



## THE FURNITURE HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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### PHILIP BLAIRMAN (1896/97–1972): AN EARLY COLLECTOR OF VICTORIAN FURNITURE



Before World War II, but in the wake of collectors including Gerald Wellesley, Albert Richardson and Edward Knoblock, the antique dealer Philip Blairman was seriously promoting Regency-period design at a time when conventional wisdom, in the trade at least, still regarded post-1800 production as worthy of scant consideration. What is perhaps less well known is my grandfather's early interest in furniture from the Victorian era. The recent discovery of some purchase records show that Philip Blairman was buying Victorian furniture from around 1952. What was he buying, from whom, and why?

There had been a Victorian Exhibition in 1931, and an Edwardian Festival Exhibition in 1951. But far the most significant reappraisal was the V&A's seminal exhibition 'Victorian & Edwardian Decorative Arts' (1952), organised by their pioneering, long-since disbanded and much missed Circulation Department. Although this ambitious V&A show included 'only objects that [could] be authoritatively attributed to leading Victorian and Edwardian designers', it is tempting to postulate that it was this event that once again piqued my grandfather's curiosity. Charles and Lavinia Handley-Read were, over the next two decades, to make the most significant early accumulation of innovative Victorian and Edwardian decorative arts, before their untimely deaths in 1971, but Philip Blairman was pursuing the period in a different and more modest way.

Among those from whom Philip Blairman sourced this Victorian furniture were many of the intermediary dealers who, at the time, fed the West End trade; firms such as Bly of Tring, Anderson of Welshpool, Oliver of Guilford, Blanchard of Winchester and C. Fredericks, Jas. A. Lewis, H. C. Baxter and the now highly esteemed Pelham Galleries, all based in London.

The earliest recorded purchase, on 6 August 1952, was of '6 rosewood chairs' for £19 from Randolph of Broadway (A. Randolph Brett). Significantly, it transpires, two chairs went to his daughter Jacqueline Pinto and the other four to his son John Blairman. Over the next ten years successive purchases were made for Jacqueline, John, for Wendy Levy (my mother) and in the name of Mrs Blairman (Philip's wife and my grandmother). Although my grandfather still had a few of these pieces in his flat in Cadogan Square at the end of his life, including a small octagon table now attributed to Edward Holmes Baldock, the vast majority of these acquisitions were made to furnish the homes of three of his four children. The choices reflect not the wide-ranging explorations of the Handley-Reads, but a more conventional attempt to find objects that, although from later in the nineteenth century, retained those elements of 'polite taste' that characterised the stocks of London's West End antique dealers during the 1950s and 1960s.

My parents married in 1952 and over the next decade furnished first their flat, and later the house in which I was brought up with my grandfather's purchases; they were never themselves truly 'collectors'. As a seven- or eight-year-old, I can remember a photographer shrouded under a black cloth behind a heavy wooden tripod taking photographs for Symonds & Whineray. Much of this furniture remains in the family, some now on loan at Down House (English Heritage). Two chairs of a pattern used in Queen Victoria's 'Retiring Room at the Crystal Palace' (Symonds & Whineray, pls 270 and 276) are on loan at Leighton House; these were bought from Pelham Galleries (Henry, Ernest and Leonard Rubin) on 22 July 1953 for £32.

Little more is known now about most of this furniture than at the time it was



*Fig. 1*

bought. Today, we might date the work table acquired in August 1954 from Pelham Galleries for £48 and now on loan at Down House (Symonds & Whineray, pl. 173) earlier than suggested, and perhaps make an attribution to Gillow. And the chess/work table (Fig. 1) can now be attributed to William Smee of Finsbury Pavement, London. But in the main, the *étagères*, chairs, and carved and inlaid occasional tables remain the anonymous production of skilled cabinet-makers supplying the demands of the rapidly increasing middle class market. Six 'balloon-back' chairs purchased 6 September 1952 for £42.10s from Michael Brett of Broadway (Symonds & Whineray, pl. 182) are, however, identical to a pair in an American private collection labelled 'John Sharpe & Co/Practical Cabinet Makers & Upholsterers/14a, Oxford Road, Leicester'.

An objective assessment might infer that this furniture, accumulated during the 1950s, represents little more than the better end of Victorian conventional manufacture, as opposed to the mass-produced and poorly finished furniture that drove the creations of the period from view during the first five decades of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, Philip Blairman was making, once again, a concerted effort to see the merit in furniture of a hitherto largely neglected type.

Martin P. Levy

## FUTURE SOCIETY EVENTS

### BOOKINGS

For places on all visits please apply to the Events Secretary Anne-Marie Bannister, Bricket House, 90 Mount Pleasant Lane, Bricket Wood, St Albans, Herts., AL2 3XD. Tel. 07775 907390 enclosing a separate cheque and separate stamped addressed envelope for each event using the enclosed booking form. Some advance event information (including weekends) will be available by email, please email the Events Secretary or send your email address with your application: NB. PLEASE NOTE NEW EVENTS E-MAIL ADDRESS: [events@furniturehistorysociety.org](mailto:events@furniturehistorysociety.org).

