



The Norfolk House George II Mahogany Sectaire Bookcase

Inventory Number :110-126

Price :\$95,000

Size:

Height: 90 inches

Width: 40 1/2 inches

Depth: 22 inches

Of compact form with swan's neck pediment terminating in foliate roundels framing a bust-plinth and finely carved fretwork panel. The upper case with a pair of glazed astragal 15 panel doors enclosing adjustable bookshelves. The lower case of serpentine outline, the secretaire drawer with hinged fall and lined with silk velvet, enclosing a well fitted interior of small drawers, pigeonholes and a small hinged compartment to the front.

The shaped panel doors below concealing two short lead-lined and two long drawers, all standing on well-shaped bracket feet. The piece appears to retain its original hardware throughout. The hinges of the fitted secretaire drawer bear the H. TIBATS stamp which has been noted on a number of distinguished pieces of case furniture dating from the mid-18th century including the renowned “Messer Cabinet” attributed to Thomas Chippendale. The stamp almost certainly refers to Hugh Tibbatts, listed as a *hinge and sash fastening maker* of Bell Street Wolverhampton.

The quality of this secretaire bookcase and its intimate size would suggest that it was commissioned for one of the principal bedroom suites of Norfolk House.

Edward Howard, 9th Duke of Norfolk

This secretaire bookcase would have been commissioned in the mid 1750's by Edward Howard, 9th Duke of Norfolk, hereditary Earl Marshal of England for Norfolk House, at 31 St. James's Square, the London residence of the Howard dynasty, acquired by the 8th Duke in 1722. Edward Howard was the son of Lord Thomas Howard and Mary Elizabeth Savile and succeeded as Duke of Norfolk, Earl of Norwich, Barons Howard, Furnivall, Mowbray and Segrave in 1732 following the death of his brother Thomas Howard, 8th Duke of Norfolk. Edward married Mary Blount, a member of an ancient English Catholic family in 1727 and they were responsible for the enlargement and complete refurbishment of Norfolk House. The Duchess died on May 27th 1773 and Edward survived her for four years dying on September 20th 1777 aged 91.

The Royal Connection

As hereditary Earls Marshal of England the Norfolk family was close to the Royal family despite being the premier Catholic family of England and therefore excluded by law from any political office, and the 9th Duke was a particular friend of George II's son and heir Frederick, Prince of Wales. In September 1737, following a quarrel with his father Frederick was expelled from St. James's Palace and the 9th Duke offered Norfolk House, which was steps away from St. James's Palace to the Prince for an annual rent of £1,200 per annum. Frederick lived in the house with his wife Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha from 1737 until 1741 and his son, the future George III was born at Norfolk House on May 24th 1738. Following the Prince's move, in 1742, to Leicester House the 9th Duke embarked on an ambitious plan to rebuild the former royal residence.

Norfolk House

St. James's Square in the west of London was developed following the Great Fire of 1666 and No.31 was first occupied by the Duke of St. Albans. In 1722 St. Albans House was acquired for the 8th Duke of Norfolk and the site remained the principal London residence of the Dukes until the property was sold in 1938. By the time the Prince of Wales vacated No.31 in 1742 the original house was in considerable disrepair and the 9th Duke initiated a project to completely rebuild the mansion in a style that would complement the family's social position. Adjacent property was acquired and the original house was demolished by 1748. The erection of the new Norfolk House commenced in 1749 under the direction of the architect Matthew Brettingham and continued until 1752 when the interior decoration began and was not completed until 1756 when a grand reception was held to introduce the new residence to London society. The Whig politician Horace Walpole commented... “All the earth was there...you never such a scene of magnificence and taste”. The exterior of the house was a simple Palladian design, but the interior was remarkable for containing the first extensive display of French inspired rococo decoration, exemplified by the Music Room in the State Apartments that was sold along with the present secretaire bookcase in 1938 and is currently installed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Despite the prominence of the patrons, little is known about who was commissioned to furnish the interiors and contemporary accounts of the house provide no clues. Certainly the form and style of the secretaire relate to a number of the designs published in Chippendale's 1754 Director, and documented Chippendale pieces that incorporate many of the same elements present in this piece are at Nostell Priory. It would be interesting to speculate that the Lancaster firm of Gillows could have had some involvement. The Howards, being the premier Catholic family of England could well have commissioned Gillows another Catholic family that in the 1740's and 1750's worked almost exclusively for the Catholic nobility and gentry of England. Whoever the craftsman was, this secretaire would most certainly have been installed prior to the reception held in February 1756, and it would have remained in-situ until sold by the 16th Duke at the sale held on the premises on February 7th 1938.

Subsequent History

At the Christie's sale in the premises at 31 St James's Square on February 7th 1938 the Sectaire Bookcase was purchased by the prominent English dealer Charles Sneyers of Godalming, Surrey and was then sold by him to Mr. and Mrs. Tim Whelan of The Grange, Farnham Common, Buckinghamshire on April 27th 1938. The secretaire remained with the Whelan family until acquired by us in 2011.

Tim Whelan (1893-1957) was an American film director, writer, producer and actor and his wife, the former Miriam Seegar a silent film star turned celebratory decorator who survived her husband by 44 years dying at the age of 101 in 2011. Resident in England during the 1930s the Whelans returned to Beverly Hills, California where the secretaire remained at their house until Mrs. Whelan's death in 2011.

This piece is offered with a selection of memorabilia relating to the cabinet including the original invoice from Sneyers to the Whelans and a November 1938 copy of Ideal Home showing the piece in-situ at the Whelan residence in Buckinghamshire.

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