

For Immediate Release

6 May 2005

CHRISTIE'S TO OFFER THE KEDLESTON BOOKCASE IN JUNE

**Following the sale of the Badminton Cabinet, Christie's Now Offer
One of the Most Important Pieces of English Furniture at Auction**

A Masterpiece of Design and Manufacture



THE KEDLESTON BOOKCASE

Designed by Robert Adam and supplied by William and John Linnell in 1761 for Lady Scarsdale's dressing-room.
115 1/2in. (293.5 cm.) high; 99 1/2in. (253 cm.) wide; 24in. (61 cm.) deep

Important English Furniture

Christie's London

9 June 2005

London – Christie's will offer the Kedleston Bookcase at auction on 9 June 2005. This magnificent bookcase, designed by Robert Adam and supplied by the celebrated cabinet-makers William and John Linnell, was commissioned in 1760 by the connoisseur, Sir Nathaniel Curzon, 5th Baronet (1726-1804) for his wife, Lady Caroline's apartment at his 'pleasant seat' Kedleston Hall, one of England's greatest treasure houses. It is one of the most significant pieces of English furniture to be offered at auction.

The bookcase is part of one of Robert Adam's earliest and most important commissions. By 1758, Robert Adam, who had just returned from Italy, was already known as 'a man of genius'. In December of that year he was introduced to Sir Nathaniel Curzon, who had the previous month succeeded his father to the baronetcy and the extensive Kedleston estate in Derbyshire. Lord Scarsdale, who was created Baron Scarsdale in 1761, became instrumental in launching the London career of the Rome-trained architect, Robert 'Bob the Roman' Adam (d.1792), and the bookcase's manufacture coincided with Adam's appointment as one of George III's court architect.

Adam was delighted by the prospect of his new patron and reported so, in glowing terms, to his brother James, who was still in Rome: “*A man resolved to spare no Expence, with £10,000 a Year, Good Temper’d & having taste himself for the Arts and little for Game*”.

The bookcase was delivered in June 1761 and was referred to as ‘Lady Scarsdale’s Bookcase’ in celebration of her husband’s elevation as Baron Scarsdale two months earlier. It was designed for the central dressing-room of Lady Scarsdale’s recently created apartment in Kedleston’s family pavilion and is conceived in Adam’s fashionable Roman style. Its elegant triumphal-arched and Ionic-scrolled pediment is crowned by Roman ewers and a beribboned bouquet of Roman acanthus. The frieze, beneath a richly-gadrooned cornice of water-reeds, is likewise enriched with Roman foliage alternating with Grecian palms, while its glazing, in octagon compartments, evokes the ceiling of the Roman temple at Palmyra, dedicated to the sun and poetry deity Apollo, illustrated in Robert Wood’s *Temple of the Sun at Palmyra*, London, 1753.

The bookcase’s introduction into the private reception and dressing-room was a novel feature, replacing the china-cabinet that until this time furnished such fashionable rooms. Adam wrote on 11th August 1760 to Sir Nathaniel, “*I have finished the design for Lady Caroline’s Dressing Room, which I must send in a small box*”, also enquiring whether “*Lady Caroline wants to Chuse any particular contrivance about her bookcase, whether she would have it to hold books to the bottom or drawers for clothes etc. below*”. Curzon annotated Adam’s letter in pencil, with the words: “*A place to draw out for writing upon & Convenience for pens & ink. Small drawers about 12 inches in front for different parts of Dress & Two Large (erased) hold a suit of Clothes*”.

In 1769, Lord Scarsdale recorded the house and its contents in his *Catalogue of Pictures, Statues etc.*, and this bookcase is the only piece of mahogany furniture, that he included, clearly demonstrating the very high esteem in which he held it. For nearly forty years William and John Linnell supplied furniture for Kedleston, with their bills totalling just under £3,000, however a payment of £49.16s.2d in 1761 is the most likely to correspond with this masterpiece of design and manufacture.

The Kedleston commission was of paramount importance to both the emerging Robert Adam and John Linnell, who excelled themselves for their cultivated patron, Lord Scarsdale; he surely saw his wish come true: “*Grant me ye Gods, a pleasant seat; in attick elegance made neat*”.

The bookcase is being sold on behalf of the Executors of the late Viscount Scarsdale and the Curzon family for estate planning purposes. The bookcase is expected to realise in the region of £1.5 million.

Notes to Editors:

Christie’s International Furniture Department are auction market leaders and have a long established reputation for the highest levels of scholarship and achieving the strongest prices for works of art. Eight of the top ten lots of English furniture ever sold have been at Christie’s including the record-breaking Anglesey Desk that sold for £1.76 million at Christie’s London in 1990 and still remains the most expensive piece of English furniture sold at auction.