



N278

An early 19th century English Regency, neoclassical statuary marble fireplace, carved in Italy to the highest quality with crisply and deeply carved undercutting to the sculptural decoration. The centre tablet with a scene from the Roman poet Virgil's epic Aeneid depicting the legendary founder of the Roman race, Aeneas. He recounts the misfortune and destruction of Troy after a ten-year war and his own predestined fate, to Dido his future tragic lover, the founder and first queen of Carthage. Circa 1825-1830. See following page for further details.

Dimensions

To be confirmed

Further details

The rectangular tiered and moulded shelf above the frieze, centred with a rectangular tablet with a very depressed and sorrowful Aeneas seated wearing a Phrygian cap opposite a regal Dido seated on a klismos throne chair with her sister Anna (who actively encouraged Dido's passion and later unknowingly helped in her death) in attendance behind. The scene is lit by a tall flaming torch illuminating wine ewers. To either side are panels caved with half, winged figures and flying butterflies, symbolic of new life after death and resurrection, on ribbon leashes growing from scrolling leafy flowering acanthus. These fanciful beings appear in Raphael's arabesques at the Vatican and were used later by Adam as independent motifs and in his arabesques compositions. The flanking blocks with baskets of summer flowers and ears of corn, allegorical of abundance and fertility. The pilaster jambs are decorated with further geometric arabesque carving, surmounted by capitols of palm leaves with turned ends. The whole raised up on foot blockings.

A comparable statuary marble fireplace with an identical centre tablet and flanking side panels carved by the same Italian workshop can be seen in Benjamin Disraeli's old home at 93 Park Lane, Mayfair.* The house is fortunately well documented and was built by a speculative builder Samuel Baxter in 1823-25, and was purchased by Wynham Lewis, MP for Aldeburgh, in 1827. He employed the firm of Morant, Boyd & Morant, decorators, carvers and furniture makers of 88 New Bond Street, to decorate and furnish the house in 1827-8, and they must have installed the fireplace.** Dido's love affair with Aeneas has made her a sympathetic heroine to all romantics of all ages and has been a tremendously inspirational subject in music, drama, literature and the visual arts.

* London Metropolitan Archive, SC PHL 01503703136.

** Survey of London, Vol. 40, Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, chap. XX.