



THE FURNITURE HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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A JOHN HARRISON PRECISION PENDULUM-CLOCK OF 1727 AT LEEDS MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

A recent collections review at Leeds Museums and Galleries served to remind collections staff of a highly important wooden movement Harrison clock, signed by James Harrison, the younger brother of John Harrison. Specialist clockmaker and conservator Andrew King, who has made an extensive study of Harrison's early formative work, especially the wooden movement clocks, was contacted and recognised the importance of the clock. A founder member of the Harrison Research Group, Andrew King along with others such as William J. H. Andrewes, Jonathan Betts and Dava Sobel, has done much to raise awareness of the incredible story behind the quest for longitude. The precision pendulum-clock is the second of a series of three, and dated 1727. William Wyrill Sissons bequeathed it to Leeds City Council in the 1970s. How the Sissons family acquired it, or exactly when, is not known yet, but it is being researched. From what is known presently precision pendulum-clock No. 2 was with the Sissons for a considerable time. With research on No. 2 taken as far as it could be, treatment options were agreed and carried out.

John 'Longitude' Harrison (1693–1776) was an accomplished joiner (his original metier), but he turned out to be a very fine engineer, an original thinker, a Copley medallist and ultimately the winner of the Longitude Prize for finding the practical method of determining longitude. Once out of sight of land, fixing position became increasingly difficult, often with tragic consequences. Dead reckoning has an ominous ring to it, and that method of navigation frequently led to disaster simply because the ship's master and crew did not know where they were. Passed by Parliament in 1714, The Longitude Act set out the terms and conditions of what can be considered to be the first government sponsored research and development project. Many methods and ideas for determining longitude, some of them completely hare-brained, were subsequently explored. The time difference principle was one approach: by setting a reliable timekeeper to the time at a known longitude, for example the ship's home port and comparing this to local time — which could be

accurately determined by observation of the sun and stars — the time difference could then be converted to an east or west distance from the fixed geographical point that the timekeeper represented. The challenge, of course, with this methodology was the development of extremely accurate and reliable timekeepers, that would be unaffected by the movement of the ship, and high variations in temperature. Developing accurate timekeepers was Harrison's approach to the problem. The importance of Harrison's contribution to the growth of empire, projection of naval power, economic growth, and lives, ships and cargos saved cannot be overstated. Ship's chronometers revolutionised navigation and map-making, and were still being used for determining longitude until the advent of the Global Positioning System in 1984. Harrison's quest for accurate timekeeping became quite a marathon over several decades, initially working on developing large sea-clocks, before realising that the answer lay in a different direction; and then heroically setting off on a new course, departing from decades of work and accepting that the path followed could not really have been any other.

The eventual outcome, H4, appeared to be an oversized pocket watch but, crammed full of technical innovations, represented the rocket science of the day in many respects. That Britain led the way in extremely accurate timekeeping there can be no doubt, and Harrison was its vanguard. The eighteenth century was a period of rapid growth and change in Britain, which became, by the end of the century, the world's first superpower, with an empire the likes of which had not been seen before or since. Like the Lunar Men, Harrison was very much part of that heady mix of science, politics, business, dynamism and ambition that made it all possible. Indeed, many of Harrison's technical innovations are with us today, caged roller bearings and bimetallic springs to name only two. What makes his story all the more astonishing is that he was largely self-taught. John Harrison had an inventive, lateral-thinking and resourceful mind. Despite the relative isolation of North Lincolnshire, where initially he lived and worked, his work has indications that he was influenced by clockmaking and shipbuilding trades in Hull, across the Humber estuary, a rapidly developing city in the eighteenth century.

John Harrison was born in the West Riding of Yorkshire, at Foulby, which was at the time part of the Nostell Priory estate. Recent research indicates that his father, Henry Harrison (1665–1728) was probably employed at Nostell Priory as a carpenter. The family moved to Barrow-upon-Humber in North Lincolnshire before John Harrison was ten years old. At their workshop in Barrow-upon-Humber John and his brother, James (1704–66), with whom he worked in partnership for a time, made three regulators following a turret clock commission at Brocklesby Park, North Lincolnshire. This turret clock, with a movement made of oak that functions to this day, is, it would seem, the origin of accurate timekeeping. How or why John Harrison became interested in timekeeping is not known. Before the Brocklesby Park commission he made some wooden movement, but otherwise conventional, longcase clocks. One of these is at Nostell Priory, a National Trust property near Wakefield. Harrison must have acquired something of a local reputation as a clockmaker. What is certain is that he and James were commissioned to make, probably in 1722, a turret clock for the re-furbished Stable Block at Brocklesby Park, near Barton-upon-Humber. During the Brocklesby Park commission John Harrison must have started thinking deeply about accurate timekeeping, although he, according to his own memoirs, did not learn of the Longitude Act and its associated Prize until 1726. The Prize was the then colossal sum of £20,000, such was the importance attached to finding a practical solution to the problem of determining longitude. In addition to the movement of the Brocklesby Park clock being very finely designed and made, the innovative grasshopper escapement that Harrison invented and introduced into this clock reduced and effectively negated the 'enemy', friction. By his judicious design and selection of materials he also obviated the need for



Fig. 1 Precision Pendulum-Clock No. 2, signed James Harrison, 1727. Photograph by Jeff Darken



Fig. 2 The oak dial and brass chapter ring. Photograph by Jeff Darken

lubrication, lubricants of the time being notoriously unreliable, a fair-weather friend at best. Additionally his use of boxwood bearings running in combination with brass pivots created effective, oil-free bearing surfaces.

