

MACKINNON FINE FURNITURE



THE HEATHCOTE GETTY LACQUER CHAIRS

England, *circa* 1720

The coat of arms on the backs of these Chinese lacquer banquet hall chairs belongs to William Heathcote (1693-1751) and they were likely made to celebrate his marriage in 1720 to Lady Elizabeth Parker, daughter of Thomas Parker, the 1st Earl of Macclesfield. William followed his father Samuel Heathcote, a merchant and East India Company director, into business, while his brother Sir Gilbert Heathcote became Governor of the Bank of England. Upon inheriting from his father in 1715, William entered politics, and served as MP for Buckingham from 1722-27 and for Southampton until 1741. He was made a baronet in 1733. Since the chairs feature the Heathcote coat of arms alongside the Parker arms without a baronet's coronet, they can be precisely dated to between 1720 and 1733. These chairs were intended for Hursley Park, Hampshire, which William acquired in 1718 and remodelled with architect Sir Thomas Hewett. Originally these chairs are likely to have been a set of ten, with two chairs leaving the suite before the set of eight chairs were sold as part of the Heathcote Heirlooms at Christie's London, 26 May 1938, lot 118.

This distinctive model of hall chair, produced in China for export to Europe, is an example of the 18th-century trade and stylistic exchanges between Europe and East Asia. This was only possible through the East India Company, which held a monopoly on British trade with China. This period was notable for the rise of England's wealthiest individuals, who amassed their fortunes through trade, speculation, and

investments in emerging markets. To create pieces like this, British families had to send a pattern or tracing of their coat of arms to China, which would be used to customise items such as porcelain, textiles, and various types of furniture. Notably, at Osterley House, there is not only a set of chairs similar to the present lot, but a group of sixteen pieces of Chinese Export furniture including a side table, a casket, all bearing the arms of Child. By 1720, such furniture was manufactured in China (especially in Canton), largely as part of the private trade that East India Company officials, including captains, investors, and directors, were permitted to conduct in addition to official company business. These individuals could use part of a ship's capacity for personal goods, which were often showcased in their own cabins. Due to space constraints on ships, lacquer furniture was transported as flat boards, packed in cases to maximise space. Upon arrival in England, these boards were assembled with locally-made seat rails and legs. Thus, while the lacquered components were imported, the bases of these chairs were generally crafted in England.

A pair of chairs, featuring the coat of arms of Sir Gregory Page, 1st Baronet of Greenwich (1668-1720), closely resembles the set sold at Christie's London, 15 November 1990, lot 69. These chairs, likely commissioned to celebrate Sir Gregory's baronetcy in December 1714, were part of an original set of six. Sir Gregory, a director and later Chairman of the East India Company, likely had the chair backs made in Canton and then exported to England for assembly. The chairs are noted for their angular cabriole legs with flying brackets, decorated in lacquer. Like Heathcote, Sir Gregory was deeply involved in the East India trade.

Another pair of japanned armorial hall chairs, featuring similar design elements to the Heathcote chairs, including the flying brackets at the top of the legs and a shell-centred front seat rail sold at Christie's London, 27 November 2003, lot 51. Although the coat of arms is no longer visible, these chairs were likely made for a member of the East India Company.

A hall chair in the Victoria and Albert Museum [W.16-1962] features the same simple angular cabriole legs as other notable examples, but the original owners remain unidentified because the arms painted on the chairs are later additions. The current armorial shield and elephant crest, painted in oils, represent the arms of Sir Herbert Pakington, 7th Baronet, and his wife Elizabeth Hawkins, who was the sister of Sir Caesar Hawkins, 1st Baronet. These arms, which include the badge of Ulster, suggest that they were added after Sir Herbert succeeded to his title in 1762, though the couple married in 1759.

Another chair closely resembling the form of the chair and the Chinese Export lacquer depicting a landscape scene was in the collection of Sir Edgar Speyer and is illustrated in Francis Lenygon, *Furniture in England 1660–1760*, 1914, p.285, fig. 428.

James Moore the Elder, a distinguished Royal Cabinetmaker in early 18th-century London, served George I and the Prince and Princess of Wales, and later George II. His workshop was located at Nottingham Court, Short's Gardens, St. Giles-in-the-Fields, London. Moore's earliest recorded commission dates back to 1705 for the Duke of Marlborough and his wife Sarah, marking the beginning of a notable career. In 1714, Moore entered into a partnership with John Gumley, a relationship that lasted until Moore's death in 1726. This partnership managed both private and royal commissions, and they often undertook projects independently as well. Noteworthy is Moore's involvement in the construction and interior decoration of Blenheim Palace, where in 1716 he succeeded Sir John Vanbrugh as Comptroller of Works, earning the title of 'Oracle' from Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. Further supporting his reputation, Moore is almost certainly linked to a set of four lacquered and gilt-gesso hall chairs supplied to Sir Robert Walpole for Houghton Hall, Norfolk. These chairs feature backs

adorned in Chinese Export lacquer depicting mountainous landscapes, with legs and aprons in delicate gilt-gesso. These chairs were later sold in pairs at Christie's London, 29 March 1984, lot 103 and Christie's London, 8 December 1994, lot 110.

The distinctive brackets on the present lots are typical flying brackets, and are also found on a specific group of early 18th-century furniture. The brackets are noteworthy for their purpose in providing stability to the legs and frames, potentially functioning as stretchers. One prominent collection featuring these flying brackets is the suite of furniture commissioned for Browsholme Hall, Lancashire. Originally silvered and now gilded, this suite includes at least six side chairs, two stools, and a table, and was likely supplied by Royal cabinet-maker James Moore to Edward Parker. This suite was sold at Christie's London, 7 July 2011, lot 23. Additional examples of Moore's work with flying brackets include a pair of Queen Anne walnut stools, formerly in the 20th-century collection of Sir (Richard) John Sherlock Gooch, 12th Baronet (1930-1999) of Benacre Hall, Suffolk and later part of Peggy and David Rockefeller's collection, sold at Christie's New York, 9 May 2018, lot 244. Similar stools were once in the collection of Colonel H.H. Aykroyd at Whixley Hall, Yorkshire around 1950, and another sold at Christie's London, 7 July 1988, lot 53.

SOLD

A HIGHLY IMPORTANT GEORGE I LACQUER AND JAPANNED ARMORIAL HALL CHAIRS

Attributed to James Moore

Each rectangular back with re-entrant corners decorated in Chinese Export lacquer depicting a watery pagoda landscaped below the arms of Heathcote impaling Parker, the japanned seat with conforming landscape, the seat rail centered by a scallop shell, on hipped square tapering legs with flying brackets on pointed pad feet.

Exhibitions

San Francisco, Asian Art Museum, *A Curious Affair: The Fascination Between East and West*, 17 June - 3 September 2006

Literature:

O. Brackett, *English Furniture Illustrated*, rev. ed., London, 1950, p. 132, pl. CV

G. Beard and J. Goodison, *English Furniture 1500-1840*, London, 1987, p. 58, fig. 1 (one from the set of eight).

L. Syngé, *Mallett Millennium*, London, 2000, p. 34, fig. 25 (two from the set of eight).

F. McGill, *A Curious Affair: The Fascination Between East and West*, San Francisco, 2006, pp. 40-41.

Height: 3' 10¹/₁₆" in (118 cm)
Width: 1' 8⁷/₁₆" in (53 cm)
Depth: 1' 10" in (56 cm)

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