



## THE FURNITURE HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No. 168

NOVEMBER 2007

### A NEW ERA FOR DUMFRIES HOUSE

As this FHS *Newsletter* goes to press, Dumfries House passes from two hundred and fifty years of ownership by the Bute family to the care of the newly-formed *Great Steward of Scotland's Dumfries House Trust*. This is due, in large part, to the swift action and discreet, good stewardship of Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay, and is, without doubt, an occasion to be celebrated with delight and relief by furniture historians everywhere.

Those who were privileged to visit Dumfries House under Bute ownership experienced a world that had been lost elsewhere — a mid-eighteenth century house with its full complement of original furniture, much of it in the original positions following delivery between 1759 and 1766, scrupulously maintained over two and a half centuries. It is a wonderful collection of furniture that transports the visitor into a real, and not staged, eighteenth-century context. But what really quickens the pulse of the historian and student is the completeness of the underpinning records at Dumfries House. The bills and correspondence (now in the Bute archives at Mount Stuart) that support the repertoire of furnishings, illuminate for us the mind and aspirational thoughts of the man who had this house put together. Like his immediate neighbour, Lord Auchinleck, the 5th Earl of Dumfries was aware that some might have thought East Ayrshire a remote place, similar to Horace's country backwater of *Ullubris*, but his aim was to furnish the house in as civilised and up-to-date manner as possible. As a result, Dumfries House contains Scotland's most important and extensive collection of eighteenth-century rococo furniture. Most of this remains *in situ*, as it was executed, and as such presents an unrivalled opportunity for detailed study of luxury work from London's newest and Edinburgh's top, established firms. So, as well as showing the special relationship between Thomas Chippendale the Elder and Scotland, Dumfries House contains the reference collection of Scottish fashionable furniture of the mid-eighteenth century.

Turning first to the Chippendale connection, Scotland was the proving ground for Thomas Chippendale's early rococo furniture and Dumfries House, after Arniston House,

Midlothian (1757) and Blair Castle, Perthshire (1758), was the first major commission of his 'Director' period. It was thus an experiment and the 5th Earl of Dumfries was certainly aware of this. The correspondence shows him to have been excited by his purchases from Chippendale, picking up on the infectious enthusiasm that the designer had for his own ideas. But, writing to his lawyer Andrew Hunter after he had settled into the new house in 1760, the Earl confessed to finding the new combination of furniture 'monstrous'.

The special relationship between Thomas Chippendale and Scotland stemmed from the designer's association with the short-lived architect and wright Alexander Spens of Lathallan, Fife, who was cited in the *Caledonian Mercury* of 5 April 1753 as co-author of *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director*. A group of Spens's compatriots and keen subscribers to the first edition of the *Director* (all members of the same St Andrews golfing society, also founded in 1754) seem to have propagated interest in the talented Yorkshireman's future and the Leith man, James Rannie, an entrepreneur and provider of venture capital, stepped in to underwrite Chippendale's initial business. As a result, just over twenty-five per cent of the subscribers to the first edition of the *Director* were Scots, with a noticeable concentration around Edinburgh and Fife. In a country with little or no tradition of turned common furniture, as in England, designs that could be applied to square-sectioned timber furniture were in great demand. The early presence of such a relatively large number of copies of the *Director* made an understandably great impact in Scotland. The influence can be seen today — one is as likely to find Chippendale derivative furniture in a croft or crofting museum as in a country house. But Dumfries House was the first



Figure 1 Bedroom table by Alexander Peter, 1759, Dumfries House

manifestation of this important new design influence and this is why it is so culturally important for Scotland.

The Edinburgh cabinet trade gained significant benefit from the desire to embrace new fashion at the start of the eighteenth century. There occurred what can be reasonably described as a 'great rebuilding' of Scotland's antiquated country houses between 1720 and 1760. Replacement of a vertical tower house with a spacious and symmetrical residence influenced by Italian building, often situated very near, or even adjoining, the old place was a practice repeated throughout the country, not just on the fringes of the major cities. But a cheaper way in which to appear modern, without embarking upon a major architectural project, was to re-furnish one's house with articles in the new style. A well-judged enlargement of windows and internal alteration to create sequences of wall piers in the important public rooms would create a little backdrop for some show furniture. However, the rebuilding of stone staircases was very costly, and was attempted rarely. Thus, the new, classically-inspired furniture that one finds in 'modernised' Baronial houses is frequently of diminutive size, as it had to be carried up a turnpike stair to the public rooms that were, traditionally in a Scottish house, on an upper floor. There are items that represent an interesting transition, sometimes enabling the rationalisation of an interior by assuming a function that had once been architectural. The 'Lady's Closet' for example is, in seventeenth-century inventories, a room in which a lady of the house would keep her precious things. By the 1720s it had become an integrated piece of furniture that performed exactly the same function.

This, I venture, was the pattern followed by the 5th Earl of Dumfries. His Lady's Closet, corner cupboard and eagle table, supplied by the Edinburgh wright Francis Brodie in 1753, all appear to be items originally commissioned for Leifnorris, his old house by the River Lugar. When moved by the Earl to the new Adam mansion, they looked ridiculously small, especially the 'marble slab supported by an eagle', which was lost in the great central saloon.

That Brodie's furniture represents the pinnacle of Edinburgh luxury work of its time is without doubt. The Lady's Closet, for example, makes extensive use of padouk wood, with brass inlaid cabinet, drawers, and fashion-leading 'Roman' feet with suppressed scrolls. The Earl was buying the best quality stuff and this closet remains the most significant piece in Brodie's identified repertoire.

Similarly, in the work of Alexander Peter, who supplied most of the seat furniture, beds and tables in Dumfries House, glamorous versions of specific Scottish types are found. For example, the bedroom table, with single long flap and shallow frieze drawer, occurs in most of the bedrooms and is made in solid Jamaican mahogany. This space-saving article appeared, made from less expensive timber, in houses of much smaller size, but survival rate has been low in this domestic context. Interestingly for us, the bedroom table as preserved in quantity at Dumfries House (there are eight of them in the house) can be seen to be the precursor of the standard single-flap Scottish kitchen table that is so familiar to that generation brought up before the nineteen sixties and seventies.