Then came the three precision pendulum-clocks, the most accurate clocks in the world at that time. They are of longcase clock configuration and at their hearts are movements made of oak and *lignum vitae*, with a few metal parts. They employed further innovations such as the temperature compensating pendulum and *lignum vitae* bearings, in addition to the grasshopper escapement. The use of *lignum vitae*, a very dense and waxy timber and an improvement on boxwood, because of its self-lubricating properties, is further evidence of Harrison's relentless search for innovations that would bring him closer to his goal. *Lignum vitae* was a timber that was used in shipbuilding. Certain components, with moving parts, benefited from its dense and self-lubricating properties, for example the sheaths of ship's blocks, deadeyes and belaying pins. It is more than likely that Harrison learned of

this timber and its properties from ship carpenters in Hull. The precision pendulum-clocks are the direct link to the sea-clocks - H1, the first of these was, like the precision pendulum-clocks, also made at Barrow-upon-Humber - and are thus of extreme importance in telling the story of Harrison's deeply original thinking that in turn led ultimately to timekeepers, what we today call chronometers.

CASE AND HOOD

The case and hood of precision pendulum-clock No. 2 are of conventional longcase construction, using softwood as seen very commonly in similar applications. The trunk of No. 2 differs from clocks No. 1 and No. 3, which have blocks either side, spanning a gap that became necessary to cut into the trunk because of the degree of swing of the temperature-compensating pendulum, which is greater than the swing of a conventional longcase clock pendulum. No. 2 lacks these blocks because the trunk was not cut into, indicating a pendulum of reduced swing when compared with No. 1 and No. 3.

The finish is black japanning with floral details, in a rather quaint and naïve style, painted on the trunk and hood. The clock dial is of oak, and beautifully decorated, again in black japanning and gilding. The chapter ring is of brass and shows no sign of ever having been silvered. On the door of the trunk, framed behind glass, is a very interesting feature, an 'equation of time' table written in Harrison's hand. The equation of time is the number of minutes that must be added or subtracted when setting the clock by a sundial, or solar time. This was important in the context of the eighteenth century because sundials were still in common usage. Whilst clocks maintain an equal measure of time (mean time) throughout the year, solar time is subject to a cycle of gaining or losing because of the tilt of the Earth on its axis, and its elliptical orbit around the sun. Solar time and mean time are the same four times a year. The discrepancy is called the equation of time.



Fig. 3 The movement within its oak frame. Photograph by Jeff Darken

Fig 4. A striking train wheel, oak, *lignum vitae* and brass. The grain of the oak of the wheel teeth are aligned radially, as with all the wooden wheels.
Photograph by Jeff Darken



Conservation of the case and hood were expertly carried out by Matthew King, the emphasis being on minimal intervention to stabilise and consolidate, in preparation for display. The finials are replacements, based on ones from the other regulators, silver gilt and lacquered to imitate gold.

THE MOVEMENT

The movement is made almost entirely of oak and *lignum vitae*. Wood might seem a curious choice at first, but not for a highly skilled joiner who had had no apprenticeship as a clockmaker. The precision pendulum-clock movements are a redesign and development of the turret clock movement. They are signed by James Harrison but there is no horologist in the world that doubts that it was older brother John who was designing and directing the works. James was also a very skilled woodworker but without, it would appear, the outstanding engineering intellect of John. The construction of some of the wooden components of Harrison's wooden movement clocks bear a striking resemblance to the wooden machinery of wind and water mills. In particular the way the wooden teeth are let in to the wheels has considerable resonance with mill wheels. Harrison would almost certainly have been aware of this type of wooden machinery and there is every chance that he would have worked on mill machinery. In fact it would have been very odd if he had not been familiar with them as Lincolnshire had hundreds of windmills and he and James were, in many senses, jobbing joiners taking work where they could get it. The similarities in construction between the wooden machinery of mills and Harrison's wooden movement clocks are a line of research that is being followed.

The movement is contained within an oak framework, a fairly complex structure held together by 22 mortice and tenon joints. The three-way joints are to an extent self-locking but are also glued. The frame is large, but it completely contains the movement, forming a substructure that fits snugly within the case and hood.

