



18th Century Antique

An extremely fine mid-18th Century Palladian overmantle chimney piece in carved pine in the manner of Inigo Jones. The overmantle section is crowned by a broken pedimented shelf centred by a richly carved Imperial Roman eagle, clasping festoons of oak in his beak and talons. The pediment is decorated with dentils and carved acanthus, above a central panel on which an overmantle painting would once have hung, flanked by two pairs of cherubic herms to the front and side elevations. Provenance: Stratton Park, Hampshire, now demolished. *See following pages for further details.*

Dimensions

Overall height 129 $\frac{7}{8}$ in (329.9cm)

Shelf height 62 $\frac{1}{2}$ in (158.9cm)

Exterior width 58 $\frac{7}{8}$ in (149.6)

Internal height 46 $\frac{3}{4}$ in (118.7cm)

Internal width at top 58 $\frac{7}{8}$ in (149.6cm) at bottom 55in (139.8cm)

Footblock to footblock 80 $\frac{3}{8}$ in (204cm)

Depth 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ in (33.4cm)

Overmantle width 81in (205.5cm)

Reference

G381

Provenance

John Russell, 4th Duke of Bedford (1710-1771), is known to have re-built Stratton Park to designs by the architect John Sanderson on inheriting the property in 1732. An elevation, section and plan of the Piano Nobile of the house was published in Vitruvius Britannicus in 1767. The section through the entrance hall and saloon show the presence of a number of Palladian chimneypieces, with continuations, those in the Saloon incorporating broken pediments.

In the second half of the 18th century, with alterations at his primary residence, Woburn Abbey, taking priority, the 4th Duke of Bedford is thought to have demolished more than half of Stratton Park, prior to his death in 1771. The house was subsequently bought by Sir Francis Baring in 1801 who employed George Dance to extensively remodel the house from 1803. There were further changes to the house in the 1840s and the early 1900s when the stove grate shown in the NBR image may have been introduced. In 1961, John Baring, the 7th Baron Ashburton, demolished the building and the contents were dispersed.

The chimneypiece is recorded in a National Buildings Record photograph of an Ante-room in Stratton Park, Hampshire in 1952 (NBR AA52/905). It appears, from the white marble border of the slab, being the same extent as the terms of the plinth and the plinth block fascia height appears being of the same height as the skirting board, that the chimneypiece is a contemporary fixture, whilst the interior marble slips and stove grate are of a much later date.

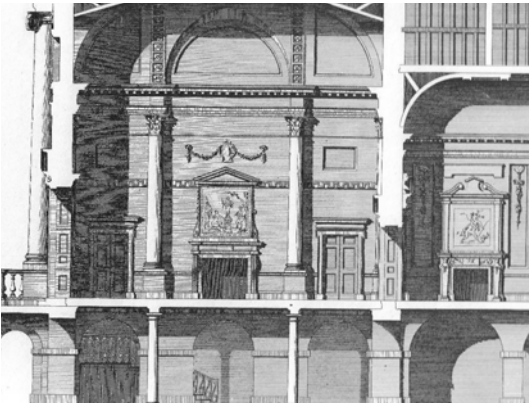
The chimneypiece was subsequently with Crowther of Syon Lodge. That firm's correspondence with the song writer Robert Mellin, of 24 Parkside Knightsbridge, details the installation of the chimneypiece into 9 South Audley Street in January 1976. The chimneypiece, valued at £4,000 by Crowthers, is identified as being Robert Mellin's property and the provenance of Stratton house, Micheldever, Hampshire detailed. Within that correspondence is a photograph of the chimneypiece as set up and photographed within the gallery at Crowther's premises at Syon Lodge, Brentford.

Following its installation, the interior of 9 South Audley Street, Westminster, was recorded by the London County Council in 1977. The view of the ground floor rear room shows the chimneypiece, as installed by Crowthers (London Picture Archive Collage Reference 139457).

The design of the chimneypiece with its tapering pilasters and ionic capitals above can be traced back to a Palladian design published by the architect Isaac Ware in his 1731, Designs of Inigo Jones, a 'Chimneypiece at Chiswick'. The reference is to Lord Burlington's Villa at Chiswick and the chimneypiece within Lady Burlington's bedchamber. However the design has earlier sources, Lord Burlington had acquired many of the drawings of the 17th century designer Inigo Jones, amongst which were drawings by Jones for a continuation for an existing 17th century chimneypiece in the Cross Gallery of Somerset House on the Strand, and it is this, in fact early chimneypiece design that was re-created for Chiswick House.¹ Sanderson however has modified and enriched the Ware's published design, introducing rosettes and reducing husk drops into sunken panels within the pilasters.



The chimneypiece as illustrated in an ante room at Stratton Park by the National Building Record in 1952, ten years before the house was demolished. The slab appears contemporary with the chimneypiece, the interior slips and stove grate probably date to circa 1900.



Section through the Hall and Saloon Stratton Park as designed by Sanderson, Architect and published within Woolfe and Gandon's 1767 Vitruvius Britannicus. A number of continued chimney-pieces with pediments of a related form to that seen in the ante room chimney-piece were prominent features of the building.



A circa 1976 photograph of the chimneypiece as set up within Crowther of Syon Lodge's gallery, Brentford.

The chimneypiece is centred by a fabulously carved mask of Venus reminiscent of Sandro Botticelli's Birth of Venus, circa 1480. In Roman mythology, Venus was the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility and was born of the foam from the sea after Saturn castrated his father Uranus and his blood fell to the ocean. After her birth she came ashore on a shell, pushed along by the breath of Zephyrus, the god of the west wind.

Venus is here depicted on a background of gathered drapery, perhaps reminiscent of the figure of Hora of Spring, who stands on dry land poised to wrap a cloak, decorated with spring flowers, around Venus to cover her beauty. Her hair is articulated in a clear homage to Botticelli's style and is tied under her chin. The frieze is decorated with sprays of acanthus, flanked by corner blocks carved with scallop shells, further references to the mythology surrounding the Goddess's birth. The tapering jambs are capped with ionic capitals and carved with fish scales.

Such angled masks were often a feature of Palladian chimneypieces with the designer William Kent incorporating one within a chimneypiece at Lord Cobham's mansion at Stowe and Isaac Ware within another at Clifton Hill House, Bristol. Variations on the Palladian design, with the architecture enriched with ornamental sculpture were to become increasingly fashionable, such as that fitted into Northumberland House. Similarly, the form of continued chimneypiece was fashionable in the fourth decade of the 18th century and was extensively used by Sanderson, as seen in the engraved section of Stratton Park as well as other chimneypieces known to have been designed by the architect, such as that once in the Dining Room of Kirtlington Park, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

1 See: <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/RIBApix/image-information/poster/somerset-house-strand-london-design-for-the-installation-of-an-old-chimneypiece-in-the-cross-gallery/posterid/RIBA22801.html>



The chimneypiece as recorded within the ground floor rear room of 9 South Audley Street in 1977.

Design for the chimneypiece in Lady Burlington's bed-chamber as published by Isaac Ware in his 1731 Designs of Inigo Jones, Plate 2 (Chimneypiece at Chiswick).