It was refined rococo, not neo-classicism, that came to dominate the third edition of Thomas Chippendale's *Director* of 1762. There was a change in emphasis from the practical novelty of the first edition, to the seriously fashion conscious of the third, in which French ideas were absorbed with greater understanding and *Chinoiserie* was developed to a mature level. The Dumfries House furniture is a response to the designs of the first edition, and is unique in being the largest collection of commissioned furniture from this exciting experimental phase. Alexander Peter's furniture joined in this experiment; the house is full of his variations on the theme of Thomas Chippendale's first-edition *Director* designs. Most obvious are items such as the blind-fretted mahogany sideboard table in the dining room, made



Figure 2 *Wych Elm chair by Alexander Peter, 1759, Dumfries House*

according to plate XXXVI, but less noticeable are features such as the bed cornice, now in Lady Bute's downstairs bedroom, that picks up on a small detail in plate XXVII.

Peter's some-time apprentice and work colleague, the carver William Mathie responded to different design stimuli; his looking glass frames can be related to the work of John Linnell, but with a distinctly Scottish twist in the substitution of thistles for the traditional acanthus as the carved foliage. The thistle serves very well in this role, being robust and in fact more interesting than its classical prototype the acanthus, but its part in the Dumfries House decorative scheme is mainly symbolic. The 5th Earl was a military hero, having served in the War of Austrian Succession where he received particular mention for his part in victory over the French at the battle of Dettingen, 27 June 1743, in which he fought alongside King George II. For this he was made Knight of the Order of the Thistle in 1752, an honour of which he was famously proud. The thistle, and the badge of the Order of the Thistle, is therefore a persistent decorative theme throughout the house, appearing in its plasterwork, carving

and textiles. In this he was imitating his friend Sir Robert Walpole, 1st Earl of Orford, who had done the same thing — but using the badge of the English Order of the Garter — at his house Houghton Hall, Norfolk. The two houses have several parallels that would repay further research. Aside from symbolic work, Dumfries contains what is perhaps the most iconic piece of Scottish rococo carving in existence; Mathie's frame for the painting by Jacopo Bassano in the Dining Room. This light frame, attached to the wall, is delightfully natural, with plenty of Scottish fresh air between its scrolls and floral trails. It was invoiced by Mathie in 1760 at £12.

Supporting the major players, as at every authentic country house, there is a cast of lesser known, and anonymous figures. James MacDowall provided a quantity of plain brown furniture in the decade following completion of the new mansion and there is a substantial run of case furniture, mainly bureaux and chests of drawers, by an unidentified Scottish cabinet maker. They can be verified as such by their characteristic Scottish construction details — such as drawer format and the appearance of strengthening muntins or *munters*.

From the curator's point of view, the house is exciting because it contains spectacular items, but also furniture that relates to the more ordinary Scottish eighteenth-century mainstream. Pieces such as Alexander Peter's Wych elm chairs, or James MacDowall's Scots laburnum snap table are found in their original context; such a rarity now. It has been thrilling to re-unite ensembles within the house collection, including the Brodie corner cupboard and Lady's Closet, the different sets of back stools by Thomas Chippendale and



Alexander Peter, and the original marbled paper-lined trays that belonged to Chippendale's glamorous black and gilt japanned clothes press from the best bedroom. Some of these items had been relegated as early as the eighteenth century — a significant point of furniture history in itself — but this practice of moving and not throwing away meant that Dumfries House accumulated the most fascinating series of attic and cellar collections, perhaps anywhere in the UK. To have had an 'attic sale' or 'sale of debris contents' at Dumfries House, would have been a catastrophe of colossal proportions.

The collection is special in museological terms because it requires no enrichment; nothing has been thrown away and within its general scope is a number of highly important sub-groups. It contains, for example, the best collection of Scottish-made, chimney and hearth furniture by known eighteenth century smiths. However, certain items have been lost over the years and their retrieval must be a curatorial priority. Some articles from the 5th Earl and Countess's family parlour (the North Drawing Room) including an oak version, by Alexander Peter, of the dining room sideboard table, have disappeared and their return would be essential for the re-creation of this particularly interesting room. Perhaps most irritating is the loss of the original Hall Lantern that corresponds to the right hand side of a design in the third edition of the *Director* (plate CLIII). The published design even incorporates the Crichton family crest, a 'wyvern, fire issuant from the mouth all proper'. Like the resplendent best bed supplied by Thomas Chippendale, this lantern is one of the items that was proudly engraved in the third edition of the *Director*, having been successfully made first for the Earl of Dumfries at Dumfries House. It was taken by the 3rd Marquess of Bute, to his London house, St John's Lodge, Regent's Park, from where it passed into the American antiques trade when the house changed hands. It has been in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art since 1943. The lantern was the first piece of Chippendale's rococo work seen by the visitor on arrival, striking a note of the splendours to come. What a magnanimous gesture it would be, in this new era that is about to begin, for the Philadelphia Museum of Art to lend it back. It would complete the irresistible ensemble that is Dumfries House.

David Jones

Hon. Curator of Furniture, Dumfries House

*The FHS actively supported the successful campaign to keep the house and its contents together.*

## THE SOHO HOUSE TABLE

The Soho House table recalls the ancient poets' accounts of banqueting gods and the love feasts of Venus and Bacchus in the Arcadian Golden Age of Peace and Plenty. It is a marble sideboard, conceived as a Roman altar, and is intended to evoke the triumph of lyric poetry, with its golden 'bronze' frame recalling sacrificial tripods dedicated to festive deities. A low-relief filigree of beribboned festoons of flowers including roses, sacred to Venus, garlands its elliptical Roman-medallion frieze, which is hung with lion heads to symbolise the triumphs of the harvest deities Bacchus and Ceres. Accompanying lyres mark the civilising presence of Apollo, as god of poetry and leader of the Mount Parnassus muses of artistic inspiration. The statuary slab is supported and guarded by the Arcadian satyr Pan, whose caryatic veil-draped busts are borne on truss-scrolled, herm-tapered and lion-footed pilasters. The pilaster facades are imbricated with foliated paterae sunk in tablets; while Roman acanthus bearing Apollo's Parnassus laurels issues from their medallioned volutes, whose sunflowers recall the sun-deity's love as recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.



