MACKINNON
FINE FURNITURE



William Hallett: A George II Mahogany Armorial Hall Chair

England, *circa* 1755

This fine armchair is emblazoned with the arms of Anne Basset, née Prideaux (1718-1760), the daughter and co-heir of Sir Edmund Prideaux, 5th Baronet of Netherton (1675-1729), widow of John Pendarves Basset (1713-1739) and mother of John Prideaux Basset (1740-1756) of Tehidy Park, Cornwall. The Basset family, one of the most powerful families in Cornwall, made their fortune from mining local tin and copper.

The arms are presented on a lozenge, which indicates that they represent a widow. The small central shield (representing Prideaux: Argent, a chevron sable in chief a label of three points gules), known as an escutcheon of pretence, is placed on the husband's shield (Basset: Barry wavy of six, or and gules) in this way when the wife is a heraldic heiress. In this case it would suggest that Anne had no brothers, or if she did, they had no issue, so that she could be said to represent her father's family.

Anne Basset Prideaux

John Pendarves Basset (1713-1739) came from a family of Norman settlers in England. He married Anne Prideaux (d. 1760), daughter and co-heir of Sir Edmund Prideaux, 5th Baronet of Netherton in 1737. Three years earlier John had commissioned Thomas Edwards of Greenwich to build a new

mansion house, Tehidy Park, in the neo-Palladian manner. When John passed away in 1739, his brother Francis Basset (1714-1769) continued the work on the house. It soon became apparent that Anne was pregnant with the posthumous son of her husband, so Francis oversaw the works to place it in trust for his nephew. Tehidy was completed by 1740, the same year when John Prideaux Basset (1740-1756), heir to the Prideaux and Basset families, was born.

A portrait of John Prideaux Basset by Allan Ramsay (1713-84), dating to circa 1747-48, shows the young heir in dress designed to recall Van Dyck's portraits of the young Charles II (sold Christie's London, 10 June 2003, lot 34).

Sadly, John Prideaux Basset died on May 28th 1756 at the young age of sixteen, and Tehidy Park passed back to his uncle Francis Basset. After her son's death Anne Basset left Tehidy and settled at Haldon House, Devon, which she purchased from Sir John Chichester in 1758. Considered one of the finest houses in the county, Haldon was modelled after London's Buckingham House.

At Tehidy Park, Francis sought to cement his position as the new lord of the manor and celebrate his recent marriage to Margaret St. Aubyn by commissioning an extravagant suite of two settees and ten hall armchairs (a pair from this set was sold Christie's New York, 18 October 2005, lot 450, realized $284,800). Both the Tehidy Park suite and the present chair feature backs and seats in the form of shells, and supported on frames and legs of the same profile.

Upon moving to Haldon House, it is entirely plausible that Anne would have commissioned a suite of seat furniture amongst other furnishings for her new house. Being a wealthy widow, and as an heiress of two powerful families, Anne Basset would have wanted to celebrate her status in society and what better way to do this than to commission furnishings, proudly displaying her coat of arms. It is quite possible that both Francis and Anne ordered suites from the same workshops at the same time, or one commission was influenced by the other.

Anne Basset died in 1760.

Thomas Chippendale

The present chair, and the larger suite of chairs from Tehidy, both relate to a design illustrated in the third edition of Thomas Chippendale's Gentleman and Cabinet Maker's Director (pl. XXIV, fig. C), which shows an open armchair with a similar back and seat both carved in the form of a shell. Chippendale notes that this design is 'proper for Grottos,' as well as for 'Halls, Passages, or Summer-Houses.' As can be seen on the construction of the present armchair, he states, 'The backs may be cut out of the solid Board, and fixed on the Back Edges of the Seats.' The elegant S-shaped profile and form of the front legs of the present example appear on plate XVII of the Director.

William Hallett

The present chair and the Tehidy Park suite bear strong similarities in design, construction and quality of carving to a set of six padouk side chairs and two armchairs supplied to the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury (1711-1771) for St Giles, Dorset and most likely emanate from the same workshop. All of these chairs have distinctive paper-scroll bases to the backs, and share a closely related design for the arms and

the same pattern and construction of the front and back legs and stretchers, differing only slightly in the profusion of decoration.

Although the maker of the St Giles chairs is uncertain, it is known that William Hallett (1707-1781), one of London's most fashionable cabinetmakers of the day, supplied large quantities of furniture to the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury between 1745 and 1752.

Other related examples include ten side and two armchairs, with painted crests, from Tythrop Park, Oxfordshire. Another set is recorded with the arms of William Henry Nassau de Zuylestein, 4th Earl of Rochford, and a single example, without provenance, is illustrated in F. Davis, A Picture History of Furniture, p. 259.

A very fine George II mahogany armorial hall chair attributed to William Hallett. The scallop-shaped, rippled and paper-scrolled back centred with the coat of arms of Anne Basset framed in an elaborate cartouche decorated with scrolls, lambrequins and a carved cherub's mask. The outswept scrolled arms on spreading supports flanking a solid shell-carved seat, raised on shaped and moulded cabriole legs united by a moulded stretcher.

Height: 38.58 in (98 cm)
Width: 24.80 in (63 cm)
Depth: 24.80 in (63 cm)

Stock Number
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5 Ryder Street - St James's - London, SW1Y 6PY
Phone: +44(0)20 7839 5671 Mobile: +44(0)7725 332 665
Email: charlie@mackinnonfineart.com Web: mackinnonfineart.com