Secretary for India Red Despatch Box

Wickwar

£1,350

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Christopher Clarke Antiques
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REF: 83795

Height: 10.16 cm (4")

Width: 45.7 cm (18")

Depth: 17.77 cm (7")

Description

A red leather Despatch Box for the 'Under Secretary For India'.

The box is made of red leather on softwood with an interior lined in worn green velvet. It is stamped either side of the lock by the maker Wickwar & Co. and the quality is true to their work. The interior has a raised, chamfered edge to provide a good seal to the top. In addition to this it has a pair of brass lugs to the interior edge of the top, by the handle, to locate to a corresponding brass plate. This served the dual purpose of also allowing a label to be hung from them. The box has a large, gilt brass swan neck handle to one short side to pull it out from where it would be kept with a number of other boxes.

The top of the box is stamped in gilt with two VR cyphers with a crown above on either side of the initials 'I.O.' It can be seen that underneath these initials were a previous pair that look to be 'J.F.' or possible 'J.E.' To the front chamfered edge of the top is 'Under Secretary For India'. The top of the box also has tooled tram lines with decorative elements to the corners. The pair of Victoria Regina gilt cyphers with crowns are also stamped to the front of the box either side of the gilt brass escutcheon plate. Much of the gilt to the tooling has worn or discoloured.

The position of Under Secretary of State for India was a parliamentary position from 1858 to 1937 when it became a civil position until 1948. From the initials which were later over stamped with 'I.O.' (India Office), there is one possible candidate for the original owner, Sir James Fergusson. Sir James Fergusson was Under Secretary For India from 1866 to 1867. Fergusson was a 6th Baronet and Conservative MP for Ayrshire. He fought in the Crimean War with the Grenadier Guards. He left his position as Under Secretary for India to become Governor of South Australia in 1868. He then served as Governor of New Zealand from 1873 to 1874. John Ellis held the position from 1905 to 1907 and also has initials that work but of course Queen Victoria was no longer on the throne during his dates.

It appears that the box remained in use by the office of the Under Secretary after the original owner left the position. A darker 4 by 3 inch patch can be seen to the top where the initials are. This was from a paper label that was stuck down on the leather by a later owner that noted 'Will - Funeral Arrangements etc. Double lock - may need oil.'

The box has plenty of signs of use with wear to the leather at the edges, marks and scars etc. It is a good size and of the type with the handle to the end so that it could easily be pulled out when stored side on in a cabinet etc. with other such boxes. The lock is a period replacement. Wickwar were good, recognised makers of Despatch Boxes and their details note that they were 'Manufacturers to H.M. Stat.y Office' along with their address of 6 Poland Street. Added to this, Official Government red Despatch Cases are much sought after. Circa 1866.

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