

# FRANK PARTRIDGE

## A Pair of George III Giltwood Pier Glasses Attributed to John Cobb

*Circa 1765*

38 x 88 in high (95 x 224 cm)

*Each with a shaped rectangular divided plate within a scrolling foliate-carved frame, the cresting carved with confronting C-scrolls and rockwork, surmounted by a pair of billing birds and flowerheads.*

### **Provenance:**

Almost certainly supplied to John, 2nd Baron Monson (d. 1774) for Broxbournebury, Hertfordshire, and thence by descent at Burton Hall and sold by the 12<sup>th</sup> Lord Monson.

Broxbournebury mansion dates back as far as 1086 to the time of The Domesday Book. Earliest records show that from 1198 it was held by The Order of Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem until 1553 when the Order was suppressed by King Henry VIII and the estate was granted to Sir John Cock. In 1603 Sir John Cock's son Henry entertained King James here on his return from Scotland to take possession of the throne after the death of Queen Elizabeth I. The estate passed to Henry's daughter after his death who went to marry Sir Richard Lucy. After his death, through marriage, the estate passed to the Monson Family who also owned another estate in Lincolnshire. On inheriting Broxbournebury Lord Monson then sold the house and kept the contents which he took back to his estate in Lincolnshire. In 1768 he commissioned the famous architect James Paine to demolish their Tudor Mansion and build Burton Hall in the county of Lincolnshire which is where the family had lived since 1600.

# FRANK PARTRIDGE

## Literature:

Possibly, the ‘Two Pier Glasses in Gilt frames’ in the ‘Insect Room’ in Broxbournebury, *Inventory of the Household furniture Belonging to the Right Hon’ble Lord Monson and the Hon’ble Colo’n Monson Taken the 6th Day of October 1773*.

A. Denney, *Burton Hall*, privately published, 1950, the pier glasses in the Drawing Room.

This fine pair of Rococo pier glasses was possibly supplied by John Cobb (d. 1778), cabinet-maker and upholsterer of 72 St. Martin’s Lane, London to John, 2nd Baron Monson (d. 1774) for either Broxbournebury, Hertfordshire (the Monson country seat until 1790), or the family’s principal residence after 1770, Burton Hall, Lincolnshire.

Cobb, whose successful partnership with William Vile (d.1767) led to their royal patronage, is renowned for the quality of his marquetry work rather than for carved giltwood mirror frames. However, as the Monson papers in the Lincolnshire Archives show, Cobb was supplying John Monson, 2nd Baron Monson (d. 1774) with giltwood mirror and girandole frames from 1765–71. There are two extant Cobb invoices dating from 1765–66 and 1769–71 addressed to Lord Monson, and there were undoubtedly other Cobb invoices no longer extant. References in these invoices state:

*‘A Large handsome frontispiece for a Chimney Carv’d & Gilt in Burnish Gold wth Borders in Compartmts with Double branches for Candles Wrot leaf Nossels & pans, new Pollishing Delivering and fixing your Center Plate into Ditto with brass plate screws & fixing the Picture in the Top of Do. Compartment £47.5’, ‘2 Paper Mache Girandoles Gilt in Burnish’d Gold with branches for Candles wrot leaf Nossels & Pans, brass plates & Compleat £5.10’, ‘2 Large Handsome Oval Glasses Carvd & Gilt in Burnish’d Gold with Ribbons & Husks at Top Brass plates Screws Compleat £41’, and ‘an oval Jerondole Carv’d & Gilt in Burnishd Gold with branches for Candles brass plates Compleat £8 16’*

Furthermore, the 1773 inventory for Broxbournebury also includes many references to ‘Dressing Glass’, ‘Looking Glass’, and ‘Two Pier Glasses in Gilt frames’ in the ‘Insect Room’ (*Inventory of the Household furniture Belonging to the Right Hon’ble Lord Monson and the Hon’ble Colo’n Monson Taken the 6th Day of October 1773*). The 1809 inventory for Burton Hall notes ‘pier glass in two plates’ and ‘chimney glass’ (*An Inventory of All the Household Furniture Books, Plate, China, Glass, Linen, Wines, Beer, Stores, Carriages, Horses and Dogs, the Property of the Late Rt. Hon’ble Lord Monson taken at His Lordships House Burton by Lincoln, December 5th 1809 & following Days*).

## The Design:

Undoubtedly influenced by Matthias Lock’s *Six Sconces* (1744) and later *A Book of*

**FRANK  
PARTRIDGE**  
*Ornaments*, suppliers of carved work such as carvers such Thomas Johnson (d. 1778), Thomas Chippendale (d. 1779) and John Limmel (d. 1796), and presumably also Cobb, were quick to adopt the fashionable Rococo style in their designs for pier glasses. The present glasses exemplify the ebullience of the English late Rococo style of 1760–70 with their extravagant pierced giltwood frames, C-scrolls, rockwork, and acanthus leaves surmounted by a pair of billing doves, emblematic of Venus, the Roman goddess of love, beauty, fertility and prosperity; the doves facing each other representing harmony and unity. Cobb's first wife Sukey was the daughter of of the famous master wood sculptor and carver, Grinling Gibbons (d. 1721), and Cobb may have been inspired to include billing doves in his composition as a tribute to the Gibbons' incomparable limewood carvings.

### **Comparable Pier Glasses:**

Similar pier glasses are illustrated in the former residence of the late Queen Mother, Clarence House, and at Ragley Hall, Warwickshire, where Cobb's partner William Vile is recorded in expenditure accounts (J. Cornforth, *Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother at Clarence House*, London, 1996, p. 113, no. 102; 'Ragley Hall - II. Warwickshire, The Seat of the Marquess of Hertford', *Country Life*, 29 March 1924, fig. 3).