At this point I would like to quote from Jonathan Betts' book, *Harrison*, (1993 and 2007), a book that makes Harrison's story very accessible: 'John Harrison's victory over the problem of lubrication by eliminating the problem itself was ingenious, but not typical of his scientific method. His usual approach was to accept the presence of an 'enemy' and negate the effect by compensating for it. Using this more typical method, he eliminated another significant error in these precision clocks: that caused by the effects of temperature change. Clocks go slower when they get warmer because the pendulum rod expands and lengthens, and longer pendulums beat more slowly than shorter ones. For it to keep time constantly, the pendulum's effective length must not change. The effective length is the distance between the point of suspension and the centre of gravity. Harrison solved the problem of temperature change by inventing a pendulum which, instead of a simple rod, has a grid-iron made up of an alternating series of brass and steel rods, the steel rods' downward expansion being counteracted by the upward expansion of the brass rods. In this brilliantly clever design, although the rods are expanding, the effective length of the pendulum remains the same and it continues to keep time. As a result, Harrison tells us that these early precision pendulum-clocks achieved the astonishing accuracy of a variation of no greater than one second in a month, a performance far exceeding the best London clocks of the day. And because the clocks had no oil, they maintained their performance for much longer than conventional clocks.'

From his research of No. 2 Andrew King explains: 'When No. 2 was sold, quite clearly Harrison removed the most crucial part of the clock, the 'Grid Iron' pendulum with the unique suspension system. This was very much still in the experimental stage, true innovation and original invention with no possible protection against plagiarism. Harrison had to replace this system with a plain, non-compensated pendulum rod and a simple suspension point. Whilst the replacement pendulum that Harrison must have made for the clock is missing the suspension bracket remains with the clock today. Following the sale of No. 2, a third clock of the same type, No. 3, was made to enable continuation of the experimental work' (private communication from Andrew King).

The treatment undertaken to the movement was carried out by Andrew King. More than 230 hours were devoted to the movement alone, much of it, of course, not immediately visible.

Of the three precision pendulum-clocks Andrew King believes that in many respects No. 2 is the most significant because of its highly original condition. No. 1 is in a private collection. No. 3 is in the collections of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers. The sea-clocks are in the Royal Observatory, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Andrew King's intention is to publish his research into Harrison's wooden movement clocks, recording their fundamental place in the quest for accurate timekeeping. The outcome will be an important and fascinating addition to the lexicon of knowledge about the extraordinary John Harrison, joiner, clockmaker, Copley Medallist, national hero with a memorial in Westminster Abbey, and his timekeepers. It is planned to display and interpret John Harrison's precision pendulum-clock No. 2 in the Collectors' Cabinet of the Leeds City Museum.

Ian Fraser, Conservator, Leeds Museums and Galleries, Temple Newsam House
www.leeds.gov.uk/templenewsam

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Jonathan Betts, Senior Specialist, Horology, at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, Andrew King, clock conservator and Harrison researcher, Matthew King, clock case conservator, for their assistance with this article, and Jeff Darken for the photography.

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*. Applications 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 LECTURE

Antique and Ancient Furniture Dealers in the Opening Decades of the Nineteenth Century

The Society of Antiquaries of London, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1

Tuesday 17 November 2009, 6.00pm for 6.30pm–8.00pm

Dr Mark Westgarth, lecturer Museum Studies, School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds, will deliver the Society's 2009 Annual Lecture.

His paper will investigate the new kind of antique and curiosity trade which emerged in London during the opening decades of the nineteenth century. The dealer became an influential catalyst and a significant agent in the promotion of the desire for historical objects and their wider dissemination into the contemporary culture. This included seventeenth- and even eighteenth-century furniture, together with a range of domestic and utilitarian objects from the past, to an expanding consumer audience. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century the antique and curiosity shop was to become one of the primary routes through which historical material was released from the narrow confines of eighteenth-century antiquarian collecting into more popular early nineteenth-century culture.

Admission is free but attendance is by ticket only, which must be acquired in advance from the Activities Secretary. Numbers are limited to 90.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and WORKS IN PROGRESS TALKS with
SPECIAL PAPERS ON THE HOLBURN MUSEUM OF ART, BATH and
DUMFRIES HOUSE

The East India Club, 16 St James's Square, London SW1

Saturday 5 December 2009, 11.00 am–3.30 pm

The Annual General Meeting for the year ending 30 June 2009 will be held at the East India Club. The AGM will start at 11.00 am (coffee from 10.30 am).

This will be followed by illustrated Works in Progress talks by Christopher Rowell, the National Trust, Treve Rosoman, English Heritage, Lucy Wood, Department of Furniture Textiles & Fashion, V&A and Jonathan Marsden, the Royal Collection. In addition to these talks will be special papers on current projects by Matthew Winterbottom, Decorative Arts Curator, the Holburne Museum and Charlotte Rostek, curator at Dumfries House. Afterwards there will be an optional lunch which will provide for opportunity for members to socialise and discuss furniture related matters further.

