



ENGLISH FURNITURE 1680–1760

The Percival D. Griffiths Collection

VOLUME I

Christian Jussel and William DeGregorio

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Preface: Percival Griffiths c.1910, as a young collector, shown standing next to an early purchase (cat. no. F21) in one of the rooms at Sandridgebury. Richard Thrale Archive.

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From Horace Walpole to Percival Griffiths: Collecting Antique Furniture in England, 1797–1937

Adam Bowett

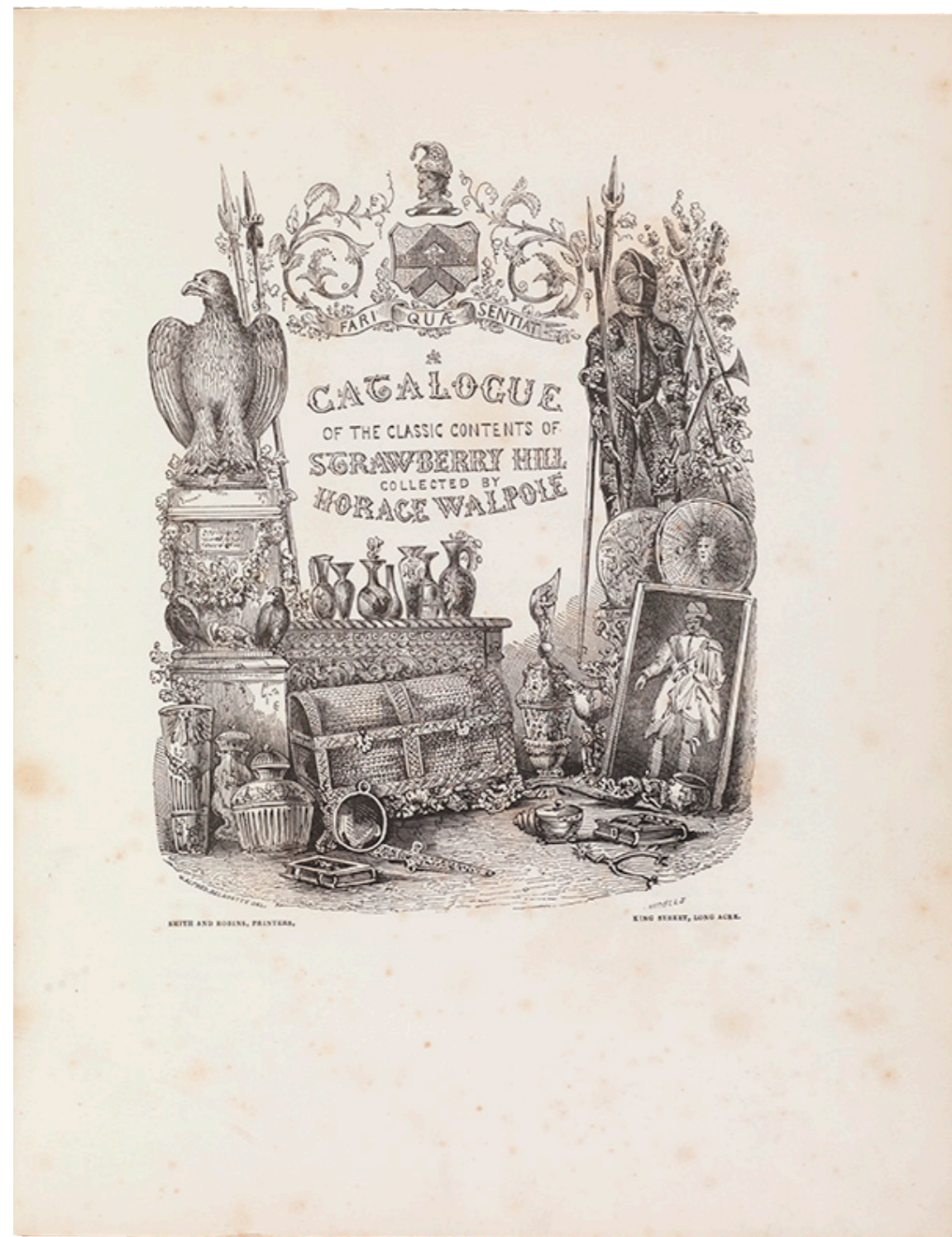


Fig. 1.1. First title page from *A Catalogue of the Classic Contents of Strawberry Hill Collected by Horace Walpole* (1842). The random assembly of objects is a far cry from Walpole's carefully arranged interiors at Strawberry Hill, but it was calculated to appeal to the new generation of antiques dealers and collectors. Nash's interiors were idealized, populated with figures in fanciful costume, and depicted furniture, such as the chairs in the window bay, that did not exist at the time the image was meant to portray.