Figure 3 Christie's Copyright, 1998

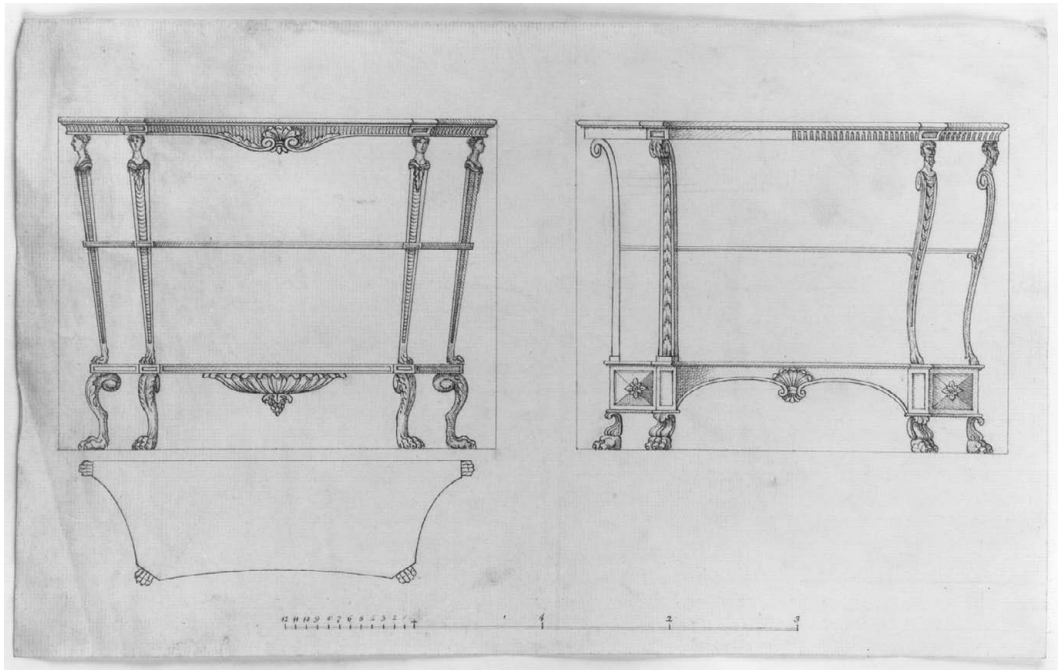


Figure 4 Designs here attributed to the Wardour Street cabinet-maker James Newton (d. 1821), Private Collection

The table, designed in the late 1790s, harmonises with the elegant Roman style introduced at Soho House, Birmingham under the direction of Matthew Boulton's architect James Wyatt (d. 1813), 'Comptroller' of George III's Office of Works. While its ormolu embellishments were executed at Boulton, Watt & Sons's manufactory, it was also intended for the display garnitures of Boulton's other manufactures on both its top and stretcher-tray. The original pattern for its console-pilasters, but with additional satyr-hooves, survives amongst Boulton's alternate designs for such multi-tiered tables. These correspond to the contemporary French *Desserte*, *buffet* or mirror-backed *commode à l'anglaise*. The table's French/antique elegance provided appropriate artistic adornment for a banqueting hall, which also served as an Assembly Room for Birmingham's scientific Lunar Society. (See R. McLean, *Furniture History Society Newsletter*, no. 134, May 1999; and N. Goodison, *Ormolu*, London, 2002, pp. 255, 256 and footnote 330)

John Hardy

## CAMPAIGN TO SAVE BOOKCASE

Lancashire Museums is attempting to save for the nation a magnificent bookcase, made by Gillows of Lancaster in 1772. Culture minister, Margaret Hodge, has placed a temporary export bar on this outstanding piece of English furniture.

The bookcase, of the finest mahogany, was made for Mary, widow of Thomas Hutton Rawlinson, a Lancashire iron-master and West Indies merchant, trading from the port of Lancaster, who had vastly increased his fortunes through his involvement with the slave trade. Gillows spared no efforts to impress their rich and powerful client, employing Thomas and John Dowbiggin to execute their superior workmanship on one of the finest pieces to have been made in Lancaster by the company. It is richly ornamented with carving, marquetry, highly figured book-matched veneers and finely chased silvered handles.

Lancashire County Council's Museum Service has launched this campaign to raise the recommended price of £260,000 so that this important part of our national heritage will be secured for public display at the Judges' Lodgings Museum in Lancaster.

For further information please contact Edmund Southworth, County Museums Officer by emailing [museums.enquires@mus.lancscc.gov.uk](mailto:museums.enquires@mus.lancscc.gov.uk) or telephone 01772 534061.



Figure 5 Bookcase by Gillows of Lancaster

## SUBSCRIPTIONS 2007–2008 YEAR

The 2007–2008 year commenced on 1st July 2007. Those members *who pay by cheque* annually should complete the enclosed form and sent it to the Membership Secretary with the remittance. Members who pay annually by banker's order should ignore this notice. Payment may be made by credit/debit card but this is subject to a 2% surcharge to help recover part of the additional costs to the Society. The scheme for the early notification of events is an option which allows for the sending by fax or first class air postage of the activities pages of the *Newsletter* at proof stage (about three weeks before the receipt of the *Newsletter*). UK members who have not provided a Gift Aid Declaration and wish to do so should tick the box on the form. This provides extra income to the Society at no cost to the member.

The Membership Secretary can be contacted at 1 Mercedes Cottages, St John's Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 4EH (tel./fax 01444 413845).

## FUTURE SOCIETY EVENTS

### BOOKINGS

For places on all visits, please apply to the Activities Secretary, Clarissa Ward, 25 Wardo Avenue, London, SW6 6RA tel./fax 020 7384 4458, enclosing a separate cheque *and* separate stamped addressed envelope for each event *using the enclosed booking form*. Application should *only* be made by members who intend to take part in the whole programme. No one can apply for more than one place unless they hold a joint membership, and each applicant should be identified by name. If you wish to be placed on the waiting list please enclose a telephone number where you can be reached. Please note that a closing date for applications for all visits is printed in the *Newsletter*. Applications made after the closing date will be accepted only if space is still available.

### CANCELLATIONS

Please note that no refunds will be given for cancellations for occasional visits costing £10.00 or less. In all other cases, cancellations will be accepted up to seven days before the date of a visit, but refunds will be subject to a £5.00 deduction for administrative costs. Separate arrangements are made for study weekends and foreign tours and terms are clearly stated on the printed details in each case.

N.B. PLEASE REMEMBER TO SEND SUFFICIENT STAMPED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPES FOR ALL APPLICATIONS, INCLUDING REQUESTS FOR DETAILS OF FOREIGN TOURS AND STUDY WEEKENDS.

