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A Rare George I Period Blue Japanned and Gilt Bureau Cabinet

English, circa 1720

H: 8ft 3 in (251 cm) W: 41 1/2 in (105 cm) D: 24 in (61 cm)

The broken arched cornice decorated with stylised leaves and panels of birds, flowers and figures in a landscape surmounted by three silver gilt finials. The two mirrored doors opening to reveal an interior with an arrangement of pigeon holes, 14 drawers and a central mirrored cupboard all similarly decorated in blue and gilt scenes of flowers and buildings with a trellised border. The bureau with opening fall decorated with figures on horseback and village scenes with a border of acanthus opening to reveal an arrangement of drawers, pigeon holes and central mirrored cupboard with slide concealing a well and with velvet lined writing surface. The two short and long drawers similarly decorated with scenes of figures and landscape of leaves and foliage. Retaining original brass handles and escutcheons. The shaped apron with turned bun feet.

PROVENANCE

Private collection.

DESCRIPTION

This remarkable bureau cabinet belongs to a small group of similar pieces of identical form. A cabinet by John Belchier, formerly in the Royal Collection but japanned in black and gilt was sold in Christies New York 12 October 1996 for \$717,500. Other examples in different colours exist but the rarest and most sought after colour is blue as found on this magnificent example. It also retains all the original brass handles and escutcheons.

Described by a contemporary as 'a very eminent cabinetmaker', this finely crafted girandole can be attributed on stylistic grounds to John Belchier (c. 1670-1726) who from 1712 had established a workshop at Nottingham Court, Short's Gardens in the parish of St. Giles in the Fields, London. Renowned for supplying mirrors, one of his printed trade labels records that he was making up and providing 'all sorts of fine Peer and Chimney-Glasses and Glass Sconces' (Ed. Geoffrey Beard and Christopher Gilbert, *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers 1660-1840*, Furniture History Society, Leeds, 1986, pp. 59-60). Belchier's most significant commissions include the provision of mirrors to St. Paul's Cathedral and during the same period between 1722 and 26, of pier glasses and furniture to John Meller at Erddig in Clwyd, North Wales. Of the two extant mirrors at Erddig, one in carved and gilded gesso and of the most expensive glass at a cost of £50 was installed in the Best Bedchamber. The flattened arch to the top of this mirror incorporates a bold double-scroll flourish that is reflected in the ornamentation of the present example (Adam Bowett, *Early Georgian Furniture 1715-1740*, Antique Collectors Club, Woodbridge, 2009, p. 292). The second Erddig mirror is surmounted in a similar fashion to the Dunecht mirror by a plumed mask. The Dunecht mirror is also related to another with a similar plumed mask formerly in the Untermeyer Collection now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, which has also been attributed to Belchier (Yvonne Hackenbroch, *Highlights of the Untermeyer Collection of English and Continental Decorative Arts*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1977, p. 73, no. 126). Other characteristics that suggest that these mirrors may be by the same hand or more likely copying each other are the inclusion of gesso carved strap work ornamentation that terminates in a foliate scroll and the addition of a single strap work scroll flanking the lower portion of the frame above where the original sconces would have been fitted. There are several examples of this style of mirror in existence today, therefore John Belchier was possibly not the sole craftsman to provide such works.