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THREE PIGEONS

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A RARE GEORGE III WESTMINSTER "GALA" SEDAN CHAIR

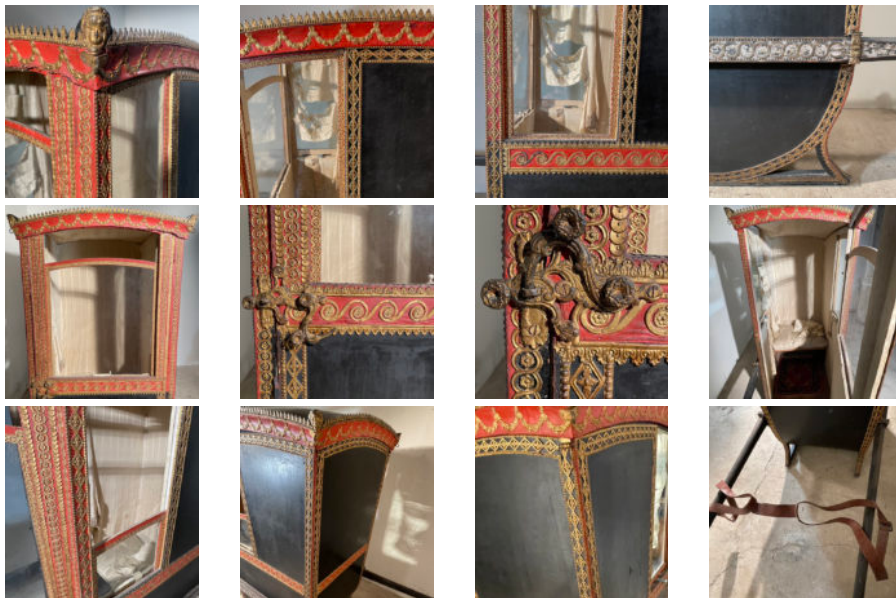
1790-97, by Holmes & Griffin of Whitcombe Street, London

the cabin of deal construction with a domed roof all clad in blacked Moroccan leather with crimson borders and ornamented with beautifully detailed gilt-brass crestings - masks to the top corners and guilloche and Vitruvian scroll applied friezes, the door-furniture ornately cast, the front door opening to reveal a silk lined interior with privacy blinds concealing the three drop-sash windows - one to the front and two to the sides; the sedan chair is borne by the pair of guilloche carved poles threaded through two hasps on each side and with hooped leather shoulder straps,

DIMENSIONS: 164cm (64 $\frac{1}{2}$ ") High, 77cm (30 $\frac{3}{4}$ ") Wide, 92cm (36 $\frac{3}{4}$ ") Long, the removable poles 355cm long

PRICE: £12,000

STOCK CODE: 46411



HISTORY

It may seem a bizarre anachronism today but with Georgian London streets cobbled at best, or

at worst a thick quagmire of rutted mud, puddles and dung, the gentle-folk with servants, and with fine shoes, stockings, petticoats – and their reputations – to preserve opted to put those servants to use for short trips. They could be carried in a glazed sedan chair shielded from all the ghastly smells, the flies, and the beastly oomsqa underfoot. For all concerned, it was quicker and easier than harnessing the horses for quick trips – and it became a status symbol.

This sedan chair is a rare survivor – and it is a good one. It came from the collection of Stephen Loft-Simson whose research has concluded that only about 1200-1600 chairs survive across Europe and less than 10% of these are in Great Britain.

Loft-Simson notes that, “In London, the glass-windowed sedans became available for public hire from October 1634 and by the late 18th century more than 2,000 of them were available to hire in over thirty seven cities and towns across Great Britain and Ireland. Ornamentation reached its zenith during the period 1745-1775 when there were tens of thousands in private use across Europe.”

A very similar Sedan chair by the same maker can be found at Firle Place in Sussex. It was purchased in 1792 by Henry, 3rd Viscount Gage (1761-1808) from Holmes and Griffin of Whitcomb Street, London, for £46 4s 0d. It was meant for use at his London townhouse, 17 Arlington Street, and records show that it was kept in the front hall. It bears the initials of the Viscount’s wife, Susanna, and was regularly used by her to visit her mother-in-law, Margaret, who lived nearby. Like the LASSCO example, it is decorated with fashionable ‘Etruscan’ motifs and possesses the practical feature of a hinged roof, in order to facilitate access for a lady wearing her hair or a wig piled high. Although the Firle Place example no longer has its poles, it is surmounted with a coronet, indicating the nobility of the person within to passers-by.