The modern collector of antique English furniture has no exact historical equivalent. He (or she) is better informed, better advised, and has more knowledge and expertise at his disposal than any collector of a former age. And yet he follows in a tradition long established, whose attitudes and preconceptions, while they may have changed over time, have moulded the attitudes and preconceptions of the present day. Among these forebears, Percival Griffiths stands pre-eminent, and his collection, formed between about 1900 and 1937, represents a high-water mark of a style of collecting that prevailed in England in the early and middle years of the twentieth century. This essay will provide context for how that high-water mark was achieved.

In May 1875 the *Cornhill Magazine* published an article entitled "The Art of Furnishing."¹ Its anonymous author argued that anyone wishing to furnish a new home would do better to buy old furniture than new. Indeed, "the art of furnishing must for the present be closely connected with the judicious buying of old furniture." The author's objective was to persuade manufacturers and customers alike that the "intolerable ugliness" of modern furniture could be rectified only by looking to the past, and in particular to English furniture of the "despised eighteenth century." It was a polemic of vigor and cogency—on the one hand a Ruskinian advocacy of traditional craftsmanship and on the other a tirade against the "upholsterers" who controlled the modern furniture trade. It was also a manifesto for a new style of furnishing, in which the virtues of Georgian furniture, hitherto ignored in favor of historical pastiches of Gothic, Elizabethan, and Carolean furniture, were extolled. Georgian furniture, of sound materials and construction, good design, utility, and comfort, was perfectly suited to the modern home and was superior in design, function, and workmanship to almost everything manufactured in the "present day." In buying Georgian furniture rather than new, the "amateur" furnisher escaped the tyranny of the upholsterer and became his or her own arbiter of what was tasteful, comfortable, and convenient. This was an argument that appealed not only to middle-class homeowners but to an emerging class of collectors who laid the foundations of the great twentieth-century collections of English furniture. It also represented a significant break with the antiquarian tradition of the previous one hundred years.

The two figures most often associated with the development of antiquarianism and collecting in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are Horace Walpole (1717–1797) and Sir Walter Scott (1771–

1832).² So much has been written about them that they have assumed gigantic status, but we must try to ignore the hyperbole and focus on the matter of furniture collecting. The two never met and their situations were not analogous; Walpole became famous because of his collection, whereas Scott's fame as an author preceded the creation of his collection.

Walpole and Scott both owned furniture, of course, and some of it was old, but whether these constituted furniture collections in the modern sense is a moot point. For both men, furniture's role was primarily to create the *mise en scène* for their other objects and works of art. Some of it they commissioned, some they bought from stock, and some was acquired because of its historic associations. Walpole's ebony tables and chairs were in this last category, and it is to him that we owe the enduring myth that this furniture of the "true black blood" had a Tudor origin, whereas it was actually made in southern India and Sri Lanka about 1700. Amazingly, its true identity was still being debated by historians and curators in the 1930s.³ Walpole's "Glastonbury" chair was another object of mythical status, bought in 1759 and used to enthrone clerical guests, whom he regaled with accounts of its original owner, Joannes Arthurus, the monk of Glastonbury. It was one of several such chairs, all identical or nearly so, owned by antiquaries of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and by many collectors since. The first copy was reputedly made for Lord Bathurst, after which it had been "frequently copied in substantial oak," and it is not certain whether even the one remaining in the Bishop's Palace at Wells is truly of medieval date.⁴ J. C. Loudon remarked in 1839 that "Correct copies of these celebrated chairs are manufactured by Mr. Kensett for sale."⁵ Walpole's turned "Welch" chairs were bought in a job lot from a sale of the effects of another antiquary, Richard Bateman, in 1775. They were acquired not because Walpole showed a precocious interest in vernacular furniture but because they gave his cloister a suitably rude and monkish air. They were, he wrote in a characteristically flippant phrase, "lumbering . . . immovable objects of our forefathers."⁶ Other antique furniture included the early seventeenth-century chair made for Sir Peter Warburton, which was later acquired by the Earl of Derby and was recently returned to Strawberry Hill.⁷

Walpole's reputation as a collector stood high in the nineteenth century. In 1874 John Hungerford Pollen (1820–1903), assistant keeper at the South Kensington Museum, wrote: "Few writers have done greater service to the study of English art than Horace Walpole; and few collectors have had the opportunities he enjoyed a century ago . . .



