

An exceptional, mid-17th century, burr-yew chest of drawers

Sold



REF: 10947

Height: 94 cm (37")

Width: 98.5 cm (38.8")

Depth: 59 cm (23.2")

Description

The burr yew employed throughout this chest is exceptional. The tight-knots create the most beautiful and desirable, figured surface which has been prized by collectors for centuries. The colour and patina have developed into a superb, rich, warm, lustrous surface. These features are also very tactile. It is exceptionally rare to find a large piece of cabinet furniture, such as this chest of drawers, made from burr yew which is normally used sparingly and reserved for veneers. This indicates that this chest was probably made in the third quarter of the 17th century before cabinet makers used expensive and prized woods more economically by cutting them into thin sheet which were used as veneers. The design is simple and characteristic of the period using geometric mouldings to display the beauty of the burrs to maximum effect. The use of burrs for the top and the sides indicates that this chest was conceived as a fine piece of cabinet furniture

Height 94 cm., 37 in., Length 98 cm., 38¾ in., Depth 59 cm., 23¼ in.

The top is made from two planks of burr-yew faced with a solid, moulded edge. These are exceptionally, large pieces of burr which have been cut to display the prized, tight-knots and figuring to full advantage. The front is fitted with a shallow drawer above three deep drawers, all geometrically inspired and with replaced handles, dust boards and runners so they move easily. The drawers with flat panels and those with projecting, cushion mouldings are interposed to create a contrast and use the different directions that the beam of light hits them to display the figuring of the burrs at their best. Unusually, the sides have moulded panels which, like the top, are made from large pieces of burr and is very rare in English furniture which normally employs inferior woods for the parts that are not seen fully. The bottom mouldings and stile feet have typically been replaced as the originals must have worn down from standing on damp floors or been would have damaged by worm. Second half of the 17th century.

YEW : The yew tree is a native conifer found throughout the UK. It is prized for its warm orange, brown colour with finely, marked growth rings and prominent white sapwood. Good burrs have always been prized and used on fine furniture. They are typically tight knotted with each knot centred by a black pith or eye. Evelyn relates that 'inlayers and cabinet makers most gladly employ it.'

BURR : A large wart-like growth, with twigs sprouting from it, found on the trunk of a tree. Internally the wood tissue is very confused and usually contains numerous dormant bud formations. The wood cut from a burr usually shows very attractive figure and is very highly prized by cabinet makers.

SOLID VERSUS VENEER : At first antique furniture was made from solid wood, but as cabinet making improved, the technique of decorating furniture by applying veneers (thin sheets of wood which can be cut from the tree in several ways) developed. This was an economical way of using expensive woods, and allowed the maker to create decorative effects from the different grains and patterns (called figuring) of the wood.

Veneered furniture has a carcass (solid body) made from a di...