

MACKINNON FINE FURNITURE



THE HAMILTON PALACE CHAIRS

England, *circa* 1720-1730

These exceptional chairs are part of a suite of seat furniture from Hamilton Palace and likely commissioned by James, 5th Duke of Hamilton and 2nd Duke of Brandon (1703-1743). James inherited the dukedom in 1712 at the age of nine, following the death of his father, and was an prominent patron who engaged the architect William Adam (1689-1748) to update Hamilton Palace, and later the Holyrood apartments, as early as 1722.

The present chairs are featured in a *Country Life* photograph of the Long Gallery at Hamilton Palace in 1919. Henry Avray Tipping's text accompanying text refers to 'a gilt set composed of some half-dozen settees and three times that number of chairs' which have 'a shell on the knee and below that a band of nulling'. Interestingly, earlier photographs of the Long Gallery taken by Thomas Annan in the late 1870s or early 1880s instead show the room lined with twenty four mahogany armchairs covered with crimson Aubusson tapestry decorated with a ducal coronet and cipher specially commissioned by the 10th Duke in the early 1840s, and clearly recorded in the Long Gallery in the 1876 and 1915 inventories. The giltwood suite illustrated by Tipping in 1919 may have been part of a move conducted by Country Life to show interiors of a more Georgian nature, as has been suggested by Ian Gow.

The suite was sold from the collection of the Duke of Hamilton, Christie's, 5 November 1919, lot 25 and was described as: 'A Suite of Queen Anne Gilt Furniture, on cabriole legs with shells and foliage, and ball-and-claw feet, the seats and backs stuffed and covered with crimson silk damask, consisting of - A settee - 5 ft. wide. Two ditto - 4 ft. wide, Two ditto - 3 ft. 6 in. wide, Seventeen chairs - Illustrated in

Until 1919 the suite appears to have been dispersed between the 'Oak State Room No. 2', on the first floor of the baroque west wing of the palace (previously the Old State Bed Room), and the 'Hamilton Drawing Room', the first reception room on the first floor of the 1820s extension to the palace. In the 1915 inventory the seat furniture in the 'Oak State Room No. 2' is listed as: 'Eight Chippendale Chairs, on carved and gilt cabriole legs. (ensuite with nine in Hamilton Drawing Room) Two Settees - ensuite - on six legs. 3ft. 8 in. x 4ft. wide.' The seat furniture in the 'Drawing Room, adjoining Hamilton Library', is described as: 'Nine Chippendale Chairs, on carved and gilt cabriole legs, with shells, foliage and eagles' claw and ball feet, square backs and seats, covered with figured crimson silk damask. A pair of ditto Settees, with high back and sides, on six legs - ensuite. 4ft wide. A sofa, on six legs - ensuite. 5 ft. wide.' In the 1876 Hamilton Palace inventory, the equivalent items in the Old State Drawing Room are listed as: '9 High Back Chairs, stuffed & covered in Crimson Silk Damask Carved & gilt Legs.

2 Settees [*sic*] to match'. This seems to tally with the chairs and settees in the Hamilton Drawing Room in 1915.

Hamilton Palace was the seat of the Dukes of Hamilton, and is widely accepted as having been one of the grandest houses ever built in the British Isles. The original palace dated from the 14th century, rebuilt in the Baroque style between 1694 and 1701, and was subsequently much enlarged in the neoclassical taste between 1824 and 1832. The magnificent collections of the Dukes of Hamilton, including two libraries, and masterpieces of fine and decorative arts inherited from William Beckford were held in extremely high regard and were dispersed over two landmark auctions in 1882 and 1919. Hamilton Palace itself was demolished between 1921 and 1932 after coal mining beneath the house were discovered to threaten its structural integrity.

A magnificent and important pair of early 18th century George I period carved giltwood and gilt gesso side chairs from the collections of the Dukes of Hamilton, Hamilton Palace. The green velvet upholstered backs and seats above shell carved cabriole legs with claw and ball feet, the back legs similarly detailed and elegantly outswept.

Literature:

The Hamilton Palace inventories of 1876 and 1915

H. A. Tipping, 'Hamilton Palace - II. Lanarkshire', *Country Life*, 14 June 1919, p. 721, fig. 8 (shown in situ in the Long Gallery).

J. Cornforth, *The Search For a Style: Country Life and Architecture 1897-1935*, London, 1988, p. 174, fig. 156 (shown in situ in the Long Gallery)

I. Gow, *Scottish Houses and Gardens from the Archives of Country Life*, London, 1997, pp. 134-135 (shown in situ in the Long Gallery).

G. Evans, *Hamilton Palace: The Dukes of Hamilton and their Collections*, vol. I, Edinburgh, 2025, pp. 66, 132, 225, figs. 2.14, 3.26, 7.8

Height: 3' 1" in (94 cm)
Width: 2' 11 1/4" in (64 cm)
Depth: 2' 4" in (71 cm)

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V04.59

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