

MACKINNON

FINE FURNITURE



A CHIPPENDALE SECRETAIRE

England, *circa* 1775

The restrained proportions and neo-classical detailing of this beautiful secretaire are reminiscent of the late work of Thomas Chippendale and would appear to belong to a group believed to have been commissioned from his workshops. In around 1772, Chippendale supplied a secretaire with a marquetry dressing commode *en suite* to his great patron Edwin Lascelles (1712 - 1795) for Harewood House, Yorkshire. On 12 November 1773 a further celebrated example in Chinese black and gold lacquer was also supplied to Harewood by Chippendale at a cost of £26 - this example is now in the collections at Temple Newsam, Leeds. This was described on the invoice as a 'Lady's Secretary' with the 'the front of the Secretary to rise with Ballance Weights'. A further lacquer example was supplied for Mr Robert Child's dressing room at Osterley Park, Middlesex.

Chippendale's mention of the secretary's balance weight mechanism is particularly relevant as it was his own invention and allowed for the seamless rising and falling of the fall front. Hidden within the construction of the case, it allowed the writing surface to appear as if it was suspended in the air with no distracting brackets. Thissecrétaire as well as the others in the group have this unique feature. Other constructional hallmarks of Chippendale's workshop are the hardware used on the drawers whose construction bears the typical finely executed details such as the mitered corners to the undersides, the triangular stoppers to the interior of the carcass for the drawers and the distinctive red

wash visible in areas on the case.

These secretaires all share similarities of form and construction with the *secrétaire à abbatants* found in France at the same time. Although the form was not widely embraced by the English patrons, it allowed the cabinet-maker to exploit the expansive surface of the secrétaire's front to display rich veneers and marquetry as shown by the Harewood House example.

In our example, the beautiful and lustrous satinwood is used as a splendid background for the two meticulously inlaid central ovals with twin-handled urns framed with a fan-patterned border. The absence of any carved or gilt metal ornament only emphasises the restraint of the neo-classical design. When first supplied the strong contrast between the various woods would have been dramatic. The very pale satinwood acted as a foil for the dark purpleheart medallions and the tulipwood crossbanding emphasised the linearity of the piece. The attention to detail is followed through to the beautifully weighted fall front writing surface which opens to reveal a neatly fitted interior with the cupboard below containing three long drawers still bearing the original gilt lacquered handles.

An almost identical secrétaire of exactly these dimensions and marquetry was formerly in the collections of the Hon. Lady Fry at Oare House, Wiltshire (ref. Christie's *Yearbook*, 1966).

Another with ebonized pilasters and square tapering legs supplied to William Windham (1708-1789) for Earsham Hall, Norfolk (Ronald Phillips, *The Legacy of Thomas Chippendale*, Exhibition Catalogue, 2018, no. 19, pp. 89-93).

SOLD

Attributed to Thomas Chippendale

An important and very rare George III Chippendale period neo-classical satinwood secrétaire abbatant, the top with tulipwood cross-banding and boxwood stringing, with a long single drawer in the frieze above a weighted fall-front and writing surface inlaid with a marquetry vase within an oval fan-shaped border, with a series of small satinwood drawers below pigeon-holes surrounding a large central well. The lower section with a similar inlaid vase and border, opening to reveal three graduated long drawers with ring pull handles. The whole cabinet crossbanded and inlaid with tulipwood and boxwood and supported on tapering reeded legs on block feet.

Literature:

Partridge Fine Arts, *Recent Acquisitions*, 1991, pp. 62 - 63 (illustrated)

Mallett, *The Age of Matthew Boulton - Masterpieces of Neo-Classicism*, 2000, pp. 26 - 29 (illustrated)

Ronald Phillips Ltd., *The Legacy of Thomas Chippendale*, 2018, pp. 88 - 93 (the Earsham Hall example)

Christopher Gilbert, *The Life and Work of Thomas Chippendale*, 1978, vol. I, p. 62, fig. 97

Christopher Claxton-Stevens and Stewart Whittington, *18th English Furniture: The Norman Adams Collection*, 1983, p. 125

Antique Collector, November 1988, Norman Adams Ltd., trade advertisement

Christopher Gilbert in Jane Sellers (ed.), *The Art of Thomas Chippendale, Master Furniture Maker*, 2000, p. 30

Judith Miller, *Furniture: World Styles from Classical to Contemporary*, 2005, p.176

Jeremy Musson, *English Country House Interiors*, 2011, p, 140

Height: 4' 11¹/₂" in (125 cm)

Width: 2' 7¹/₂" in (79 cm)

Depth: 1' 4¹/₂" in (41 cm)

Stock Number

S12.80

5 Ryder Street - St James's - London, SW1Y 6PY

Phone: +44(0)20 7839 5671 Mobile: +44(0)7725 332 665

Email: charlie@mackinnonfineart.com Web: mackinnonfineart.com

