

# MACKINNON FINE FURNITURE



## **The Chandos Bureau**

**England, *circa* 1720**

Twice inscribed in ink on the inner backboards, 'To His Grace The Duke of Chandos at Shaw Hall, near Newbury, Barks(sic).'

## **James Brydges, Duke of Chandos (1673-1744)**

James Brydges was the first of fourteen children by Sir James Brydges, 3rd Baronet of Wilton Castle, Sheriff of Herefordshire, 8th Lord Chandos. As Paymaster-General of Marlborough's army he built a fortune that placed him amongst the richest men of his day and he profited from this position by £600,000 when he resigned in 1713. Rising through the peerage, Chandos became successively Viscount Wilton, Earl of Carnarvon, and Duke of Chandos.

Having acquired great wealth and influence, Chandos commissioned work from leading artists and architects. Alongside Sir Robert Walpole and Sir Hans Sloane, Chandos was considered one of the most important patrons of the 18th century.

Chandos' fortunes were, however, short-lived and he unfortunately suffered spectacular losses when the financial disaster of the South Sea Bubble struck, and his estates had to be sold.

### **Cannons & Shaw Hall**

Brydges began working on Cannons, Middlesex in 1714, and he appointed the Italian-trained architect James Gibbs at the advice of Sir John Vanbrugh. Cannons was complete by 1720, and it quickly gained great renown. Collectors of the time often opened their doors for public viewings, and such visits at Cannons were so popular that visitor numbers had to be regulated. Cannons was featured in an early travel guide in 1725 by Daniel Defoe, where he described,

"This palace is so beautiful in its situation, so lofty, so majestick [sic] the appearance of it, that a pen can only but ill describe it... 'tis only fit to be talk'd of upon the very spot... The whole structure is built with such a Profusion of Expense and finished with such a Brightness of Fancy and Delicacy of Judgment".

In addition to Cannons, Brydges acquired Shaw Hall in about 1727 from the Dolman family. Midway between London and Bath, Shaw Hall would have made a convenient stopping point on this journey.

The purchase took 8 years to complete and as the house was in a state of decay, it required costly restoration. It appears that the Duke and his wife Cassandra, his first cousin and daughter of Sir Francis Willoughby of Wollaton Hall, Nottingham, very much enjoyed Shaw Hall and were dedicated to making it a comfortable home, in preference to Cannons.

### **Peter Miller & Nicholas Seehuysen**

Peter Miller was a cabinet-maker working from St Mary-le-Savoy in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The location of his workshop in the Savoy between the Strand and the north bank of the Thames is significant, as it lies outside the City of London and therefore outside of the restrictions of the London Livery Companies and its associated oversight. Christopher Gilbert illustrates a magnificent walnut bureau cabinet featuring a hidden label behind a small mirror in the centre of the upper case, which reads: 'Peter Miller Cabenet Macker in the Savoy in London the 13 June Ao 1724.'

Peter The Great of Russia sent a group of twenty-four apprentices to London in 1717 with the goal of developing Russian knowledge of art and architecture as part of his ambitious preparations to develop a new capital to the north in St. Petersburg. Nine of these apprentices were sent specifically to study under furniture-makers, including 'joinery and decoration of houses' and 'cabinet work.' One such apprentice, named Fedor Martynov, made careful drawings of three styles of bureau cabinets that survive today in the State Hermitage's archives. It is possible that Martynov received training from Miller given the similarities in the drawings to known pieces created by Miller. Miller would have been able to provide this type of training because of his location outside the boundaries of the City.

Another possible candidate is a cabinet-maker named Nicholas Seehuysen. Believed to be of German origin, he was recorded as working in Covent Garden between 1728 and 1730. Very little information exists but it is known that he did supply furniture not only to Holkham Hall and Longford Castle, but also to the Duke of Chandos himself at Shaw Hall.

### **The Rodney Cabinet & Comparisons**

There are similarities between the Chandos bureau and another piece known as the Rodney Cabinet. The latter is a George I burr walnut cabinet that once belonged to the George Rodney, 1st Baron Rodney (1718-1792), the distinguished naval commander. There are significant similarities between the lower part of the Rodney cabinet and the present bureau. Each piece features a base in two parts with brass bordered flaps and engraved brass lock plates enclosing a fitted interior with slide and carrying handles. There are also parcel gilt columns on the present bureau that conceal secret drawers, similar to the ones found on the upper part on the Rodney cabinet.

Interestingly, James Brydges and George Rodney were related. The marriage of Sir Edward Rodney's daughter, Anne, to Sir Thomas Brydges of Keinsham, linked the two families. Brydges recommended Rodney to Admiral Haddock in 1739, and the following year he sought to help Rodney to get a promotion.

A further comparison can be made to a George I walnut bureau illustrated in Lanto Synge, *Great English Furniture*, London, 1991. As with the Rodney Cabinet, this bureau also features a similar construction in its lower half to the Chandos bureau. Along with the Rodney cabinet and the Chandos bureau, this exceptionally rare walnut piece reflects the finest craftsmanship and detail in its construction, incorporation of fine materials, and elegant form. A further related bureau, with similar out-folding doors, decorated throughout in black japanning, is also recorded.

A masterpiece of 18th century walnut furniture.

An exceptional and very rare George I figured walnut, cross-banded, and feather-banded bureau attributed to Peter Miller. In two parts, the top with a pair of hinged sloping doors, lined with silk velvet, which open outwards. The interior fitted with a sliding velvet lined writing surface, and a combination of drawers and pigeon holes. The lower part fitted with a pair of projecting panelled doors flanked by gilt carved and gesso decorated walnut Corinthian pilasters concealing hidden compartments and three short concave drawers to each side, above a shaped apron drawer with projecting plinths, the sides with wonderful carrying handles. On shaped bracket feet with castors. With solid walnut lined drawers throughout. Of exceptional quality throughout.

Height: 46.85 in (119 cm)  
Width: 48.43 in (123 cm)  
Depth: 29.53 in (75 cm)

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AD.113

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