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An Important George II Period Serpentine Fronted Mahogany Commode Attributed to the Workshop of William Vile or William Hallett

REF925

H: 33 ½ in (85 cm)

W: 48 in (122 cm)

D: 24 in (61.5 cm)

The well shaped serpentine top veneered in finely figured fiddleback mahogany with a moulded edge over a pull out slide with fluted moulding. The top drawer fitted with leathered writing slide over compartments in solid padouk. The drawers with elaborate cast bronze handles and escutcheons. The front canted corners with applied covering of winged putti, finely detailed foliage, set square and dividers tied with ribbons over an acanthus bracket. The lower moulding carved with flower and dart over shaped bracket feet.

DESCRIPTION

This outstanding commode belongs to a group of related Baroque commodes, generally ascribed to the workshops of either William Vile, or William Hallett. Many of the designs of this group include well-

modelled cherub or putti heads, and here, the carving of the dense West Indian mahogany is of the highest quality. The design and technique of carving are inspired by the work of Grinling Gibbons (1648-1721). An almost identical treatment can be seen in his work at Trinity College Chapel in Oxford.

It would appear to be the pair to the commode in the Mulliner Collection, illustrated in 'The Decorative Arts in England 1660-1780,' by H.H Mulliner, Fig 16. Interestingly, the text states:

'designed specifically for a great house in Yorkshire, from whence it came to this collection. The original owner was a nobleman interested in architecture and the set square and compasses in the ornament symbolise his taste.'

A Pair of commodes clearly by the same maker but less elaborate in form were in the Moller Collection from Thorncombe Park, Surrey, sold by Sothebys in 1993, lot 85.

William Vile of 1700-1767 of 72 St. Martins Lane, London was apprentice to William Hallett and was originally a joineryman in Hallett's employment. He set up a workshop nextdoor to Hallett and the two cabinetmakers evidentially worked closely together. Many payments were made to Hallett by Vile and are detailed in his accounts.

William Hallett was born in 1707 and died in 1767. He and William Vile were both born in Somerset, which might account for their close working relationship.