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Saturday 24 November 2007, 11.00 am – 4.00 pm

The Annual General Meeting for the year ending 30 June 2007 will be held at Portcullis House, Westminster. This magnificent contemporary building, architect Michael Hopkins, houses offices and facilities for the Houses of Parliament. The AGM will start at 11.00 am (coffee from 10.30 am) followed by Works In Progress talks to be given by Christopher Rowell, Curator of Furniture The National Trust, Treve Rosoman, Curator English Heritage



and Nick Humphrey, Curator, the Department of Furniture Textiles & Fashion V&A Museum. There will also be a short paper delivered by the Society's Chairman, Simon Swynfen Jervis, on current issues relating to private and public collections of furniture.

After a light lunch, there will be private tours of the House of Lords and selected areas of the House of Commons focussing on the architecture and furnishings, which will be led by Malcom Hay, Curator of Works of Art and his colleagues. We are indebted to Robert Wilson, Principal Clerk of Select Committees and FHS member, for facilitating the privileged use of Portcullis House and the afternoon visit.

Admission to the AGM is free but due to security all members wishing to attend must notify the Activities Secretary at least seven days in advance. Tickets for lunch and the afternoon visit are available at a cost of £28 per head and likewise must be booked with the Activities Secretary at least seven days in advance.

## ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

The Lecture Theatre, V&A Museum, South Kensington, London SW7

Saturday 23 February 2008

This symposium has been organised by James Goodwin with the assistance of Simon Swynfen Jervis and Sarah Medlam

### *Ancient Furniture and its Revivals*

10.30–10.35 Simon Swynfen Jervis  
*Welcome*

10.35–10.45 James Goodwin  
*Introduction on Ancient Furniture*

10.45–11.15 Geoffrey Killen (Researcher, Liverpool University)  
*Ancient Egyptian furniture: from the earliest examples of those 'wonderful things' of the New Kingdom*

11.20–11.50 Professor Elizabeth Simpson (The Bard Graduate Center, New York and University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia)  
*The Royal Phrygian Furniture from Gordion, Turkey*

11.55–12.25 Dr Demi Andrianou (Athens)  
*Furniture and Furnishings in Late Classical and Hellenistic Greece*

12.30–13.00 Dr Stephan T.A.M. Mols (Radboud University, Nijmegen)  
*Ancient Roman Furniture: from Herculaneum to the Rhine*

13.00–14.00 Lunch

14.00–14.30 Dr Eileen Harris (Architectural and Decorative Arts Historian, London)  
*Archaeology and/or invention? The neo-classical repertoire and its sources*

14.35–15.05 Dr Mirjam Gelfer-Jorgensen (National Art & Design Library, Copenhagen)  
*Danish Neo-antique. A movement in opposition*

15.10–15.40 Olivier Gabet (Curator of Decorative Arts, Musée d'Orsay, Paris)  
*From Ruprich-Robert to Diehl, Aspects of the Greek Revival in France (1850–1880)*

15.45–16.15 Derek Ostergard (Decorative Arts historian)  
*Through a Not So Distant Filter: Ancient Sources, Modern Furniture 1895–1939*

16.15–16.30 Question and answer discussion followed by tea

Fee: £35 (to include morning coffee and afternoon tea) for FHS members, students and OAPs £30, non-members £40

A lunch of sandwiches and tea/coffee, will be available for members in Seminar Room 3 at a cost of £7.50 per person. There will be a pay bar for soft drinks and wine. Please note that tickets for lunch must be purchased in advance from the Activities Secretary. The regular café/restaurant facilities at the museum will be open.

Subject to availability, tickets will be on sale on the day outside the Lecture Theatre.

#### SUMMER STUDY WEEKEND

Sir Robert Lorimer and the Edinburgh Cabinet Makers — Fife and Edinburgh

Friday 20 – Sunday 22 June 2008

Romantic, revivalist, modernist — all terms used to describe the work of Scottish architect and designer Sir Robert Lorimer (1864–1929). His career coincided with the great collecting and building activities of the late-nineteenth century Scottish industrialists and is linked to the growth of the Edinburgh furniture makers of this period including Whytock & Reid, Scott Morton & Co. and Morison & Co. This study weekend, led by Christina Anderson, who has written on the subject, will examine Lorimer's influences as well as some of the period's most representative interiors. William Lorimer, Sir Robert's grandson, will accompany the group, along with Ian Gow and Dr David Jones on specific visits.

Full programme and application form will be available in December 2007 from the FHS Activities Secretary. Closing date for applications will be 15 February 2008. N.B. Applications for funding for this tour are invited by the Oliver Ford Trust and the Tom Ingram Memorial Fund by 10 February 2008. For details please contact Adriana Turpin, email [turpinadriana@hotmail.com](mailto:turpinadriana@hotmail.com)







## NEWS ITEMS

### SECOND-HAND AND OUT-OF-PRINT FURNITURE BOOKS AND TRADE CATALOGUES

Do you collect furniture trade catalogues, exhibition catalogues or scarce and out-of-print books on furniture? If so, you may like to send for the Book List of a fellow collector who has now developed a selling stock of furniture-related materials. The books and catalogues mostly cover the Victorian and Edwardian periods and all of the twentieth century. For a copy of the Furniture and Interiors List contact Barry Clark on 0161 881 2833, or e-mail at bazu@macunlimited.net, or by post at 36 Zetland Road, Chorlton, Manchester M21 8TH.

### WESSEX FINE ART STUDY COURSES 2008

*The Art and Architecture of Liverpool and the Wirral, 10–13 March, 2008*

This course will include the Walker, Liverpool with its new Craft and Design Gallery and the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight where the tour of its collection of world-class commodes and other furniture will be led by the furniture conservator.

*The Art and Architecture of the North and West Riding of Yorkshire, 29 June – 5 July, 2008*

There will be furniture highlights at Temple Newsam, Harewood, Newby Hall and many private houses. Private visits will include the Georgian houses of Clifton Castle, Constable Burton, Ebberston Hall, Hovingham Hall, Rokeby Park, Stockeld Park and provisionally the distinguished collection at Birdsall House. Specialist lectures will pay particular attention to the work of Chippendale and other Georgian cabinet-makers.

For further information contact Wessex Fine Art Study Courses tel. 023 8055 1872 or tel/fax 01962 771579, email wesfasc@talk21.com

## BOOK REVIEWS

Suggestions for future reviews and publishers' review copies should be sent to Dr Reinier Baarsen, Reviews Editor, Rijksmuseum, PO Box 74888, 1070 DN Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Tel. 00-31-20-6747220, e-mail r.baarsen@rijksmuseum.nl

Petra Krutisch, exh. cat. *Weltberühmt und heiß begehrt — Möbel der Roentgen-Manufaktur in der Sammlung des Germanischen Nationalmuseums* (Nurnberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2007) 88 pp. 87 col. illus. ISBN 978-3-936688-25-2, €10,00.