Admission to the AGM is free but all members wishing to attend should notify the FHS Activities Secretary at least 7 days in advance for security reasons. Tickets for lunch £15 should likewise be booked with the Activities Secretary at least 7 days in advance.

ADVANCE NOTICE — THE 34TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM OF THE
FURNITURE HISTORY SOCIETY, Twentieth-Century Furniture

Saturday 6 March 2010

Next year's symposium will be run jointly with the Victoria and Albert Museum, with speakers organised by Christopher Wilk, Keeper of the Furniture Textiles & Fashion Department.

Full programme and booking arrangements will be in the FHS November *Newsletter*.

OTHER ITEMS

Please note that these are not organised by the Furniture History Society. Information/booking instructions will be found under individual items.

CLAXTON STEVENS PRIZE AWARDED TO JOHN MAKEPEACE, OBE

John Makepeace has been awarded the prestigious 2009 Claxton Stevens Prize presented by the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers for the best item of individual furniture receiving one of the Company's Guild Marks in the last year.

The award ceremony took place in London at the Mansion House on 11 May when Makepeace received his £1000 prize from The Lord Mayor at the Installation Dinner held in the Egyptian Hall. It is the second time he has received this accolade, the first being in 1998 for 'Eighteen', a cabinet purchased for an American collection. Designed in his studio at Beaminster, Dorset, the winning cabinet, 'Flow', was made by independent craftsman, Tom Kealy, who was a student at Parnham before becoming the leader in the Makepeace workshop.

'Flow' is the fourth and last in that series of chests of drawers made from a magnificent tree of ripple ash, each inspired by different landscapes. 'Flow' derives its form and title from patterns created by glaciers. This free-standing sculptural form, evocative of a Medieval trunk hollowed out to store our most treasured possessions, is unusually made so that the grain runs horizontally, matching at all four corners. The ten drawers include a suedelined writing slide and three shallow drawers for stationery or jewellery. All the drawers have luxurious holly wood sides lined with scented Lebanon cedar.

Widely exhibited over the past 18 months, 'Flow' appeared at the V&A in the 2008 exhibition 'Collect' and was featured in the recent show, '21st Century Furniture, The Arts & Crafts Legacy', in Islington. 'Flow' has been purchased by a client in Strasbourg.

FURNITURE FUTURES: V&A Biennial Symposium, Friday 18 September 2009

The first in a new series at the V&A, hear some of the most influential contemporary designers, practitioners and commentators associated with furniture making today. The day is structured around three main themes: Creative Directions, Changing Practice, and Promotion and Communication. It will examine the growing interest in furniture as an expression of contemporary culture which crosses the boundaries between art, craftsmanship and design. Debate will also explore topics including: furniture as a new art form; the role of new materials and sustainability in design; and whether individual creativity or collaboration is the key to innovative practice.

£45, £36 concessions, £5 students. Visit www.vam.ac.uk/conferences or call 020 7942 2211 for further details or to make a booking.

THE REGIONAL FURNITURE SOCIETY'S ANNUAL CHRISTOPHER GILBERT LECTURE, The Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Rd, London E2 8EA, Saturday 24 October 2009, 2pm

David Jones, 'Furniture and People: the personalities behind scholarship'.

This lecture marks David Jones' retirement as editor of *Regional Furniture*, the annual journal of the Regional Furniture Society. David became editor in 1992, following Christopher Gilbert's retirement from the post on his becoming chairman of the Furniture History Society. He will talk about the personalities and achievements of people who have had natural and pioneering interests in vernacular furniture. This journey will take him from

Christopher Gilbert's Yorkshire to present day Scotland, discovering that the work of some significant scholars is relatively hidden, but forms a lasting legacy for future generations.

Cost of the lecture: £12 per person. An optional buffet lunch will be served at the Geffrye Museum from 12.30pm, cost £8 per person. Apply to Polly Legg, Events Organiser, 8 Church St, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1JN, telephone 01305 264596.

THE CERAMIC COLLECTION AT DUMFRIES HOUSE: Study Day, Tuesday 3 November, Dumfries House, Cumnock, Ayrshire

Miranda Bowles, lecturer on ceramics and Charlotte Culham, ceramics conservator will lead this engaging study day. An introductory morning lecture will be followed by an exclusive tour in the afternoon where the exciting and little known pieces in the collection of Dumfries House will be studied first hand. There will be an opportunity to get close to examples from China, Japan, Europe and England all of which were acquired by the successive owners of Dumfries House.