CATALOGUE

LIBRARY ARMCHAIRS

F103 Walnut library armchair¹

c. 1740
38 × 31 × 30 in. (96.52 × 78.74 × 76.2 cm)
Private collection, London

The chair has a distinctive carved apron.

Provenance

By 1909, Percival D. Griffiths; sold at Christie, Manson & Woods, London, May 10–12, 1939, lot 186, to Gooden & Fox (£252); Frederick Poke, and then by descent in the Poke family (1982–97, on loan to the Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry), until sold at Sotheby's, London, May 15, 2014, lot 327 (£22,500); private collection, London.

Exhibition History

1931, May 28 – June 18: Dorchester Hotel, London, *Loan Exhibition of Works of Art, in Aid of the East London Hospital for Children, Shadwell, E. 1.*, exh. no. 627.

References

Macfall, "Mahogany, Part VII," 1909, p. 160; Cescinsky, *English Furniture of the Eighteenth Century*, 1909–11, vol. II, p. 82, fig. 78; Wheeler, *Old English Furniture*, 1909, p. 218; Symonds, *Present State of Old English Furniture*, 1921, fig. 65; Symonds, *English Furniture from Charles II to George II*, 1929, p. 121, fig. 76; *Loan Exhibition of Works of Art*, 1931, p. 77, exh. no. 627; Symonds, "Walnut and Mahogany Chairs," 1939, p. 51, fig. VIII; CM&W, *Collection of . . . Percival D. Griffiths*, 1939, lot 186; Symonds, "Development of the English Chair," 1941, pp. 170–71, fig. VI.

See also Appendices 1 (Figs. I.76, I.77), 3, 4.

¹ The chair was reupholstered after it left the Griffiths collection.



F104 Walnut library armchair¹

c. 1745
Private collection, UK

The chair is covered in petit-point needlework.

Provenance

By 1909, Percival D. Griffiths; offered for sale at Christie, Manson & Woods, London, May 10–12, 1939, lot 185 (unsold); sold at Christie's, London, April 7, 1983, lot 155 (£11,340); private collection, UK.

References

Macfall, "Mahogany, Part VII," 1909, p. 160; Tipping, "English Furniture . . . II—Seat Furniture (cont.)," 1918, p. 168, fig. D; Tipping, *English Furniture . . . Cabriole Period*, 1922, pl. XII.1; Symonds, *English Furniture from Charles II to George II*, 1929, p. 155, fig. 102; CM&W, *Collection of . . . Percival D. Griffiths*, 1939, lot 185.

See also Appendices 1 (Figs. I.74, I.77), 3, 4.

¹ The chair retains the upholstery it had when it was in the Griffiths collection.



F105 Walnut library armchair

c. 1745
Whereabouts unknown

The chair was covered in petit-point needlework.

Provenance

By 1913?, Percival D. Griffiths.

References

CLPL, Sandridgebury L8687_007, 1913?; Symonds, *English Furniture from Charles II to George II*, 1929, p. 155, fig. 101; Symonds and Ormsbee, *Antique Furniture . . . Walnut Period*, 1947, pl. XX (left).

See also Appendices 1 (Figs. I.74, I.77), 3.



F155 Mahogany stool¹

c. 1755
18½ × 23 × 18 in. (46.99 × 58.42 × 45.72 cm)
Private collection

The stool belongs to the set that otherwise consists of two armchairs and six side chairs (cat. no. F89).

Provenance

By 1929, Percival D. Griffiths; sold at Christie, Manson & Woods, London, May 10–12, 1939, lot 192 (with Farm.38, as a set), to Sigrist (£1071); offered (stool only) for sale at Christie's, New York, October 9, 1993, lot 333 (with-drawn); sold at Christie's, New York, April 16, 1994, lot 114A (\$7,475); private collection.

References

Symonds, *English Furniture from Charles II to George II*, 1929, p. 180, fig. 137; CM&W, *Collection of . . . Percival D. Griffiths*, 1939, lot 192.