Achim Stiegel, *Präzision und Hingabe — Möbelkunst von Abraham und David Roentgen, Bestandskatalog XXIV des Kunstgewerbemuseums der staatlichen Museen zu Berlin* (Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2007) 176 pp. 91 col., 48 b. & w. illus. ISBN 978-3-88609-578-0, €24,80.

Andreas Büttner, Ursula Weber-Woelk und Bernd Willscheid (eds), exh. cat. *Edle Möbel für höchste Kreise — Roentgens Meisterwerke für Europas Höfe* (Neuwied: Roentgen-Museum, 2007) 245 pp., 209 col., 62 b. & w. illus. ISBN 3-9809797-5-X, €29,90.

To commemorate the bicentenary of the death of David Roentgen in 1807, three German museums have organized exhibitions on the Roentgen workshop. Each of the catalogues accompanying these exhibitions presents a survey of the holdings of the museum itself, as well as illustrating any loans present in the show.

The Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nurnberg has a small but fine collection of Roentgen furniture, mainly consisting of marquetry pieces. In describing the floral designs of the 1760s, Petra Kulitsch points at the illustrated books on flowers copied in many branches of the decorative arts, and briefly pays attention to flower painting on porcelain which still shows the brilliant polychromy which Roentgen's marquetry also aimed at, and indeed to a great extent achieved originally.

An adjustable reading table of about 1769, the year in which David Roentgen held his famous lottery in Hamburg, has marquetry not just of flowers, but also of birds. The canary on its top is a remarkably early example of the new *à la mosaïque* technique of assembling the picture like a jigsaw-puzzle, rather than using engraving to represent detail. In employing this technique, Roentgen was later mainly to use artificially dyed woods, but in this early example, the species have been selected for their natural colours, the yellow bird being executed in barberry wood. The catalogue illustrates a reconstruction of the original polychromy of this top, and a separate chapter elucidates the other colours shown: the grey of the background and the green of the foliage. Two later marquetry portraits, attributed to the famous specialist Michael Rummer who was employed in the workshop, are also analysed; although by this time most woods were dyed, a surprising variety of species was identified. An illustration of the back of one of the portraits shows the astonishing detail of the workmanship as well as the original colours.

Achim Stiegel's book accompanying the Berlin exhibition is published in the Kunstgewerbemuseum's series of catalogues of its holdings, and it is organised as such. The first part describes the Roentgen furniture in the collection of the museum, as well as that lent to the exhibition, the second part presents three pieces by followers of Roentgen, and the third deals with furniture formerly in the museum but lost since the war.

The catalogue entries are very detailed. One of the foremost pieces in the exhibition, the famous Walderdorff desk on loan from the Rijksmuseum, is already characterised by a multiplicity of sophisticated devices, although it still lacks the smooth mechanisms of the next item in the catalogue, the great desk delivered to Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia in 1779. This combines beautiful construction, detailed marquetry and sumptuous gilt bronze mounts with many astonishing mechanisms, the work of Christian Krause. The third great masterpiece in the exhibition was a mechanical desk delivered in 1785-86 to Catherine the Great. Set with gilt bronze mounts by François Rémond, it was on loan from the Hermitage.

The thought-provoking section on some Roentgen followers reflects how these have not yet been as fully researched as the master himself. For example, a desk from Schloss Charlottenburg is described in old inventories as the masterpiece of 1799 by Georg Stein who had worked with Johann David Hacker, a former assistant in Roentgen's workshop. Dendrochronological testing, however, points at this piece having been made somewhat later. It is clearly related to Roentgen's work, but the question of its maker — possibly Christian Härder in Brunswick? — must remain unresolved.

The Berlin catalogue contains a very useful CD showing the three afore-mentioned masterpieces being completely opened up and all their secrets revealed.

The Neuwied catalogue has a number of introductory essays, many of which contain new material. Bernd Willscheid's contribution on Abraham Roentgen's clients during his activity in Herrnhaag between 1742 and 1750 describes some unusual deliveries to the Princes of Wied, such as three magnifying glasses. Ian Fowler has interesting insights in the dating of clock movements by Roentgen's collaborator, Kinzing, based not only on their complexity. His knowledgeable presentation of the clocks in the Neuwied collection includes many technical explanations and identifies distinguishing features of Kinzing's output. Vincent van Drie presents a circular tilt-top tea-table of English type, originally

owned by Peter von der Leyen, which he convincingly attributes to Abraham Roentgen on the basis of the engraved brass inlay work. An important discovery is the identification by Wolfram Koeppé of a marquetry writing desk with a superstructure, now in the Danske Kunstindustrimuseet in Copenhagen, as the first prize in the 1769 lottery. This desk was considerably altered in later years, but a detailed technical investigation has revealed that it originally had the clavichord and the sliding doors mentioned by David Roentgen in his lengthy description in the lottery announcement. Ralf Buchholz's contribution on the technical side of Roentgen's marquetry sheds new light on the red mastic used to fill engraved details. The last essay, by Volker Dömling and Gerrit Schlörer, also deals with the technical side and is particularly revealing on matters of construction.

In contrast to the two other catalogues, this one also illustrates furniture from the earliest phase of the workshop, such as an unpublished desk and table of about 1745. The attribution to Abraham Roentgen of some pieces, like a carved oak table and a number of caskets, might have been elucidated more clearly, as they do not entirely conform to his known repertoire of forms. Other items, of markedly Dutch shape, should also be investigated more closely, as recent scholarship indicates that these are actually often of Dutch origin. However, these reservations concern only a limited number among the large assembly of furniture shown. Many pieces have a known early provenance and these are presented not in a chronological sequence, but linked to the portraits of their original owners.

Together, and individually, the three catalogues offer many new illustrations and a considerable amount of novel material concerning Roentgen's work.

Christine Cornet

The Knight of Glin and James Peill, *Irish Furniture, Woodwork and Carving in Ireland from the Earliest Times to the Act of Union, Including A Dictionary of Irish Furniture-Makers* by John Rogers (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007) 324 pp., 400 col., 100 b/w illus. ISBN 978-0-300-11715-8, £50.