Full price including lunch and coffee breaks £55 per person. For more details or to make a booking, please call 01290 425959 or e-mail k.dunsmuir@dumfries-house.org.uk

POMP & POWER — CARRIAGES AS STATUS SYMBOLS: International carriage conference, Museum of London 12–13 November 2009

This conference will bring together experts from around Europe and the USA who will explore different aspects of the coachbuilding trade in London and examine particular coaches made in Britain and Ireland from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. The social history of carriages will be discussed as well as French and British influences on British carriage design. For further information e-mail pomp&power@museumoflondon.org.uk

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Joseph Darmanin & Sons, Malta, marble workers.

An inlaid marble table top in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum is labelled underneath 'DARMANIN & SONS/ MARBLE WORKERS/ MONUMENTAL & MOSAIC SLABS/ AND/ OTHER ORNAMENTAL WORK/ STRADA LEVANTE No 45/ MALTA'. Kate Hay is seeking information on the firm and other examples of their work. Please contact: Kate Hay, Department of Furniture, Textiles and Fashion, Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, London SW7 2RL, e-mail k.hay@vam.ac.uk

BOOK REVIEW

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.

David Sherlock, *Suffolk Church Chests* (Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History, 2008), viii + 112pp., 138 col., 26 b. & w. illus, 2 maps, 24 diagrams. ISSN 978 0 952 1390, £15.00 incl. p. & p. (£12 to SIAH members) from the author at 5 Meadowford, Newport, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 3QL (cheques to be made out to the SIAH).

In the 1920s Claude Morley, a Suffolk entomologist and antiquary, inspected and noted 293 chests in churches throughout that county. David Sherlock's *Suffolk Church Chests* is an edition of Morley's typescript with an ambitious new introduction and copious illustrations, mainly from recent photographs, but some from earlier drawings, prints or photographs. Morley had firm views, at one point anathematizing 'that appalling beetle *Hypothenemus eruditus*' and at another 'the most damnable form of vandalism ... destroying an ancient object for the sole purpose of attempting to deceive the credulous by exhibiting bits of it on a new object', and he was equally emphatic about dates. As to the latter Sherlock is, rightly, more circumspect, although for certain selected chests recent dendrochronology has supplied firm evidence.

Sherlock's introduction moves logically from the general to the particular, citing many documents; fascinating, for example, that in 1518 a coffer containing twelve painted coffers, valued at a mark (6s 8d), was imported though Yarmouth. Dated chests are another — rare — type of document. At Cratfield is one with a black-letter inscription recording its gift in about 1475 (by contrast the date and inscription which link a chest at Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich, to the circumnavigator, Thomas Cavendish, have a nineteenth-century look). Sherlock concludes with an account of various groupings, not exclusively Suffolk in the case of those linked with the celebrated iron-mounted chest at Icklingham of about 1300, the Earl Stonham chest with chip-carved roundels, and the Chevington chest carved with a combination of Gothic tracery, birds and beasts. But two large groups of Suffolk chests stand out: thirty-two of pine with rounded poplar lids at Mendlesham and other locations are plausibly identified as the 'Danske Chests' which eluded Peter Thornton in 1971 ('Two Problems', *Furniture History*, 7, pp.66–69); and some very large ironbound chests at Stonham Aspal (over eight feet long with no fewer than twelve locks) and elsewhere (that at Dennington calculated to incorporate 345 feet of iron banding) seem to be a local speciality.

After the introduction Morley's gazetteer is presented alphabetically from Aldeburgh to Yoxford, with many glosses, including some extra chests, a measure of compensation for the twenty or thereabouts lost since the 1920s. The text is mainly and usefully descriptive, enlivened by the odd juicy gobbet: in 1732 the Earl of Oxford described Hannibal Hill, landlord of The Angel, who gave a chest to St Mary's, Bury St Edmunds, as 'a great sot'. The dating is usually sensible, although the carving on a Jacobean chest at Great Ashfield looks more Victorian than original. And there is a useful and very up-to-date bibliography. All in all *Suffolk Church Chests* is a worthy successor to Lewer and Wall's 1913 Essex volume and Roe's 1929 Home Counties study. It is to be hoped that other counties will extend this antiquarian sequence.

Simon Swynfen Jervis

SHORTER NOTICE

Daniel Alcouffe, *Les artisans décorateurs du bois au Faubourg Saint-Antoine sous le règne de Louis XIV d'après les minutes des notaires parisiens* (Dijon: Éditions Faton, 2008), 316 pp., 21 col., 7 b. & w. illus. ISBN 978-2-87844-111-6, €95.

This book comprises a dictionary of woodworkers of all kinds who during the reign of Louis XIV practised their craft in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, a part of Paris where, due to a privilege belonging to the Abbey of Saint-Antoine des Champs, the guilds of the city held no authority. It was originally conceived as an appendix to the author's thesis dealing with these artisans, defended in 1962 at the École des chartes in Paris. This thesis remains

unpublished, but Daniel Alcouffe has since made available much information contained in it through articles and contributions to larger publications, most recently that on Laurent Lelibon in *Furniture History*, 2007. These writings have demonstrated the richness of the archival material studied by him, as well as the perceptive and imaginative use he has been able to make of the facts gleaned from documents.

