

# MACKINNON

## FINE FURNITURE

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**John Cobb: A Pair of George III Giltwood Armchairs**

**England, *circa* 1770**

The distinctive gadrooned frame and finely carved knees of these chairs belong to a group of seat furniture traditionally attribute to the celebrated cabinet-maker John Cobb (d. 1778) of St. Martin's Lane and who was 'upholsterer' to George III from 1761.

**Mackinnon Fine Furniture** previously had a set of four carved mahogany armchairs designed in the same fashion with the gadrooned frames. A small group of these superlative chairs are known. A single armchair was sold from the famous Leidesdorf Collection, Sotheby's New York, 28 June 1974, lot 162, a set of four armchairs were sold Christie's London, 23 June 1983, lot 162; and two pairs were sold Christie's London, 9 June 1992, lot 68, and 18 November 1993, lot 54. These mahogany examples are frequently included in research books on English furniture.

In the 1770s, Cobb was known to have supplied a closely related, though less sophisticated, suite of six chairs together with a matching settee to Philip Yorke for Erdigg, near Wrexham, which may still be viewed in the house today.

### **John Cobb (c. 1710-1778)**

John Cobb was born around 1710 in Ashby, Norfolk. He began his career as an apprentice to Timothy Money, an upholsterer in Norwich, in 1729. Cobb married Sukey, the daughter of renowned cabinetmaker Giles Grendey, in 1755. The marriage may well have provided Cobb with useful connections.

Cobb joined in partnership with William Vile (1700-1767) from 1750 until 1765. They occupied 72 St Martin's Lane, which sits on the corner where it joins Long Acre.

Vile & Cobb held the Royal Warrant from 1761 through the end of 1764. There is a sumptuous jewel cabinet in the Royal Collection that Queen Charlotte commissioned from the partnership. The bill describes this piece as 'very handsome... made of many different kinds of fine Woods' as well as having 'all the Front, Ends and Top inlaid with Ivory in Compartments and neatly Engraved.' The Victoria & Albert Museum have an impressive carved mahogany medal cabinet that was almost certainly made by Vile & Cobb for George III. The pair to this piece is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and would have likely flanked a central larger piece of furniture, called 'His Majesty's Grand Medal Case,' which has not survived.

After Vile died in 1767, Cobb carried on with the business with his foreman, Samuel Reynolds (fl. 1751-1785).

In his early career Cobb was better known for his upholstery work while Vile was the primary cabinetmaker, however Cobb demonstrated his great skill at cabinetry throughout the partnership and when he continued the business on his own. Cobb was particularly skilled at impressive marquetry work in tropical woods. Hester Thrale, a friend of Dr Johnson, described the inlaid floors at Sceux, France with 'the most high prized Cabinet with Mr Cobb can produce to captivate the Eyes of his Customers.' One such piece of marquetry furniture by Cobb was an 'Extra neat Inlaid Commode' along with two pedestals en suite for Paul Methuen at Corsham Court, Wiltshire.

Cobb had a number of notable clients during his career, including the 6th Earl of Coventry at Croome Court, Worcestershire, who ordered a large mahogany wardrobe and an extensive suite of seating in the Neo-classical taste. He also received commissions for Burton Hall in Lincolnshire, Uppark in West Sussex, Audley End in Essex, and David Garrick's villa at Hampton, Middlesex.

Cobb died in 1778 having maintained a successful business throughout his career.

An important pair of George III giltwood armchairs attributed to John Cobb. In the French taste, these exceptional chairs have magnificent gadrooned show-frames. The seat, back and armrests are upholstered with silk damask. The elegant cabriole legs similarly gadrooned and terminating in scroll toes with pad feet. The legs and arms further decorated with distinctive carved C-scroll motifs.

### **Literature:**

Comparative Literature

Partridge Fine Art, *Catalogue of Summer Exhibition 1974*, pp. 106-107, offering an identical suite,

comprising six armchairs and a settee, with the provenance of the De Souza Collection, Lisbon.

L. Synge, *Great English Furniture*, 1991, pp. 8-9 for a related pair of chairs

S. Lowndes, 'English Furniture in Portugal', *Country Life*, 24 April 1958, pp. 882 - 883, fig. 2

G. Bernard Hughes, 'Costly Elegance of Gilded Chairs', *Country Life*, 28 November 1963, pp. 1398-1399, fig. 5

Height: 35.83 in (91 cm)  
Width: 27.17 in (69 cm)  
Depth: 20.08 in (51 cm)

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S09.47

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