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A SET OF FOUR EARLY VICTORIAN OAK, DEAL AND BRONZE LIBRARY BOOKCASES,

c.1843, by Henry Whitaker for The Old Conservative Club, St. James, and later removed to, West House, Glebe Place, Chelsea

Each with a lambrequin moulded cornice flanked by scrolled corbels above raised and fielded pilasters, the upper section of adjustable shelving with numbered ivory tabs, the conforming lower section with a belt of stop-fluted ornament raised on a plinth base.

DIMENSIONS: 350cm (137³/₄") High, 160cm (63") Wide, 50cm (19³/₄") Deep, the narrower bookcases are 130cm wide

STOCK CODE: 75158



HISTORY

West House was designed in 1868 by one of England's foremost Arts and Crafts architects, Phillip Webb, and is described in *Pevsner* as 'by far the most interesting' house in the street, quite the coup when one considers the competition. Its first occupant was the artist George Boyce, followed by a pair of Scottish artists Sir James Guthrie and E. A. Walton, eventually to be bought by Professor Bernard Neville in 1970. Arguably the forerunner of the 'Shabby Chic' style embraced by homeowners across the country, Neville decorated the house in his own and then unique style, leading to numerous spreads in the interior design 'glossies' of the time.

So unusual was the decoration that the house was chosen to feature in the cult film *Withnail and I* as the townhouse of the eccentric and flamboyant Uncle Monty – watch closely and one can see these very bookcases taking a starring role!

However, the bookcases were not original to West House. They had come from the Old Conservative Club at St. James's Street built by Sydney Smirke and George Basevi 1843-45.

The Survey of London records the Old Conservative Club in some detail and notes the interior fixtures and furniture:

"All the woodwork is of oak and so was the furniture, a great deal of which was contemporary with the building and of considerable distinction. It was designed by Henry Whitaker, one of the small chairs and the long tables supported by pairs of griffins being illustrated [in] his book, *"The Practical Cabinet Maker and Upholsterer's Treasury of Designs, House-Furnishing and Decorating Assistant, 1847."*

Whitaker is known to have made furniture for an impressive array of clients including Queen Victoria for Osbourne House and The Dukes of Devonshire and Northumberland.

The Survey continues:

"The library is divided in the same manner as the dining-room below it, this time by square, panelled Corinthian columns on pedestals. The doors are of mahogany but the bookcases and other woodwork are of oak, and even the heavily beamed ceiling is grained in imitation. The columns and their pedestals are of multi-coloured scagliola with gilt mouldings. The chimneypieces are of a yellowish-green marble with mirrors above them in pedimented wooden frames."

The Old Conservative Club eventually merged with the Bath Club and they moved to Brook Street – the doors finally closing to members in 1981 at which point it was let for offices. It is probably at this point that Professor Neville acquired the bookcases. The grand marble staircase was also taken down. The building is now a bank.

There were half a dozen marble chimneypieces in the library, with mouldings matching the bookcases, in fact a Connemara marble, and one of these was salvaged and rebuilt with the bookcases in the West House library. Recent renovations that restored much of the house to Webb's original scheme have resulted to the bookcases once again being surplus to requirements.

For the LASSCO news article on them, [click here](#).