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A rare George II Period walnut and burr walnut veneered breakfront cabinet on stand in the manner of Giles Grendey

REF796

English

Height: 98 in (249 cm)

Width: 61 ½ in (156 cm)

Depth: 20 ½ in (52 cm)

PROVENANCE

With M. Harris & Sons, London, circa 1920s. Percival D. Griffiths, Esq., Sandridgebury, St. Albans, Hertfordshire.

The Late Percival D. Griffiths, Esq.; Christie's, London, 10 May 1939, lot 255 (to 'VF').

With Frank Partridge, London and New York. Gift of Irwin Untermyer, to the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art, New York, 1964

LITERATURE

M. Harris & Sons, A Catalogue and Index of Old Furniture and Works of Art, part II, n.d. (circa 1920s), p.177.

R.W Symonds, English Furniture from Charles II to George II, London, 1929, pp.102, 105, 107, figs. 62-63

J. de Serre, 'The Percival D. Griffiths Collection', Country Life, 15 April, 1939, p. 44, fig. 2 'European Antiques in an American Collection', The Magazine Antiques, February 1948, p. 112, front piece

Y. Hackenbroch, English Furniture with some furniture from other countries in the Irwin Untermyer Collection, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958, pl.244-245, figs. 285-286, p.59

DESCRIPTION

The cornice with a swan neck pediment surmounted with carved flower heads, cross grain and dentil moulding over a geometric blind fretted frieze. The three glazed doors with replaced astragals over three cockbeaded drawers with herringbone inlay and cross banding. The breakfront base with caddy moulding and three further drawers, over a gadrooned moulding and supported by four cabriole legs, elaborately carved with acanthus and terminating in claw and ball feet.

This unique cabinet is a great rarity not only because of its sublime form, quality of craftsmanship, untouched colour and patina, but also due to its extraordinary provenance having been in two of the greatest collections of the 20th Century.

Its original provenance is currently unknown, but when it was illustrated by Moss Harris in their 'Catalogue and Index of Old Furniture and Works of Art' in the late 1920s. It was catalogued as 'An extremely rare example of furniture of this period'. It was illustrated in this publication with its original glazing bars which were later replaced with mirrors as seen in R W Symonds' English Furniture from George II to English Furniture from Charles II,' 1929, pp 102,105,107, figs. 62-63, diagram 5c.

The cabinet was purchased by Percival Griffiths through advice of R.W Symonds and it was further illustrated in a Country Life article in 1939. Griffiths assembled a collection of English furniture that was at the time considered the finest collection of walnut furniture in the country, at his home in Sandridgebury, near St. Albans. He began collecting mainly pieces in mahogany, however he later focused chiefly on walnut of the first quarter of the 18th Century. He specialised on pieces of the very best quality, and was fortunate in securing a number of documented pieces of furniture, which have added considerably to our knowledge of early 18th Century cabinetmakers.

Robert Wemyss Symonds (1889-1958) was a furniture historian, who dominated the field of collecting

and writing on English furniture during the middle of the 20th Century. Between 1921 and 1958 Symonds wrote numerous articles and five important books, which formed and later reflected the taste of a generation. Symonds advised on Percival Griffiths' collection, and many of his pieces were used to illustrate Symonds' books. When advising on furniture, Symonds placed paramount importance on finding pieces with original patination, a well-balanced design and good quality carving and timber, and was less concerned with provenance. It was important to Symonds' that the piece stood on its own merit, with or without an important background.

The cabinet again was sold in 1939 and was subsequently acquired by Judge Irwin Untermyer, again through the advice of Symonds and remained a prized item in his collection, being illustrated in his residence in 1948 and in Hackenbroch, 'English Furniture with some furniture from other countries in the Irwin Untermyer Collection' in 1958. It was bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1964.