Since 1962 a number of stamps found on existing pieces of furniture have been linked to *ébénistes* working in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, most notably Noël Gérard and Nicolas Sageot. This has been one of the reasons to prompt the present publication, as further stamps may be discovered whose identification it will greatly facilitate. The notices on the individual craftsmen take the form of impeccably organised thumbnail biographies, with full attention given to the numerous links to other woodworkers, established either in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine or elsewhere; a number of very useful genealogical charts clarify the ramifications of some of the most prominent dynasties. An admirably concise introduction describes the principal trends that emerge from the assembled information, charting the background, life and training of the artisans — woodworkers working in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine could not take on officially recognised apprentices, but they did train a large number of so-called *alloués* — as well as formulating some general conclusions regarding the production of furniture.

Conceived in the tradition of Vial, Marcel and Girodie's invaluable *Les artistes décorateurs du bois* of 1912–1922, this book is much more focused, dealing with a clearly circumscribed group of artisans. The author may be congratulated on his painstaking work and lucid presentation, and the publishers on their decision to make available this seminal instrument for further study in such a handsome manner.

BAROQUE FURNITURE AND INTERIORS: FHS ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM,
Saturday 25 April 2009

Synopses prepared by speakers:

Michael Snodin, Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition co-curator
Baroque: Style in the Age of Magnificence 1620–1800

There have been many attempts to define the baroque, each reflecting individual, national and aesthetic interests. At its broadest the word has been adopted as a style-period label to cover all the generations (and many different forms of expression) after the Renaissance and mannerism and before the rococo and neo-classicism. More narrowly, for some it can only be the high moment of art and architecture in mid-seventeenth-century Papal Rome, while for the others it can also include the visual language of a court culture that developed across Europe in the second half of that century. But a glance at what was going on in Latin America and South and South East Asia reveals that elements of both these expressions were exported outside Europe, where they persisted to the end of the eighteenth century. The baroque exhibition looks across this broader picture, identifies its main characteristics and shows how they were applied across a very wide range of visual media, including the fine and applied arts, architecture, urban planning, gardens, and public performance of all kinds. It aims to show how baroque was not a matter of the use of certain distinctive decorative motifs but of a whole approach to art and design in the broadest sense. Baroque used performance and a direct engagement of the emotions to deliver very clear messages of power and persuasion, both by the church and by secular rulers and elites. In this process, furniture and furnishings played a key role and the exhibition includes a group of outstanding pieces, including one the Cucci cabinets from Alnwick (and Versailles), the Bielke

state bed from Stockholm, silver furniture from Knole and the Pierre Gole desk from Boughton.

Alvar Gonzalez-Palacios, editor of *Antologia di Belle Arti*
Some Little Known Roman Baroque Furniture

This paper looked at some furnishings still with the Barberini family. They were discussed and an author sought for them. Other objects from papal families can be connected with drawings and documents of the period but perhaps not in a definitive way. A table that belonged to the Duke of Lerma may clear the chronology of all this series of princely furniture. Engravings by Filippo Passarini and by the papal goldsmith and bronze caster Giovanni Giardini were compared to objects, some of which are in private hands. One grand gilt console table with a putto and sphinxes is very close indeed to some of the models invented by Giardini in his book of ornaments of the early eighteenth century. Can we understand the use of two strange supports with the Prince Aldobrandini and the Getty Museum? Drawings in the Tessin Collection, Stockholm, may help in this research.

Dr Reinier Baarsen, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
Dutch cabinets and their International Context

Throughout the seventeenth century, the cabinet was the foremost item of veneered furniture being produced all over Europe. Although not in itself a baroque form, its history is central to the development of furniture-making ('cabinet-making') in the era of the baroque. The principal stages are fairly well charted: Augsburg – Antwerp – Paris, with a continuous influence from Italy, especially via cabinets mounted with *pietre dure* panels. Recent research has revealed that the position of Holland within this sequence was more central than has previously been surmised. Both in The Hague and in Amsterdam cabinet-makers (*ebbenhoutwerkers*) established themselves early in the century, and records show that their work was at the vanguard of international fashions. Much remains to be discovered, but some spectacular furniture by Herman Doomer of Amsterdam and of Wilhelm de Rots of The Hague has been identified. Their work displays baroque tendencies both in the overall shape of the furniture and in its decoration. Other furniture can be grouped around the production of these two makers, demonstrating that Dutch cabinet-making of the first half of the seventeenth century had a marked character of its own. Its influence abroad was undoubtedly very considerable.

