



An Exceptional Pair of Walnut
“Chinese Chippendale” Chair Back
Settees c. 1755

Inventory Number : 160-125

Size: 56 ins Wide 24 ins deep and 37 ins High

Provenance

Part of suite of furniture sold at Christie's King Street London 25th of October 1979 (property of a lady)
An important private American collection in Cleveland, Ohio

Illustrated

Geoffrey Beard and Judith Goodison *English Furniture 1500-1840* p. 133 fig. 6

Overall in a robust Chinese Chippendale design, the double chair backs with scrolled, fluted and foliate carved crest rail above fluted stiles and intricate lattice-work carved and pierced central splats. The outward curved foliate carved arms above shaped drop-in seats over six legs, the front three to each settee with highly decorative pierced carving, all on recessed brass and leather casters.

In *English Furniture 1500-1840* Geoffrey Beard and Judith Goodison praised the way that the drop in seats in the settees were “particularly well-related in constructional terms to the slightly splayed and attractively panelled outer front legs” and there is no doubt that the way these settees were conceived demonstrates the influence of a designer of real merit. As was common in the best pieces made in this period, the settees combine elements of chinoiserie in the use of the fretted brackets and panelled front legs with a Gothic influence obvious in the splats and the arms and top rails of relatively common rococo form. Combining such disparate decorative detailing in a seamless manner was a difficult task but the designer of the present settees has managed this with aplomb, creating a very distinctive pair of settees that have elements of Chippendale, Mainwaring and Ince and Mayhew in their DNA.



One of the settees as illustrated in

Geoffrey Beard and Judith Goodison's book.

In the early 20th century when so many great assemblages of English furniture were being formed under the guidance of R. W. Symonds, a chair back settee was a very important part of any collection. Probably the best and certainly the most famous collector of this period was Percival Griffiths and his collections over the years featured a number of different chair back settees such as the one illustrated below.



A chair back settee previously part of the Percival Griffiths collection.

Other chair back settees in famous collections include a piece belonging to Earl Howe at Penn House in Buckinghamshire



A piece in the S. B. Joel collection-another of the great early 20th century collections



and, proving that these pieces did not only appeal to English collectors during this period, a piece advertised by Frank Partridge and Sons that they later sold to William Randolph Hearst.



FIG. 1. MAHOGANY SETTEE
(In the possession of Mr. Frank Partridge)

To conclude this survey of “Chippendale period” chair back settees, sadly most of the surviving pieces of this type have lost their original provenance but there is one particularly interesting triple chair back example from Bramshill House in Hampshire that does retain this information.



A Christie's sale at West Harling Hall comprising of what was termed the "Nugent Heirlooms" also yielded one fine chair back piece.



Mid-18th century chair back settees are rare survivors-particularly in walnut-and pairs are almost never encountered. These settees are an exciting re-discovery and would enhance the home of any collector, whether one is seeking to follow in the giant footsteps of these great collectors of the past or simply use the very best available decorating pieces for an interior scheme.

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