See also Appendices 3, 4.

¹ The stool was reupholstered after it left the Griffiths collection.



F156 Mahogany stool with open fretwork legs

c. 1760
18 × 25 × 19½ in. (45.72 × 63.5 × 49.53 cm)
Whereabouts unknown

Provenance

By 1918, Percival D. Griffiths; Arthur S. Vernay, Inc., New York; Arthur D. Leidesdorf, New York, until sold at Sotheby's, London, June 27, 1974, lot 24, to Parsons (£2,000).

References

Tipping, "English Furniture . . . II—Seat Furniture (concl.)," 1918, p. 227, fig. D; Tipping, *English Furniture . . . Cabriole Period*, 1922, pl. XIV. 2; Macquoid and Edwards, *Dictionary of . . . Furniture*, 1924–7, vol. III, p. 172, fig. 46; Macquoid and Edwards, *Dictionary of . . . Furniture*, 1954, vol. III, p. 179, fig. 53.

See also Appendix 1 (Fig. I.80).



III
Tables

F256a–b Pair of Chinese mirror pictures

c. 1760

H. 30½ in., w. 21 in. (77.47 × 53.34 cm).

Gerstenfeld Collection, USA

The first picture shows Hsiang Fei, taken captive to Peking, where the emperor Qianlong fell in love with her; mourning her dead husband, who had died fighting against the emperor, Hsiang Fei rejected Qianlong and died either by her own hand or by that of the emperor's mother. The second picture is of a shepherdess (not, as recorded in the description in CM&W, lot 365, a shepherd), a friend of Hsiang Fei.

Provenance

Percival D. Griffiths; offered for sale at Christie, Manson & Woods, London, May 10–12, 1939, lot 365 (unsold); c. 1950, J. M. Botibol, London; Philippa, Countess of Galloway,¹ until sold at Christie's, London, February 25, 1960, lot 18 (1,500 guineas); 1960, Norman Adams Ltd., London; Gerstenfeld Collection, USA.



References

CM&W, *Collection of . . . Percival D. Griffiths*, 1939, lot 365; *Illustrated London News* 195, no. 5248A (November 11, 1939), pp. 28–9; Jourdain and Jenyns, *Chinese Export Art*, 1950, p. 102, pl. 57 (cat. no. F256a); Davis, “Lyre-Back Chairs,” 1960, p. 572, fig. 3; Norman Adams Ltd., trade advertisement, 1960; Lennox-Boyd, *Masterpieces of English Furniture*, 1998, p. 13, fig. 3, p. 21, fig. 8, p. 236, no. 88.

See also Appendix 4.

- 1 The Countess of Galloway (née Philippa Wendel) was the daughter of Mrs. Griffiths's cousin, Marian Wendell; she and her siblings were brought up in the Griffithses' house and Percival Griffiths left the bulk of his estate to her.

DRESSING GLASSES

F257 Walnut dressing glass

c. 1710

29½ × 16 × 11 in. (74.93 × 40.64 × 27.94 cm)

Private collection

“The early scroll foot to the mirror is an unusual feature” (Symonds, p. 166).

Provenance

By 1924, Percival D. Griffiths; Frederick Poke, and then by descent in the Poke family (1982–97, on loan to the Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry), until sold at Sotheby's, London, June 13, 2001, lot 73 (£18,900); sold at Sotheby's London, June 6, 2006, lot 233 (£16,800); private collection.

References

Macquoid and Edwards, *Dictionary of . . . Furniture*, 1924–7, vol. II, p. 353, fig. 19; Symonds, *English Furniture from Charles II to George II*, 1929, p. 166, fig. 124; Macquoid and Edwards, *Dictionary of . . . Furniture*, 1954, vol. II, p. 364, fig. 22.

See also Appendix 3.