Sofia Rodriguez Bernis, Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, Madrid
Furniture for the estrado

Foreign travellers visiting Spain during the seventeenth century wrote of their astonishment on witnessing the way in which ladies would receive their guests: seated in the manner of the Turks on the *estrado*, a wooden dais covered with carpets and equipped with cushions. The *estrado* derives in fact from a tradition going back to the High Middle Ages, at a time when refined Moorish culture fascinated the more modest Christian culture. However, once the latter had re-established itself, the *estrado* was no longer used by gentlemen and was reserved exclusively for the ladies. This tradition lasted until the seventeenth century. The *estrado* was an extremely luxurious space capable of assimilating the subsequent novelties which the evolution of furniture had to offer. Thus, the low chairs for ladies in the Italian manner were integrated into the *estrado*. These were the first pieces of seat furniture to introduce padded upholstery, in accordance with the European fashion of the time. The furnishing of the *estrado* subsequently included most of the luxury furniture characteristic of the baroque age, though reduced in size. This concerns especially the

bufetillos — small side tables — and the *escritorillos* — small or miniature cabinets. Their decoration included veneers of silver, tortoiseshell, exotic woods or embroidery. They were either Spanish productions or imported from Augsburg, the Low Countries or Italy. Objects imported from the colonies in the East and West Indies also found their place on the *estrado*.

Sarah Medlam, Victoria and Albert Museum
The Cucci Cabinets

This short paper presented the initial findings from the inspection and conservation carried out in preparation for the exhibition *Baroque: Style in the Age of Magnificence, 1620–1800*. The Victoria and Albert Museum is grateful to the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland for their permission to study the two cabinets together.

These cabinets are unique survivals of the furniture from the Château de Versailles before 1700. They originated in the workshops of Domenico Cucci at the Gobelins and were supplied to Versailles in 1683. They were sold from the Garde Meuble de la Couronne by auction in 1751 but escaped the usual fate of such pieces sold at the same period, that of dismemberment and re-use of their valuable panels. Their purchaser at that time was the merchant Lemaignan but their later history is unclear before they were bought by the Duke of Northumberland in 1822 from the dealer Fogg. Inscriptions discovered by the conservator Kerstin Wadewitz and a further reference found by Clare Baxter, curator at Alnwick, offer some leads for further research into their intermediate history. The cabinets are each composed of three sections, standing on low, carved and gilded openwork stands (the plinths known to be additions, made by Morel & Hughes shortly after their acquisition by the Duke of Northumberland). A recent discovery in Paris of two early engravings of the cabinets has provided images of the original designs. Placing the two stands side-by-side has shown the extent of differences in the stands, suggesting that two carvers were involved. Examination of the two main sections with their (later) backboards removed, has given evidence of the adaptation of the carcasses in the course of building these monuments to splendour.

Bertrand Rondot, Chateau de Versailles

Porphyry and alabaster vases from the collections of Louis XIV and their presentation at Versailles

The completion of the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles in 1684 marked the culmination of the most successful years of Louis XIV's reign. The works of art, chosen to be displayed under the painted vault by Charles Le Brun and along the walls lined with precious marbles, had to convey the same striking effect. To complete this display was to be the presentation of the most famous antique sculptures in the royal collection and a series of porphyry busts. Thus a policy to collect vases in noble stones was started by Louis XIV in Rome through La Teulière, director of the branch of the Académie de France in Rome, and almost 70 vases were eventually ordered. A recent exhibition on porphyry at the Louvre revealed the importance and quantity of vases in that material in the gallery, but there were important vases in alabaster and coloured antique marbles as well.

The exchange of letters between the director in Rome and the powerful minister, Louvois, head of the Surintendance des Bâtiments du Roi in Versailles, reveals month after month the building of this unique collection. Purchases were made of Roman models and commissions after specific designs, drawings of pieces on the market or to be ordered were sent for approval to Versailles, new quarries of alabaster were opened, blocks of antique marbles were bought, ancient Roman columns sliced. Although too briefly mentioned in the Palace descriptions, these vases are today known mainly through the 1722 inventory. The spectacular display of these vases which were placed on gilt wood tables or laid on the

floors remained in situ until the Revolution. Then dispersed, the quest for these vases is still ongoing and recent discoveries give a much better idea of these garnitures of vases, without precedent in the history of the decorative arts.

Cinzia Maria Sicca, University of Pisa

Shells, scrolls and figures: the Roman sources of William Kent's furniture

Research on William Kent's furniture has often failed to fully appreciate its strong links with Roman furniture design as well as Roman sculpture. These Roman origins of Kent's furniture designs account also for his choice of iconography which is integral to the whole decorative concept of a room.