This long-awaited, lavish book breaks new ground on a previously neglected subject. The title reflects the fact that it reaches beyond furniture, incorporating a broad range of objects. Tables, chairs and frames predominate, but staircases, door-cases, fireplaces, coaches, peat buckets, harps, clocks, a doll's house and even miniature furniture are also described. The majority of objects illustrated date from the eighteenth century and the survey finishes at 1800. There are some impressively early examples, such as the tenth-century square yew gaming board decorated with Celtic interlacing and the elegantly carved, late fifteenth-century oak misericords of Limerick Cathedral, from an era where little woodwork otherwise survives.

The book begins with an illustrated chronology over six chapters, not only analysing furniture makers but also specific houses, their owners and contents. The second half is an illustrated typological catalogue of furniture, which facilitates the identification of characteristics distinguishing Irish items from their English counterparts. Typically Irish are cabriole legs with a 'break' half way down, often terminating in hairy, squared lion's-paw feet; many eighteenth-century chairs have their legs linked by stretchers (a robust feature also characteristic of subsequent Irish vernacular chairs). Tables from that era have pendulous carved aprons with generous swags of fruit, foliage, baskets of flowers, lion's masks, eagle heads, oak leaves, shells and acanthus. The finest cabriole legs terminate in plain, panelled club feet, or a tripod foot made up of scrolled volutes. The Queen Anne style lasted longer than in England, and dating is hampered by the fact that most Dublin cabinet makers relied on English pattern books. A further section of the book focuses on the differentiation of Irish versus American examples.

The definition of Irish is subjective; substantial amounts of furniture were imported from England and many English cabinet makers visited and worked in Dublin. Thomas Johnson's recently discovered autobiography reveals that this London carver and designer admired the work of one of his most celebrated Irish colleagues, John Houghton 'the best wood-carver, for basso relievo figures, I ever saw ...' and the two craftsmen worked together during Johnson's visits to Dublin in the 1740s and 1750s. John Houghton (died 1774) trained at the Dublin Society Schools. He carved extraordinarily fine detail in oak as well as mahogany, and his symbolically Irish picture frames show a wonderful fluidity. Dangling tasseled ropes, an Irish harp and convoluted acanthus display a confident flamboyance reminiscent of Grinling Gibbons' technique in lime.

The inclusion of a dictionary of nearly a thousand Irish furniture makers, with their addresses and dates and often other information, is a valuable touchstone for identification of attributed or labelled furniture. This work by John Rogers is ongoing, and is based on research gathered from dozens of Dublin newspapers, as well as some from Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Belfast.

The majority of early inventories were destroyed in the Four Courts fire of 1922 and the War of Independence accounted for the burning of many 'Big Houses' and their contents. Given Ireland's troubled history, the assemblage of so much material is all the more impressive. Included are some rare photographs of opulent interiors taken before this period. Interspersed throughout are reminders of the turbulence of Irish life. Elizabeth Freke, who married her cousin, a settler, and was frequently away from her county Cork castle, described returning in 1692 to discover 'neither a Bed, Table, or chair, or Stool fit for a Christian to sett on ... and this was the Fifthe time I came to bare Walls and a Naked House since I was married'.

The prodigious research of Toby Barnard into the material culture of the Irish aristocracy is duly acknowledged and quoted, so that his book of 2005, *A Guide to Sources for the History of Material Culture in Ireland, 1500–2000*, must have been published too late to be included in the bibliography. It is a shame that the index is rather short; it omits objects or materials and does not do justice to a book of this breadth and stature.

Claudia Kinmonth

Reinier Baarsen, *Furniture in Holland's Golden Age* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum/Nieuw Amsterdam, 2007) 192 pp., 182 col. illus. ISBN 978 90 868 9014 9, €29,95

English furniture pundits have many preconceptions about Dutch furniture, most of them wrong. This is partly a problem of historiography, imbued as we are with the work of early-twentieth-century writers like Macquoid, Cescinsky and Symonds, who themselves were inheritors of nineteenth-century assumptions and attitudes. It is also a problem of language, since few of us read Dutch. Reinier Baarsen's most recent book, available in English as well as Dutch, will change many of our ideas. Its academic aspirations are modest (there are no footnotes or endnotes), but it offers a much needed, up-to-date account of Dutch seventeenth-century furniture.

The book is a series of essays based on objects in the Rijksmuseum collection, covering the period 1600 to 1700 — Holland's 'Golden Age' — in chronological order. Baarsen begins with a discussion of Dutch interior paintings, and questions whether these images represent real interiors and real furniture. He concludes that paintings must be interpreted with caution, for the artists and the sitters almost always had ulterior motives. Thus, although an important source of information, paintings 'do not present a reliable picture of the true significance of furniture in interiors, and they only reflect some stylistic developments in furniture making'. This is a lesson which applies equally to English portraits and



conversation pieces of the eighteenth century, which often seem unnaturally empty of objects, oddly inconsistent with the crowded interiors recorded in contemporary inventories. Baarsen goes on to suggest that the furnishings of rich Dutch houses are more realistically represented by two extraordinary dolls' houses, one made for Petronella Dunois (c. 1676) and the other for Petronella Oortman (c. 1686–1710). These wonderful survivals preserve many details, such as the fabric coverings of rush-seated chairs, which would otherwise be lost.

Early-seventeenth century furniture is considered in a chapter on the *kistenmakers* or *schrijnwerkers*. These were equivalent to English joiners, working primarily in oak using frame-and-panel construction. As in England, they were regulated by guilds or trade companies, and their furniture related closely to the internal architecture of Dutch houses. The parallels with contemporary English work are compelling, but a great deal more is known about this period in Holland than in England. Given that, on the whole, English archival sources are much more complete than the Dutch, this reflects poorly on English furniture scholarship. It is about time this neglected but very important period of furniture history was given some serious attention.

The auricular style briefly took centre stage in Holland in the middle of the seventeenth century. Baarsen reveals that the contemporary term for this style was *fratsen en snakerijen* — jokes and pranks — which places it in a new light. There was a problem, of course, in adapting auricular forms to the essentially rectilinear structure of joined furniture, which is why auricular was best expressed in carved work, such as table and mirror frames. This is also where we see its impact on English furniture-making. Ham House is remarkable in having several examples of mildly auricular furniture — the frames of the squabs in the Green Closet and the sideboards in the Marble Dining Room, for instance — and there are other little-studied examples such as the side-chapel altar table designed by Sir Christopher Wren for St Paul's Cathedral. There is clearly potential for further research here.

