

# MACKINNON

## FINE FURNITURE

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### VILE AND COBB: A GEORGE III ORMOLU MOUNTED COMMODORE

England, *circa* 1760

This superb commode is part of a small and distinguished group attributed to the London cabinet-makers William Vile and John Cobb. These commodes are discussed at length by Lucy Wood in her *Catalogue of Commodes*. They are characterized by their serpentine form, lustrous mahogany and rich ormolu mounts which copy French Régence patterns produced some thirty years earlier.

There are subtle variations within the group including different drawer arrangements, more or less pronounced serpentine fronts, straight or moulded edge to the tops, ebony around the edges, cockbeading on the drawers and sometimes ormolu carrying handles to the sides.

### Comparative Examples:

A group supplied to Burghley House, Lincolnshire - one from the Blue Silk Dressing Room which compares closest to this commode, with the same drawer combination and two further pairs from the Brown Drawing Room and Pagoda Room.

Two pairs from Blickling Hall in Norfolk (one pair was sold in 1993) - these have straighter sides and lack the moulded edge to the tops.

A pair now in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, having been purchased by Lord Lever in 1914.

Two pairs supplied to John 2nd Earl of Ashburnham, and subsequently sold from Ashburnham Place, Sussex (Sotheby's, 7-9 July 1953, lots 135 and 136. Lot 135 was subsequently sold at Christie's New York, 13 October 2020, lot 14 for \$300,000 and lot 136 at Christie's London, 14 June 2001, lot 140 for £421,750

A single example of slightly smaller scale supplied to the 5th Duke of Bolton for Hackwood Park, Hampshire: sold Christie's, 8 July 1999, lot 62 for £199,500

A single example with a more elaborate carved lambrequin apron, possibly supplied to Richard Grenville, Earl Temple for Wotton House, Buckinghamshire; subsequently sold from the collection of Simon Sainsbury, Christie's London, 18 June 2008, lot 50 for £193,250

### **The Attribution**

These commodes can be confidently attributed to the acclaimed Royal cabinet-makers William Vile and John Cobb based on their association with other related models recorded by the firm and a known working relationship between the cabinet-makers and the houses to which the various commodes were supplied. Most notably, at Blickling there is a payment by the 2nd Earl of Buckinghamshire to 'Vile & Cobb cabinet-makers' in August 1762 for £86.5s.9d which is sufficient to account for the four Régence pattern commodes and one other related example. This additional single commode at Blickling shares the same mounts and other distinguishable features with a documented example supplied by Cobb to James West at Alscot Park in 1766 for £16. Although Vile and Cobb are not documented at Burghley, Lucy Wood suggests they may have been made by Vile and Cobb but subcontracted to them by another firm such as Ince & Mayhew. The commodes at Burghley have considerable variations in construction and a former apprentice of Cobb called Henry Tatham was based nearby in Stamford and employed at Burghley from at least 1772.

### **William Vile and John Cobb**

After Thomas Chippendale, Vile and Cobb were arguably the most accomplished cabinet-makers of the mid-Georgian period, a golden age of carved mahogany furniture. Their work is characterized by confident lines, well chosen, high quality timber and beautifully detailed carving. William Vile (d. 1767) worked initially with the celebrated cabinet-maker William Hallett (d. 1773) before setting up in partnership with John Cobb (1715-1778) in 1751 and establishing their workshop in St. Martin's Lane. They were appointed 'cabinet-makers' to George III in 1761 and supplied a series of superb and celebrated pieces to several Royal residences including Kensington Palace, St. James's Palace, and the Queen's House, now Buckingham Palace.

An important George III ormolu mounted mahogany commode attributed to Royal cabinet-makers William Vile and John Cobb. The serpentine top with moulded edge above two short and two long cock-beaded drawers flanked by ormolu chutes cast with foliage and ormolu masks, the incurved feet with scrolling sabots. The mahogany of fine colour and patina throughout. With superb elaborate ormolu handles and escutcheons.

### **Literature:**

Illustrated: R. W. Symonds, 'English Commodes in the French Taste', *Connoisseur*, March 1957, pp. 16 - 20, fig. 1

Lucy Wood, *Catalogue of Commodes*, London, 1994, pp. 43-53

Height: 2' 8<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" in (83 cm)  
Width: 3' 4" in (101.5 cm)  
Depth: 2' 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" in (64 cm)

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