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## **A RARE MID EIGHTEENTH CENTURY OCTAGONAL CARVED MAHOGANY SILVER TABLE VENEERED AND INLAID WITH TORTOISESHELL AND BONE**

REF950

English, circa 1740

Height: 27 ¼ in (69 cm)

Width: 28 in (71 cm)

Depth: 26 in (66 cm)

The octagonal top veneered with segmented mahogany, strung with chequer inlay and centred by a compass rose of bone and rosewood. The moulded border carved with a running leaf moulding. The frieze on all sides carved and pierced with trelliswork and pierced with tortoiseshell and bone and bordered by chequer stringing. The eight legs similarly pierced, veneered and connected to the frieze with carved 'C' scroll brackets. The stretcher uniting the legs, similarly carved with double 'C' scrolls, joined in the centre by a turned and carved finial. The legs raised on original brass and leather castors.

## PROVENANCE

This rare and highly unusual centre or 'silver' table was originally made to display the seventeenth century casket now in the possession of Her Majesty the Queen. As discussed by Charles R Baird in 'The Connoisseur Magazine' in December 1932, the casket, known as the 'Watson Casket' was thought to have originally been commissioned by Sir Charles Wager (1666-1743), First Lord of the Admiralty.

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## DESCRIPTION

Sir Charles was appointed Commander in Chief in Jamaica in 1706. The following year he was promoted to Rear Admiral of the Blue, and in December the following year was knighted. Thereafter he became in turn, Comptroller of the Navy and Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty, Privy Councillor and then First Lord of the Admiralty.

Apart from the honours and the promotion, the fortune of war made Sir Charles a man of considerable fortune. While on the Jamaica station, on May 28th 1708 he intercepted the Spanish Fleet off Cartagena, resulting in the blowing up of the Spanish flagship and the loss of treasure of between thirty and five hundred million 'pieces of eight'. The prize money resulting from this action made him a very wealthy man. According to a writer in 'The Gentleman's Magazine' in 1743 however, the riches he acquired on this and other occasions, were regarded by him as instruments of doing good and accordingly, he gave his fortunes to his relatives.

The casket was presumed to be a gift to his wife and was subsequently passed on to his nephew Charles Watson, also a naval officer who was later made Vice Admiral and Commander of the East Indies and was instrumental in transporting Robert Clive and his troops to India. There is a memorial to Watson in Westminster Abbey, designed by James Stuart. The casket, now in the Royal Collection, has always been known as the 'Watson Casket'. Whether Sir Charles Wager or Charles Watson had the table made to display the casket is not clear, but the table has remained in the possession of his descendants ever since.

The cabinetmaking and overall construction of the table is very much consistent with the finest English work of the mid eighteenth Century, however the use of tortoiseshell and bone is highly unusual. It is probable that the materials used were sourced whilst either Sir Charles or his nephew were stationed in the West or the East Indies.