Almost half the book is devoted to tracing the development of Dutch cabinet-work, beginning with the *ebbenhoutwerker* of the early seventeenth century. Not unnaturally, the traditional *kistenmakers* saw the ebony workers as competitors, but time and fashion were on the side of the latter. In 1626 the ebony workers of Amsterdam achieved official recognition, and by the middle of the seventeenth century ebony, as well as other exotic woods, was being routinely employed alongside oak and walnut. However, it was not until the third quarter of the seventeenth century that the modern style of veneered cabinet-making triumphed in Amsterdam and The Hague. Baarsen's discussion of Dutch cabinets and the development of floral marquetry again throws an illuminating sidelight on English furniture studies. The Dutch preference for large two-door cabinets, whose relatively featureless exteriors belie the highly decorated interiors within, is in contrast to English examples where the exterior is as richly adorned, and stylistically consistent with, the interior. Baarsen explodes the myth of Dutch primacy in floral marquetry, pointing out that this was a nineteenth-century fallacy. Despite the leading role of Dutch émigrés such as Pierre Gole in Paris and Leonardo van der Vinne in Florence, there is no evidence for a school of floral marquetry in Holland before the emergence of Jan van Mekerén in Amsterdam in about 1687. Thus *blomwerk* developed late in comparison with Paris and London, and when it did it was chiefly associated with a craftsman, Van Mekerén, who had worked in London, and possibly in Paris as well, before returning home. In this short discussion (and this only scratches the surface of a complex and fascinating debate), Baarsen does more to clarify the relative positions of England and Holland than any number of previous scholars have done.

There is a short discussion of the similarities between English and Dutch chairs, and the consequent difficulties in attribution. These have been exacerbated, as we are now becoming increasingly aware, by a healthy trade in historicist furnishings between Holland and

England from the early nineteenth century onwards. This is the likely origin of most of the Dutch furniture in English stately homes.

The highlight of the book is the spectacular, recently discovered cabinet by Wilhelm de Rots (b.1616). The cabinet was made for the widow of the *stadhouder* Frederik Hendrik, Amalia von Solms, and can be dated between 1654 and 1668 by inventory evidence. It is veneered with exquisite *partie* and *contre-partie* marquetry of ivory and turtleshell whose meaning is miraculously revealed in a contemporary poem by Jan Zoet. The entire piece is an allegory of the House of Orange and its role as protector and heart of the nation. De Rots worked in The Hague but, significantly, was not a member of the Hague guild of ebony workers and was probably therefore trained in a different tradition. Baarsen suggests that De Rots may have been German, where such marquetry had been developed in the sixteenth century, or had possibly trained in Paris. Further light on De Rots' origins might have been gleaned from a thorough technical analysis, which is lacking, but this new discovery will no doubt reward further investigation.

In a short final chapter Baarsen discusses the influence of French art and design from about 1685 onwards, and in particular the role of Daniel Marot. This well-rehearsed material acts as coda to the main text, ushering in the eighteenth century and with it the end of Holland's Golden Age.

Adam Bowett

## SHORTER NOTICE

Kristel Smentek, *Rococo Exotic: French Mounted Porcelains and the Allure of the East* (New York: The Frick Collection, 2007), 52 pp., 22 col., 7 b. & w. illus. ISBN 978-0-912114-36-1, \$15.95.

This handsome publication accompanied the small eponymous exhibition held in 2007 at the Frick Collection, which centered on the Frick's well-known pair of Chinese blue porcelain vases mounted in gilt bronze in Paris in the middle of the eighteenth century. It contains a well-researched, wide-ranging essay on French Rococo mounted porcelain, with particular emphasis given to the complementary taste for Oriental porcelain and for the shells which are represented on the mounts. Good use is made of contemporary sources (all fully quoted in the original French in the footnotes) and the bibliography is admirably up-to-date. The actual vases themselves are somewhat cursorily dealt with. Technical remarks are partly hidden in footnotes and a list of comparable examples is given in a non-illustrated appendix. In particular, the origin of the porcelain components is not clearly elucidated; the suggestion — as opposed to the view expressed by Ted Dell in his 1992 catalogue of the Collection — that the bodies and the lids stem from the same pieces, is not clearly or convincingly presented.

## REPORTS ON THE SOCIETY'S ACTIVITIES

SILVER AND FURNITURE, FHS SYMPOSIUM, Saturday 3 March 2007

Dr Tessa Murdoch, Deputy Keeper of the Sculpture Metalwork Ceramics and Glass Department at the V&A Museum and organiser of this year's symposium, has compiled the following bibliography as reference for the subject.

Dr András Szilágyi, *Die Esterházy-Schatzkammer, Kunstwerke aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, Kunstgeweremuseum, Budapest, 2006:  
Catalogue no. 63 house altar; no. 79, armchair.

