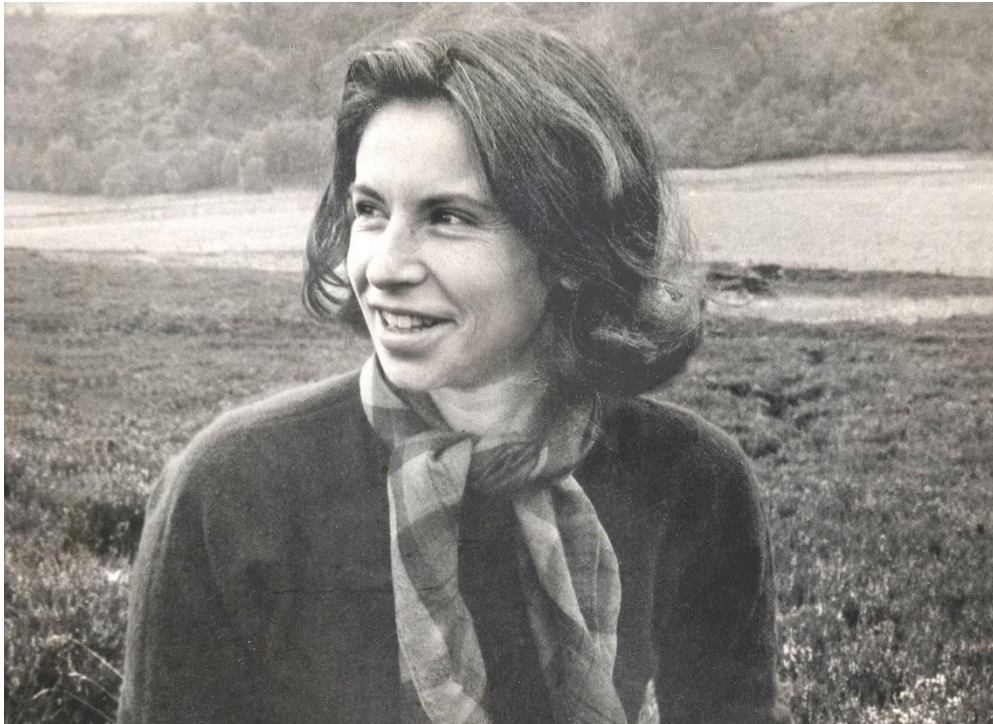


The Airlie Tiara at Lyon & Turnbull - Image Stewart Attwood

A tiara worn by the late Queen's American-born lady-in-waiting — a jewel that witnessed some of the most significant moments in recent royal history — has sold for £189,000* at auction in London with Lyon & Turnbull on **Wednesday 22 October**.

Believed to have been made by **Garrard**, the Crown Jewellers, in the late nineteenth century, [The Airlie Tiara](#) exceeded its pre-sale estimate of £50,000–£70,000. The magnificent piece, featuring natural saltwater pearls and over 30 carats of diamonds, led a collection of fine jewellery and objets de vertu from the late [Virginia Fortune Ryan Ogilvy, Dowager Countess of Airlie](#). A “white-glove” result for the collection which also included a **unicorn brooch by Verdura** (sold for £17,010*), a **multi-strand pearl choker** with a mid-19th-century diamond clasp (sold for £12,500*) , and a **Fabergé nephrite and ruby objet**, circa 1900, created under the supervision of **Michael Perchin**, Carl Fabergé's workmaster (sold for £17,010*).

The tiara was originally worn by **Mabell, Countess of Airlie**, in 1901 when she was appointed Lady of the Bedchamber to the then Princess of Wales. She continued to wear it after the Princess became **Queen Mary** upon King George V's accession in 1910.



In later years, the heirloom was worn by her granddaughter-in-law, [Virginia Fortune Ryan Ogilvy, Countess of Airlie](#), in her role as Lady of the Bedchamber to **Queen Elizabeth II**. The Countess — who married **David Ogilvy, the 13th Earl of Airlie** — was the first American to hold such a position in the British royal household. She passed away in August last year at the age of 91, at her home at Cortachy near Kirriemuir, Angus.

Lady Airlie accepted Queen Elizabeth II's invitation to become Lady of the Bedchamber in 1973, a role she held with devotion and discretion until the Queen's death in 2022.

Born **Virginia Fortune Ryan** on 9 February 1933, she was the daughter of **John Barry Ryan Jr.** and **Margaret (Nin) Kahn**. Her maternal grandfather, **Otto Kahn**, was the renowned German-American financier and philanthropist — a leading figure in New York society and a prominent patron of the arts.

Virginia spent her childhood between New York City and Newport, Rhode Island, and was educated at the Brearley School in Manhattan, later attending the James Franklyn School of Professional Arts. From an early age, she developed a lasting affection for England. During one of her regular visits to London, aged 16, she met David Ogilvy at a dance at the Savoy Hotel. Three years later, he proposed, and they were married in October 1952 at **St Margaret's, Westminster**, in a ceremony attended by **Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother** and **Princess Margaret**.



The sale of [The Airlie Tiara](#) forms part of Lyon & Turnbull's "Autumn of Airlie", a series of auctions celebrating the remarkable life and legacy of **Virginia Fortune Ryan Ogilvy, Dowager Countess of Airlie**.

Sarah Duncan, Head of Jewellery in London for Lyon & Turnbull commented, "We are thrilled with the global interest in the historic Airlie Tiara. Fierce competitive bidding made for an electric buzz in the saleroom with bids coming in from hundreds of bidders across the globe. What a powerful climax to our Lyon & Turnbull Autumn of Airlie.

It has been a real privilege to bring to the market this historic tiara. The close connection between the Airlie family and the British monarchy spurred international

interest and demand. The chance to acquire something with this level of provenance does not come about often and bidders responded with gusto.

It has been such a privilege to work with not just the Airlie family, but also archivists and jewellery curators, to bring to light as much history and provenance as possible on this historic tiara. The complimentary jewels and objects of vertu in the Countess' collection were equally sought after. Delighted to report a white glove sale for the Airlie collection."

*all prices inclusive of buyer's premium.

END

NOTES FOR EDITORS

THE AIRLIE TIARA: A LATE 19TH CENTURY PEARL AND DIAMOND TIARA

Of tapered form, set throughout with cushion-shaped and rose-cut diamonds, the pierced form decorated with daisies, each centrally featuring a 5.1-9.4mm pearl, with cushion-shaped diamond ivy leaves, adorned by alternating 4.0-8.0mm pearls and clovers across the crest, coming to a central apex with a 9.6mm natural pearl, cushion-shaped and old brilliant-cut diamonds approx. 34.75 carats total, inner diameter 15.4cm, cased by R&S Garrard & Co., 25 Haymarket, London

Accompanied by a report from the Gem & Pearl Laboratory stating that the two principal pearls are both natural, saltwater. Report number 25930, dated 13th May 2025. Remaining pearls untested.

SOLD FOR £189,000 (inclusive of premium)

[View the lot online here](#)

Auction Details

London Jewellery ft. The Collection of Virginia Fortune Ryan Ogilvy, Dowager Countess of Airlie

Presented by Lyon & Turnbull

22 October 2025

[View the Catalogue](#)

About Lyon & Turnbull

Operating since 1826, Lyon & Turnbull are one of the UK's premier fine art and antiques auctioneers. The company's venues in London and Glasgow complement the historic Georgian headquarters in Edinburgh. Hosting over 50 specialist auctions per year across the UK there is always something to see at Lyon & Turnbull: from jewellery and watches to fine furniture; traditional British and European art to Modern & Contemporary stars; European decorative arts and design to fine Asian art from China and Japan.

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