

King's College Cambridge: A Henry VII/VIII oak panel, carved with the college arms and royal cypher, circa 1505-37

£7,500



REF: 4100

Height: 18.7 cm (7.4")

Width: 11.8 cm (4.6")

Depth: 4 cm (1.6")

Description

Designed with the arms of King's College Cambridge - three roses, a chief per pale charged on the dexter side with a fleur-de-lys and on the sinister with a lion passant gardant - beneath an Imperial Crown, flanked by the royal cypher 'hR', all within a quatrefoil and lozenge frame, the spandrels carved with a Tudor rose, portcullis, oak branch and palm leaf, with moulded edge, the lower edge stamped twice 'KINGS CHAPEL ROOF 1515', on a custom-made stand.

Work on King's College Chapel began under Henry VI in 1446. It was to become one of the finest examples of late Perpendicular English Gothic architecture, with the world's largest stone fan-vault ceiling. However, at the start of the Tudor dynasty, in 1485, only six bays of the chapel had reached full height and only the first five bays, roofed with oak and lead, were in use. When Henry VII visited Cambridge in 1506 construction had not progressed. A St George's Eve Service of the Knights of the Garter was held and the open end of the chapel had to be boarded up and decorated with the Garter Knights' arms painted on paper. In 1508 work recommenced on a grand scale and upon Henry VII's death, in 1509, the terms of his will ensured it continued at pace. By 1515 the main structure was complete, with Henry VIII responsible for most of the ensuing window glazing and woodwork.

The scale and delicate carving of this panel make it highly unlikely to have formed part of the original timber roof decoration. It is more likely to have been part of a screen or choir stalls. The current screen in King's College Chapel dates from the reign of James I, and employs the H(enriches) R(ex) motif, although the 'h' is capitalised. It was installed in 1633. There are no records of what happened to the former screen and certainly no extant designs. There were further periods when the internal decoration of the chapel changed, but again these are not well documented. The chapel partly collapsed in 1537, which may suggest the panel was carved from salvaged timber at this point.

We are grateful to Tom Davies, Archivist, King's College, Cambridge for his kind input on researching this item.