- Nicholas Barker, *The Devonshire Inheritance, Five Centuries of Collecting at Chatsworth*. Art Services International, Alexandria, Virginia, 2003:  
Catalogue no. 26 perfume burner with maker's mark PR in a shield, c.1690; no. 29 engraved silver table top by Blaise Gentot, c. 1700.
- Mogens Bencard: 'Hertiginnan Hedvig Sophis's toalettsservis' in *Kung Sol i Sverige*, exhibition catalogue, Stockholm 1986.
- Mogens Bencard, *Silver Furniture*, Rosenborg, 1992.
- Michèle Bimbenet-Privat, *Les orfèvres et l'orfèvrerie de Paris au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols, Paris, Commission des Travaux historiques de la Ville de Paris, 2002.
- Boesen, 'Le Service de Toilette français de Hedevig Sofia' in *Opuscula in Honorem C. Hernmarck*, Stockholm, 1966.
- Frances Buckland, 'Gobelins tapestries and paintings as a source of information about the silver furniture of Louis XIV', *The Burlington Magazine*, May 1983, no. 962, CXXV, pp. 271–83.
- Maureen Cassidy Geiger, "'Quelquechose de beau et de bon goût': A silver-gilt toilet service for the Dresden Doppelhochzeit of 1747 in Rococo Silver in England and its Colonies'. Papers from a symposium at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, 2004, *Silver Studies: The Journal of the Silver Society*, no.20, pp. 46–57.
- J. W. Frederiks, *Dutch Silver II*, The Hague, 1958.
- Philippa Glanville and Hilary Young, ed., *Elegant Eating, Four hundred years of dining in style*, V&A Publications, 2002:  
p. 19, Robert Adam's design for the sideboard alcove in the Dining Room at Kedleston.
- Philippa Glanville, *Silver in England*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1987:  
Fig. 114, The south dining room, Burghley, 1820, showing the buffet display.
- J. F. Hayward, *Huguenot Silver in England, 1688–1727*, 1959:  
Fig. 87, Silver throne and footstool, Nicholas Clausen, 1713.
- H. Hoos, *Augsburger Silbermöbel*, I–II, Frankfurt am Main, 1985.
- Wolfram Koeppe, 'Toilet Set with Leather Case' in *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Fall, 2006, pp. 40–41:  
Illustrates case and its complete contents of 48 items from Counts Schenk von Stauffenberg, Schloss Jettingen, Germany.
- James Lomax and James Rothwell, *Country House Silver from Dunham Massey*, The National Trust, 2006:  
Illustrates, p. 84, The Bowes tea kettle and stand, Simon Pantin, 1724 from the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and, pp. 90–91, the tea and coffee tables by James Schruder and David Willaume, 1741–42.
- Gérard Mabilie, 'Les tables d'argent de Louis XIV', *Versalia*, No. 1, 1998, pp. 60–64.
- Gérard Mabilie, 'Le Grand buffet d'argenterie de Louis XIV et la tenture des Maisons royales', *Objets d'Art — Mélanges en l'honneur de Daniel Alcouffe*, Dijon, Éditions Fatou, 2004, pp. 180–191.
- Paul Micio, 'L'Orfèvrerie religieuse de Louis XIV et les sculptures murales de la chapelle royale de Versailles', (forthcoming).
- Jennifer Montagu, *Gold, Silver and Bronze, Metal Sculpture of the Roman Baroque*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1996:  
See especially Altar frontal by Antonio Arighi on the models of Agostino Corsini and Bernardino Ludovisi, Lisbon, Museo de São Roque.
- W. Rieder, 'An Eighteenth Century Augsburg Cabinet', *The Burlington Magazine*, 112, 1970, pp. 33–37.
- Jane Roberts, ed., *Royal Treasures: A Golden Jubilee Celebration*, 2002:  
Catalogue no. 78, Silver table and mirror, attributed to Andrew Moore, 1699.
- Jane Roberts, ed., *George III & Queen Charlotte, Patronage, Collecting and Court Taste*, 2004:  
p. 27, Queen Charlotte at her dressing table, Johann Zoffany, 1765.

- A. J. H. Sale and Vanssa Brett, 'John White: some recent research', *Silver Society Journal*, No. 8, Autumn 1996, pp. 474–76.
- Rudolph G. Scharmann, *Charlottenburg Palace, Royal Prussia in Berlin*, Prestel, 2005: p. 64, The Court Silver Chamber.
- Scheurleer, T. H. Lunsingh, 'Silver Furniture in Holland', in *Opuscula in Honorem C. Hernmarck*, Stockholm, 1966.
- M. Thèry and F. Waks, *Le Temps: Versailles in the Age of Louis XIV*, Reunion des Musées Nationaux, English edition, 1993:  
 Illustrations include: p. 37, Reparations made to Louis XIV by the Doge of Genoa in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, tapestry design, showing silver throne, incense burners and giant vases and torches; p. 66, tapestry from the Royal Gobelines factory showing Louis XIV's visit to the Gobelines in 1667; and p. 85, Light meal in the sixth bedroom of the King's Apartments, engraving by Trouvain, 1696.
- Matthew Winterbottom, '"Such massy pieces of plate"', Silver furnishings in the English royal palaces, 1660–1702', *Apollo*, August 2002, pp. 19–26.

















#### THE OLIVER FORD TRUST AND TOM INGRAM MEMORIAL FUND

In line with one of its roles — the promotion of interest in interior design — the Oliver Ford Trust has generously expressed the desire to sponsor a place on each FHS study weekend or foreign tour. Applicants should either be a student with a particular interest in interiors, or a junior museum professional. Applications from non-members will be considered. Grants will be awarded via the Tom Ingram Fund, to which candidates should apply.

The Tom Ingram Memorial Fund makes grants towards travel and other incidental expenses for the purpose of study or research into the history of furniture (a) whether or not the applicant is a member of the Society; (b) only when the study or research is likely to be of importance in furthering the objectives of the Society; and (c) only when travel

could not be undertaken without a grant from the Society. Applications towards the cost of FHS foreign and domestic trips and study weekends are particularly welcome from scholars. Successful applicants are required to acknowledge the assistance of the Fund in any resulting publications and must report back to the Panel on completion of the travel or project. All applications should be addressed to Adriana Turpin, Secretary to the Fund at 39 Talbot Road, London W2 5JH, Turpinadriana@hotmail.com, who will also supply application forms for the Oliver Ford Trust grants on request. Please remember to send a s.a.e. with any request.

## COPY DEADLINE

The deadline for receiving material to be published in the next *Newsletter* is **15 December**. Copy should be sent, preferably by e-mail, to [laura.houliston@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:laura.houliston@english-heritage.org.uk) or posted to Ms Laura Houliston, 44 Harrow View Road, London, W5 1LZ, tel. 020 8810 4718.

## OFFICERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS

*President: Sir Nicholas Goodison*

*Chairman of the Council: Simon Swynfen Jervis*

*Honorary Secretary: Lisa White*

*Honorary Treasurer: Martin Levy*

*Honorary Editorial Secretary: Jonathan Marsden*

*Council Members: Christopher Payne, Eleanor Tollfree, Adam Bowett, James Yorke, James Rothwell, Matthew Winterbottom*

*Honorary Newsletter Editor: Laura Houliston*

*Activities Committee Chairman: Caroline Rimell*

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY (MEMBERSHIP, SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, AND PUBLICATIONS): Dr Brian Austen, 1 Mercedes Cottages, St John's Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 4EH. Tel. and fax 01444 413845

ACTIVITIES SECRETARY (EVENTS BOOKINGS): Mrs Clarissa Ward, 25 Wardo Avenue, London SW6 6RA. Tel. and fax 020 7384 4458

*FHS e-mail: [furniturehistorysociety@hotmail.com](mailto:furniturehistorysociety@hotmail.com)*

*Web site: [www.furniturehistorysociety.org](http://www.furniturehistorysociety.org)*

*This issue edited by Laura Houliston*

*Published by the Furniture History Society c/o Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department, Victoria and Albert Museum, London SW7 2RL*

*Produced in Great Britain by Oblong Creative Ltd, 416B Thorp Arch Estate, Wetherby LS23 7BJ*

*The reviews in this Newsletter are published as the views of those persons who wrote them. They are accepted as accurate and honest expressions of opinion; those who wish to do so should communicate with the reviewer direct.*