F258 Burr walnut dressing glass

c. 1710

43 × 20 × 13 in. (109.22 × 50.8 × 33.02 cm)

Whereabouts unknown

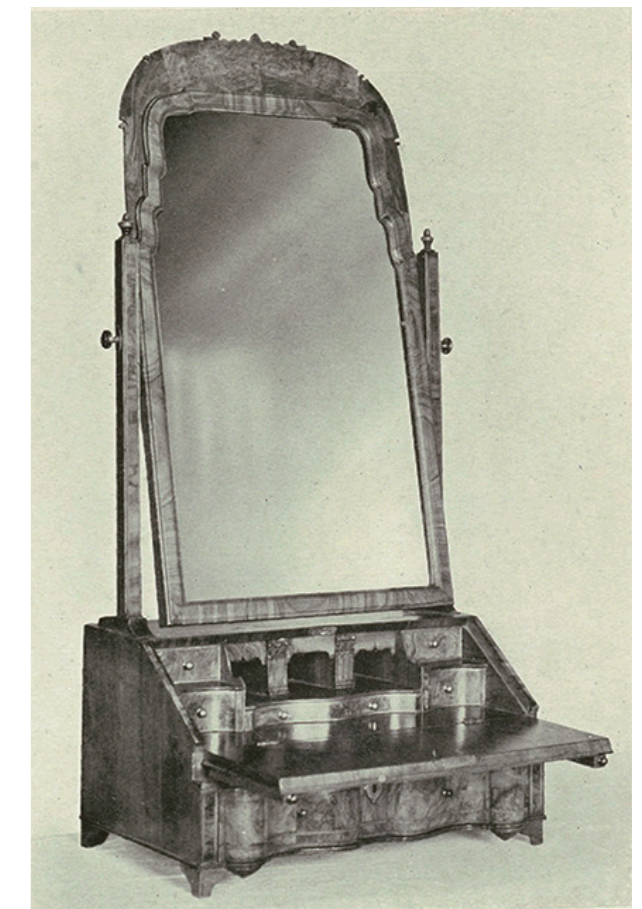
The pilasters pull forward to reveal small receptacles. The shaped drawer with cylindrical ends below the fall is noteworthy.

Provenance

By 1924, Percival D. Griffiths.

References

Macquoid and Edwards, *Dictionary of . . . Furniture*, 1924–7, vol. II, p. 352, fig. 15.



F297 Small mahogany-veneered timepiece

Paul Rimbault (fl. 1770–1785), London (CC 1770–85)

c. 1780

H. 6½ in. (16.51 cm)

Whereabouts unknown

Provenance

By 1929, Percival D. Griffiths; sold at Christie's, May 10–12, 1939, lot 107, to Van der Woude (£19 19s.).

References

Symonds, *English Furniture from Charles II to George II*, 1929, p. 295, fig. 240; CM&W, *Collection of . . . Percival D. Griffiths*, 1939, lot 107; Loomes, *Watchmakers and Clockmakers*, 2006, p. 656.

See also Appendices 3, 4.



F298 Small ormolu-mounted scagliola-cased timepiece

James Tregent (1759–1808), London (CC 1781–1808)

c. 1790

9 × 5½ × 4 in. (22.86 × 13.97 × 10.16 cm)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964 (64.101.874)

Provenance

By 1929, Percival D. Griffiths; Irwin Untermyer, New York; 1964, given by Untermyer to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

References

Symonds, *English Furniture from Charles II to George II*, 1929, p. 295, fig. 241; Hackenbroch and Gloag, *English Furniture*, 1958, pl. 15, figs. 24, 25; Loomes, *Watchmakers and Clockmakers*, 2006, p. 779.

See also Appendix 3.



F298 reverse

LANTERN CLOCK

F299 Lantern clock

Thomas Wheeler (d. before 1701), London (apprenticed 1648; CC 1656–94)

c. 1685

H. 16 in. (40.64 cm)

Whereabouts unknown

Provenance

By 1913, Percival D. Griffiths; Phillips Fine Art Auctioneers, London, 1978; sold at Dreweatts Auctions, Newbury, Berkshire, September 4, 2013, lot 171 (£4,500).

References

Cescinsky and Webster, *English Domestic Clocks*, 1913, p. 61, fig. 36; Loomes, *Watchmakers and Clockmakers*, 2006, p. 831.



FURNITURE AND FURNISHINGS



F304 Silk-upholstered tester bedstead

c. 1710
100 × 72 × 90 in. (254 × 182.88 × 228.6 cm)
Private collection

Provenance

Percival D. Griffiths; sold at Christie, Manson & Woods, London, May 10–12, 1939, lot 264, to Gooden & Fox (£39 18s.); Frederick Poke, until sold at Sotheby's, London, May 11, 1979, lot 13; Mallett & Son (Antiques) Ltd., London; Hubert de Givenchy, until sold at Christie's, Monaco, December 4, 1993, lot 57; Glenn Randall, Washington, DC; Lily and Edmond J. Safra, until sold at Sotheby's, New York, October 18, 2011, lot 149 (\$96,000).



