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An important pair of carved and white painted hall benches from Kenwood House

The design attributed to Robert Adam, probably made by Sefferin Nelson

English

PROVENANCE

The Earl of Mansfield, Kenwood House, Hampstead, London

Sold in the contents sale of 1922, lot 874 or 875: Pair of painted carved "Adam" seats, red leather tops

DESCRIPTION

The benches with profusely and finely carved end supports with a running frieze of anthemion centred by a lion mask and bordered by oval paterae; the two scrolled and fluted legs unified by swags of

bellflowers terminating in lion paw feet; the side rails similarly carved with anthemion and paterae; the upholstered drop in seat now covered in blue silk velvet.

These important benches are clearly visible in the Country Life photograph of the entrance / dining room of Kenwood House taken in 1919 while the house was still owned by the Mansfield family. Four years later, following the death of the fifth Earl of Mansfield the house and its contents were sold at auction, these benches being either lot 874 or 875. Their whereabouts have until now been unknown.

Although so far no drawings by Robert Adam for these benches have come to light, attribution to him is strong on several grounds. He is known to have specified for the entrance hall a low white chair rail and low white painted carved benches. The detailing of these benches is not only stylistically consistent with the other furniture in the entrance hall known to have been designed by Robert Adam and executed by Sefferin Nelson, but also in its detailing. The running waterleaf moulding is identical to the architectural mouldings seen on the shutters in the room and also on the pair of pedestals made by Nelson. The carving of the paterae on the sideboard table is also an identical and consistent feature as is the off white painted finish stipulated by Adam. The painted ceiling by Antonio Zucci bordered by bellflowers also reflects those on the end supports of the benches.

The benches are now back in situ at Kenwood House.