In Rome from 1710 to 1719 Kent was exposed to multiple influences. The most powerful stimulus came from John Talman in whose company he had travelled to Italy and who had the advantage of an earlier visit to Rome at the very beginning of the century. Kent's first master, Benedetto Luti, reinforced some of these notions and set an example through the drawings he supplied for metalwork engraved by Filippo Passarini in his *Nuove invenzioni d'ornamenti* (Rome, 1698). In the studio of Giuseppe Chiari, Kent's second master, both Kent and Henry Trench became expert engravers and were associated with the production of front and tail pieces for the literary works of the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury and Henry Newton, the British Envoy to Florence. The production of these vignettes brought Kent into contact with the vast decorative repertoire of Giovanni Giardini's *Disegni diversi inventati e delineati da Giovanni Giardini da Forlì*, published in 1714. In these same years, first through John Talman and then because of his own success in the 1713 Concorso Clementino, Kent moved in the circle of Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni and Filippo Juvarra, the Cardinal's architect and stage designer. Juvarra produced many drawings for furniture, some also acquired by John Talman, which must have provided Kent with further examples of a fluidity of forms springing from a conception of the imitation of nature which ultimately stemmed from Bernini. Ottoboni's palace, which Kent visited as he tells in his correspondence to Burrell Massingberd, contained remarkable pieces of furniture — a mirror and side tables — designed by Giovanni Paolo Schor for Queen Christina of Sweden. Other pieces by Schor in the Colonna collection (including the famous bed for Maria Mancini which inspired Kent's bed at Houghton) became the focus of attention as they were offered for sale, attracting the attention of English potential buyers as reported by Cardinal Gualtieri in his Diary.

The paper looked at Kent's Roman sources and illustrates through specific examples how he translated such stimuli into his furniture designs for some of his most important British clients. Also how his early Italian literary illustrations and the illustrations to Pope's translation of the *Iliad* contain already the essence of Kent's furniture designs. The themes of metamorphosis and fantasy ultimately hark back to the prime literary source of Kent's inspiration, namely Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Metal as well as plaster work appear to have been — more than marble or stone sculpture — his constant terms of reference, but there were other materials employed in the context of more ephemeral decorative apparatuses employed for canonization and funeral ceremonies. The altar front designed by Antonio Coccinioli, and embroidered by Benedetto Salandra and Girolamo Mariani (Roma, reverenda Fabbrica di San Pietro) is such an example: the embroidery simulated metal high relief, offering a completely illusionistic approach to the materials employed. Kent's treatment of wood in his furniture betrays a similar approach, disguising the material's true nature, turning it into the scaly skin of fishes or reptiles, into scallop shells or the feathers of birds' wings.

Dr Achim Stiegel, Kunstgewebemuseum, Berlin

The Mirror Cabinets from Schloss Merseburg and Schloss Wiesentheid as exemplars of the Baroque style

The mirror cabinet was a new decorative invention which at once distilled and fulfilled the flamboyant visual aspirations of baroque art. Key aspects were its ostentatious splendour, its clear functional role with an architecture planned to serve the purposes of court ceremony, and its exploitation of both nature and art through the illusionistic power of the mirror. Furthermore the very immateriality of the mirror renders ambiguous the observer's role, observation itself becoming at once sensuous and elusive. The mirror cabinet is thus a quintessential example of that baroque orchestration of every aspect of an interior to which the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* has been applied.

The main focus was a mirror cabinet from Schloss Merseburg, created in 1712–14, which ranks among the early high points of the genre in its virtuoso manipulation of mirrored surfaces. Its extraordinary impact is due to an interplay between abundant mirrors, fine matt-gilded carving and the glazed and lacquered ceramic like base of its walls, originally deep blue in colour. In the French *Régence* style, the cabinet is among the earliest surviving works of the court sculptor and master builder Johann Michael Hoppenhaupt I (1685–1751). It formed part of the new living and reception rooms constructed in Schloss Merseburg on the occasion of Duke Wilhelm of Saxe-Merseburg's accession to power and marriage in 1711.

A slightly later example from Schloss Wiesentheid, created by Johann Georg Nesstfell in 1724–25, attests to the central role which might be assigned to such cabinets in a baroque ensemble. The County of Wiesentheid, east of Würzburg, had been owned by the Schönborn family since 1701, and around 1710 Rudolf Franz Erwein began to remodel its Schloss into a small baroque residence. The mirror cabinet formed the centre and climax of the state apartment, and also acted as a hinge between the interior of the Schloss and the public symbolism of its newly created baroque garden. The cabinet combines the illusionistic effect of mirrors with the pictorial riches of the most sumptuous Boulle marquetry. Thus a reflected image of the real world and the depiction of a fairytale vision of the life of the Emperor of Cathay are placed beneath the arms of the Schönborn family.

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, e-mail Turpinadriana@hotmail.com, who will also supply application forms for the Oliver Ford Trust grants on request. Please remember to send an s.a.e. with any request.

The committee requests that applications for study trips be made well in advance of the final deadline for acceptance — preferably at least one month before.

COPY DEADLINE

The deadline for receiving material to be published in the next *Newsletter* is **15 September**. Copy should be sent, preferably by e-mail, to lhouliston@hotmail.com or posted to Ms Laura Houliston, 44 Harrow View Road, London, W5 1LZ, tel. 0208 810 4718.

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