References

CM&W, *Collection of ... Percival D. Griffiths*, 1939, lot 264; Carol Vogel, "A Wintry Winter Show," *New York Times*, January 21, 1994, p. C1.

See also Appendix 4.

F305 Pair of carved and gilt wood wall brackets

c. 1725
17½ × 8 × 8 in. (44.45 × 20.32 × 20.32 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964 (64.101.1162, 64.101.1163).

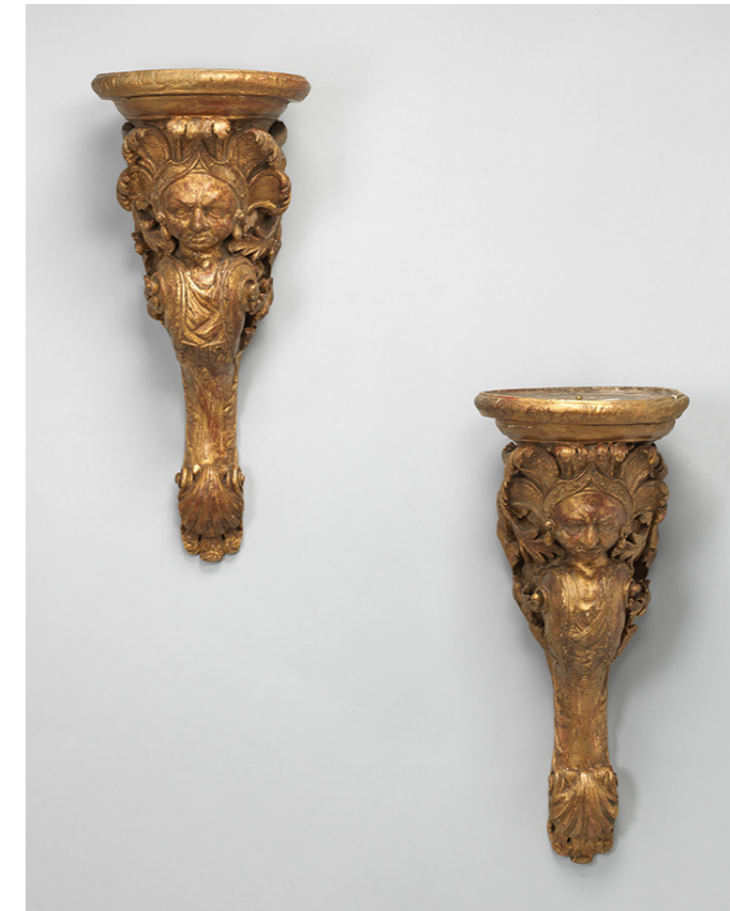
Provenance

By 1929, Percival D. Griffiths; Irwin Untermyer, New York; 1964, given by Untermyer to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

References

Symonds, *English Furniture from Charles II to George II*, 1929, p. 291, fig. 235; Hackenbroch and Gloag, *English Furniture*, 1958, p. 72, pl. 303, fig. 345.

See also Appendices 1 (Fig. I.81), 3.



F306 Mahogany whip and crop stand

c. 1740
Whereabouts unknown

"... a very unusual and rare piece" (Symonds, p. 242). This piece is important for its connection with Percival Griffiths's passion for hunting.

Provenance

By 1929, Percival D. Griffiths.

