



18th Century Antique

The Cass chimneypiece, a highly important George I chimneypiece of architectural form constructed of old English marble. The lower section with serpentine shaped frieze, centred with a fluted keystone upheld by plain pilaster jambs. The shelf with an upper tier with two rectangular moulded and recessed panels divided and flanked by fluted brackets, surmounted by an open broken pediment. The statuary crowning armorial shield bears the arms of Cass of Hackney celebrating the union with another. English, circa 1720. See following pages for more information about the provenance of this piece.

Dimensions

Height 93½in (238cm) width 56½in (144cm)

Internal height 37¾in (96cm) width 36½in (93cm)

Reference

G206

Provenance

The chimneypiece bears an escutcheon which is divided by a vertical line into two coats of Arms, in an arrangement known as impalement. This is used to depict the Arms of a married couple, with those of the husband to the dexter, or left as one looks at it, and those of the wife to the right.

The Arms to the left represent the husband's family, and may be blazoned as *a Bend and in sinister chief a Buglehorn*. They are the arms of William Sherd of Sherd and Dishley, co. Chester. The wife's Arms to the right show *a Dexter Arm couped at the elbow habited Azure the cuff turned up Ermine the sleeve slashed the linen in puffs and the hand holding a Fish proper*. The Arms shown are as far as one can tell identical to those granted to John Cass (later Sir John Cass) of Hackney in 1699.

Cass became a merchant, builder and politician who served as Alderman, for the ward of Portsoken and in 1711 was elected Sheriff. He was elected as one of the Tory MPs for the City in 1710; until losing to the Whig faction in 1715. He was appointed a commissioner of the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches, in 1711; this was a scheme to provide new churches for the rapidly expanding population of the metropolis. He was knighted in 1713; and died in 1718 of a brain haemorrhage. He was buried in the churchyard of St Mary Matfelon, in Whitechapel; now the Altab Ali Park.

He was also a philanthropist who founded a school for fifty boys and forty girls in buildings in the churchyard of St Botolph's Aldgate in 1709. After his death, Lady Cass continued as patroness of the schools, but also died in 1732. The school continued for a few more years under the aegis of Valentine Brewis, one of the trustees Cass had named, but was closed down after his death in 1738. In the early 1740s the remaining trustees petitioned Parliament for the permanent endowment of the school, and the will was finally upheld 30 years after Cass's death. This enabled the Sir John Cass's Foundation to be established in 1748. The foundation survives to this day, and the Sir John Cass College has now merged to form the London Metropolitan University.

A statue of Cass is placed outside the Sir John Cass School, at Duke's Place and Mitre Street. He is shown wearing a long wig and the Sheriff's gown. This is a copy of the cast-lead original (by Roubiliac), dated 1751, which is housed in the Guildhall.

Summary of report made by the York Herald on the behalf of Jamb Limited concerning the Cass Chimneypiece (ref G206)

Sir John Cass

Sir John Cass (February 1661 - 5 July 1718) was a merchant, politician and philanthropist. He was born in Rosemary Lane in the City of London. He was the son of Thomas Cass, carpenter to the Royal Ordnance. In 1665, the family moved to Grove Street, in South Hackney to escape the plague.

Cass became a merchant, builder and politician who served as Alderman, for the ward of Portsoken and in 1711 was elected Sheriff. He was elected as one of the Tory MPs for the City in 1710; until losing to the Whig faction in 1715. He was appointed a commissioner of the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches, in 1711; this was a scheme to provide new churches for the rapidly expanding population of the metropolis. He was knighted in 1713; and died in 1718 of a brain haemorrhage. He was buried in the churchyard of St Mary Matfelon, in Whitechapel; now the Altab Ali Park.

He was also a philanthropist who founded a school for fifty boys and forty girls in buildings in the churchyard of St Botolph's Aldgate in 1709. Cass had made a will at this time, but when his health failed in 1718, planned a new version taking account of the extra property he had acquired in the intervening years. Cass began a new will, but by the time of his death only three pages had been initialled. The will - worth £2000 - was contested by his heirs at law Court of Chancery. Lady Cass continued as patroness of the schools, but died in 1732. The school continued for a few more years under the aegis of Valentine Brewis, one of the trustees Cass had named, but was closed down after his death in 1738. In the early 1740s the remaining trustees petitioned Parliament for the permanent endowment of the school, and the will was finally upheld 30 years after Cass's death. This enabled the Sir John Cass's Foundation to be established in 1748. It survives to this day.

He died on 5 July 1718, aged 62. His widow Elizabeth died on 7 July 1732.