



Christopher Clarke Antiques

Dealers in Campaign Furniture
& Travel Items

Lieut. Col. Garnham's Campaign Chest

Sold



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REF: 82797

Height: 102.19 cm (40.2")

Width: 83.79 cm (33")

Depth: 36.18 cm (14.2")

Description

This mahogany chest is important to the history of British campaign furniture.

We have had earlier examples that have followed the design of domestic chests of the period but were made for travel and chests that have been a halfway house in the evolution of the military chest. However, this is the earliest, dateable campaign chest that we know of that conforms to what became the recognised basic design used by most British makers through the rest of the 19th century and into the 20th. That is to say made in two parts, brass bound with flush handles, no overhanging mouldings etc. and removable feet. Added to this, the chest was also owned by quite an important soldier of the East India Company.

The chest has a number of qualities that mark out its earlier age. The brass strap work is longer at 3 inches to each side and fixed with 6 steel screws when you might expect 4. Each corner of each part also has a brass corner strap and they are also larger in size. The corners to the top of the bottom section have a brass lug to fix the chest to corresponding holes to the corners on the bottom of the top section. There are also straps to the middle of the top and bottom where they meet the back. The edges of the chest are very slightly rounded and the drawer fronts cut with a line mould. The flush drawer and side carrying handles are an earlier shape, as are the decorative escutcheons. The blocks to receive the feet are taller than you would expect. The tops of both sections are finished so that the two halves can be used separately.

The quality is also good with fine dovetails to the ash and oak lined drawers. The steel screws are lined up with this attention to detail a good sign of the standard of cabinet making. This is a considered and well-made campaign chest. We know it wasn't a special commission or one-off piece of furniture as we have seen an identical chest, bar the engraved owner's name, in a private collection. This suggests the workshop produced a number of military chests. There are cabinet maker's pencil initials to the back of some of the drawers with E the most prominent, but we have no clues as to the company.

The large, flush brass carrying handles to the left side of each half are engraved 'Lieut. Col.I Garnham Bengal Army'. The top section is also engraved 19 whilst the bottom is numbered 18.

This is a significant campaign chest, belonging to an officer who counted Raffles as a friend and had a very good career in the East India Company. It is also the earliest brass bound, two-part English military chest that we know of. Circa 1825.

Lieutenant Colonel Garnham

Robert Clement Garnham (1782-1827) led a fascinating life. He became a Cadet in the East India Company in 1797 before being gazetted an Ensign as a 16 year old on the 7th of October 1798. A month later he joined the 14th Bengal Native Infantry. On the 7th of March 1803 he boarded the Lord Nelson to return to England on leave but the ship was captured by La Bellone, a French Privateer, in the Bay of Biscay. He spent the next three years as a prisoner of war before first being paroled in August 1806 and then swapped for three French officers in the November. The year before his parole, the HEIC transferred him ...