LOT 29
A GEORGE III MAHOGANY SERPENTINE COMMODE, IN THE MANNER OF THOMAS CHIPPENDALE, CIRCA 1765
the top above a single frieze drawer fitted with a baize line rushing slide and six compartments, with cupboard doors below opening to reveal three graduated drawers, on a plinth base
79cm. high, 126cm. wide, 59cm. deep; 2ft. 7in., 4ft. 1 3/4 in., 1ft 11 1/4 in.

ESTIMATE £70,000-100,000 GBP

PROVENANCE
By repute supplied to Velters Cornewall (1697 - 1768) for Moccas Court, Herefordshire;
By family descent until sold in the 20th century to John Keil;
Thence by descent to the present owner.

CATALOGUE NOTE
Related Literature:
Country Life, Moccas Court, Herefordshire I & II, November 18 1976, pp. 1474 - 1556;
The remembrance of the rides and prospects [at Moccas] has made me take the less delight in those about Hagley,
which are as inferior to yours as the height of Cleat Hill is to that of the Black Mountains. Lord Lyttleton’s letter to Velters Cornwall in 1767 best sums up the beauty of the undulating landscape surrounding the ancient estates of Moccas Court. The house sits high above a bend on the river Wye, defensively guarding the Anglo-Welsh border. Having been a seat of the Vaughan family since the early 16th century it passed in the mid-17th century to the Cornwalls, a distinguished and ancient Herefordshire family descended from Henry III’s brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall. The grandson of the Vaughan Cornwell union, Velters Cornwell, is the likely first owner of the present lot. Born in 1697, Velters represented the Tory government in Herefordshire for forty-six years in seven successive parliaments – indeed, his epitaph in the Hereford Cathedral reads ‘his constituents were preparing to elect him to an eighth parliament’. During his long tenureship as a member of parliament Cornwell was not famous for his attendance at parliament. However, the early 1760s proved to be his most vigorous parliamentary years. Cornwell found himself at the centre of Lord Bute’s contentious Cider Bill of 1763, which proposed the taxation of all English cider to stem the national debt. During the frequent visits to London it is likely that Cornwell would have been made aware of the prevailing London fashion – indeed it is possible to suppose that on the news of Lord Bute’s resignation in 1763 following Cornwell’s quashing of the bill, he celebrated his victories with new purchases for Moccas Court, including the present commode.

Cornwell married three times, but only his third wife bore him children. His son Frederick Cornwell died in infancy, leaving his daughter Catherine, born in 1752, as heir to the family estates. Ever the pragmatist Cornwell stipulated in his will that upon her marriage, the husband would have to adopt the name and arms of the Cornwalls. In deference to this, on their marriage in 1771 the young Sir George Amyand became Sir George Cornwell and the family name continued to be associated with Moccas Court into the second half of the 20th century. Immediately following the Second World War, like with so many great English country houses, a house sale was undertaken at Moccas Court. From researching the catalogue, it is clear that the interiors of Moccas Court were decorated with fine mid-eighteenth century furniture, including a number of commodes attributed to Thomas Chippendale. Although the present commode was not sold to John Keil in this sale, it is clear that it suited the quality and design of Moccas’ interiors. This form of commode was often supplied in a series, with minor variations between them. Unlike parade room furniture such as pier tables or pier commodes, these were intended to be used in adjoining rooms: one in a bedroom and another, matching in the neighbouring dressing-room. The present commode relates to a design for a ‘French Commode Table’ in Thomas Chippendale’s The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker’s Director, 1754, pl. XLVIII. A characteristic of his work is the use of pilasters invariably headed by scrolled brackets above pendent strings of finely carved and detailed husks or bell flowers. Related pilasters are found on documented examples of mahogany case furniture dating from the 1760s, such as the pair of Library Bookcases supplied to Sir Lawrence Dundas for 19 Arlington Street in 1764, and the Library Table and Commode Clothes-Press, both commissioned for Nostell Priory in 1766. However, the commode most similar to the present lot, with almost identical handles and corresponding pilaster supports, was commissioned from Thomas Chippendale by Daniel Lascelles (1714 – 1784) for Goldsborough Hall, North Yorkshire (fig 1; cf. Gilbert, op. cit., pl. 226). The Lascelles would eventually become the Earls of Harewood, responsible for one of the greatest Chippendale commissions of the 18th century. The quality of the mahogany veneers to the Goldsborough Hall commode are closely comparable to those on the present lot, whose cupboard doors are particularly reflective of Chippendale’s exceptional choice of timber and design.

The late dealer John Keil was renowned throughout the English furniture world for his phenomenal eye for colour and patination of timber. The present lot formed part of his private collection, although it has been said that his home and galleries were interchangeable. In the late 1960s John Keil started his eponymous gallery on London’s Brompton Road. His unflinching integrity and extensive knowledge led to the quick succession of galleries in Bath, Bristol and a second London space in Mount Street. Over the course of the next forty years John helped numerous clients, passionate about English furniture, building collections befitting his own taste and scrutiny. It is testament to the great quality of the present lot that he could not bear to part with it throughout his long career.
Fig. 1
The commode delivered to Daniel Lascelles

Fig. 2
Coat of arms Cornewall Family

Fig. 3
A view of Moccas Court, circa 1913 © Country Life