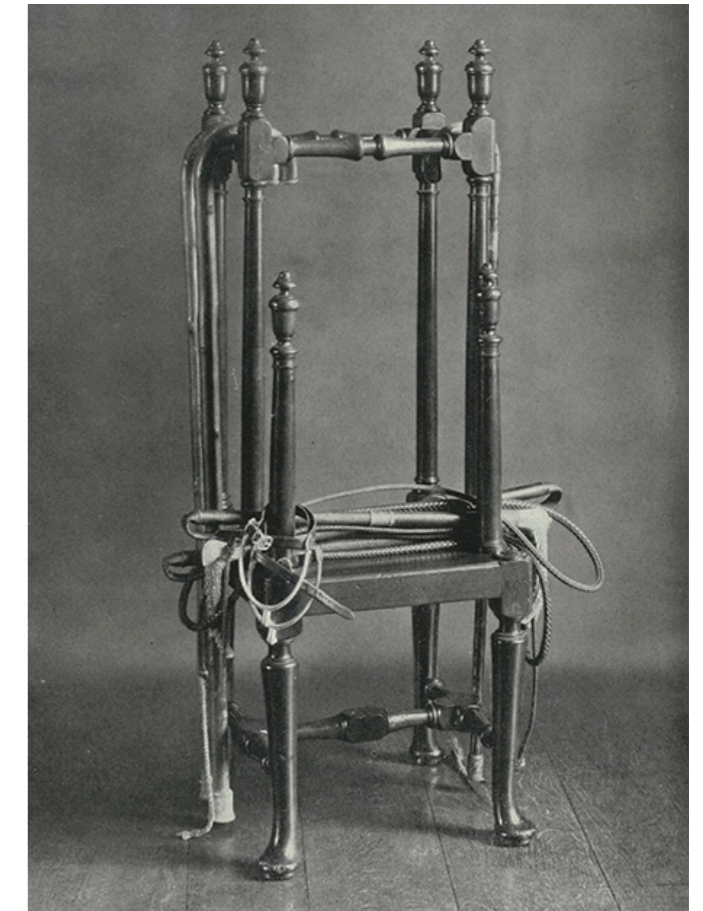
Exhibition History

1931, May 28 – June 18: Dorchester Hotel, London, *Loan Exhibition of Works of Art, in Aid of the East London Hospital for Children, Shadwell, E. 1.*, exh. no. 655.

References

Symonds, *English Furniture from Charles II to George II*, 1929, p. 242, fig. 206; *Loan Exhibition of Works of Art*, 1931, p. 80, exh. no. 655.

See also Appendices 2, 3.



VII

Objects with Royal Associations

F345 Tortoiseshell comb, and case with silver mounts

c. 1685

Case: $7\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{5}{8} \times 7\frac{1}{16}$ in. (18.41 × 11.75 × 1.11 cm)

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Mrs. Samuel Cabot (60.1173a–b)

MMA Album: £20 Comb & Case / See Comb ([p.] 54 Sundries / Bijoutry, [no.] 2 (173))

The case is inscribed on one side: "A Cashu Tree"; and on the other: "Indvs vterqve serviet vni". Besides the inscription, the case bears the same coat of arms as cat. no. F346.

Provenance

By 1925, Percival D. Griffiths (purchase price £20); How of Edinburgh Ltd., London; by October 13, 1960, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

References

Cundall, "Tortoiseshell Carving in Jamaica," 1925, p. 157, no. V; Hart, "Tortoiseshell Comb Cases," 1983, p.19.



F346 Tortoiseshell comb, and case with silver mounts

Dated 1688

Comb: $7\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{4} \times \frac{1}{8}$ in. (18.4 × 10.8 × 0.32 cm)

Case: $7\frac{7}{8} \times 4\frac{7}{8} \times \frac{3}{8}$ in. (20 × 12.4 × 0.95 cm)

Bryan Collection, USA

MMA Album: £20 ([p.] 54, Sundries / Bijoutry, [no.] 1 (173))

Inscribed: "Port Royal in / Jamaica 1688; Indvs vterqve serviet vni". The comb bears the Jamaican coat of arms (originally granted in 1661 and devised by William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury), which displays a crocodile and five pineapples within a shield, flanked by two native figures standing on a banderole. The silver mounts are thought to have been added in London.

Provenance

By 1925, Percival D. Griffiths (purchase price £20); Price P. Glover and Isobel H. Glover, New York, until sold at Sotheby's New York, January 18, 2018, lot 60 (\$27,500); Christian Jussel; Bryan Collection, USA

Exhibition History

1931, May 28 – June 18: Dorchester Hotel, London, *Loan Exhibition of Works of Art, in Aid of the East London Hospital for Children, Shadwell, E. 1.*, exh. no. 768.

References

Cundall, "Tortoiseshell Carving in Jamaica," 1925, pp. 155, 157, nos. III, VI; *Loan Exhibition of Works of Art*, 1931, p. 97, exh. no. 768; Hart, "Tortoiseshell Comb Cases," 1983, p. 19; Town and McShane, *Marking Time*, 2020, p. 323.

See also Appendix 2.