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.

Bookings will hopefully be possible via our new website as soon as the facility is fully implemented but for the time being please continue to proceed as above.

### 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. PLEASE ENSURE THERE IS SUFFICIENT POSTAGE ON YOUR SAE AS WELL AS YOUR APPLICATION/BLUE FORM ENVELOPE.

## EVENTS COMMITTEE

The Events Committee has always been highly active on behalf of members. 2013 sees a new Events Secretary, Anne-Marie Bannister and a new Chairman of the Committee, Sarah Medlam. With this changeover, the committee would like to remind all members of the importance in passing on ideas, information and suggestions to us. We are grateful to those who give us advance news of exhibitions or events in the UK or throughout the world, or who alert us to private houses that might host a visit by the society. Do e-mail or phone the Events Secretary with any such ideas. This year, because of changes to plans at a late stage, there will be no spring weekend, but plans are already well ahead for the autumn weekend in Sussex (see below). Details of future events will also be posted on the new website as soon as possible.

Sarah Medlam (Chairman)

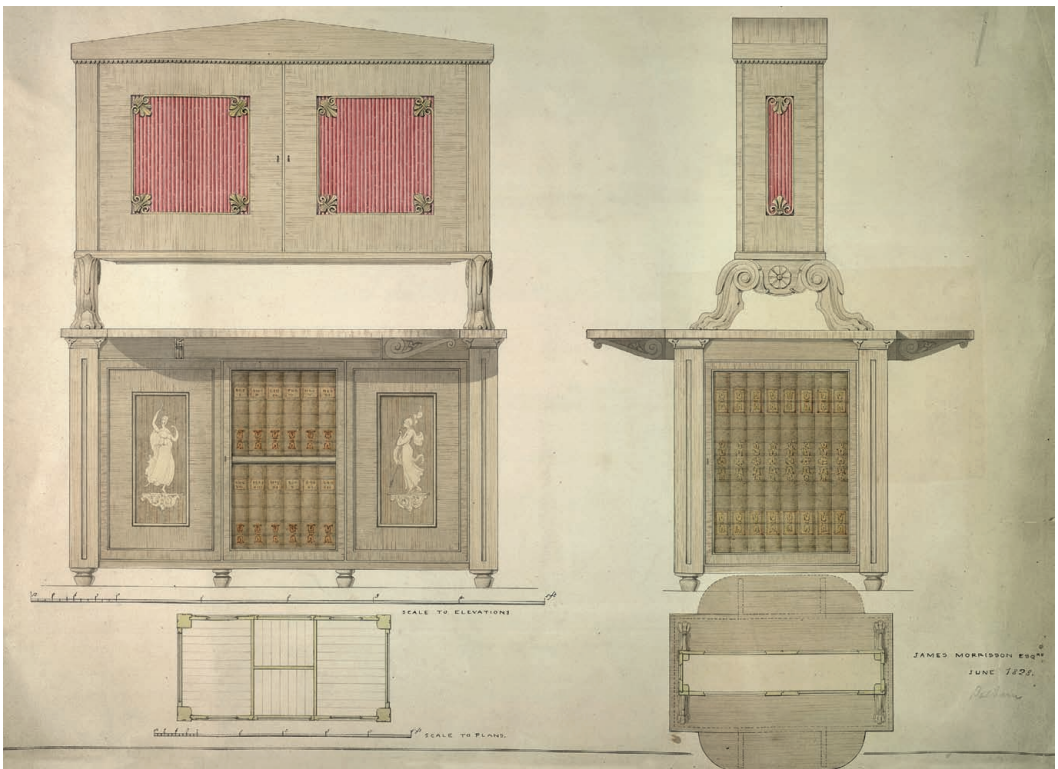
## THE 37TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM OF THE FURNITURE HISTORY SOCIETY

The Wallace Collection, Hertford House, Manchester Square, London W1

Saturday 9 March 2013, 10.00 am – 5.00 pm

### *The Architect as Furniture Designer*

The subject of architects designing furniture, for their own buildings or for commercial sale, was first investigated by Charles Handley-Read in the 1960s in his researches into



*Design for a bookcase by John Buonarrotti Papworth, 1831. RIBA Library Drawings & Archives Collection*



19th-century architects and interiors. However, there have been few attempts to take a broad look at the subject since the exhibition and associated catalogue by Jill Lever in the RIBA Heinz Gallery in 1982. This symposium brings together a number of distinguished scholars and curators to speak on architects from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries and their moveable contributions to the interiors of their buildings. The sessions will be chaired by Charles Hind, Chief Curator, RIBA Library and Julius Bryant, Keeper of the Word and Image Department, Victoria and Albert Museum.

- 10.00 – 10.25 am Registration & Coffee  
10.25 – 10.30 am Welcome (Simon Jervis)  
10.30 – 10.40 am Introduction by Charles Hind  
10.40 – 11.05 am Dr Susan Weber, Director, Bard Graduate Center, New York  
*The Furniture of William Kent*  
11.10 – 11.30 am John Harris, Curator Emeritus, Drawings Collection, RIBA Library  
*Sir William Chambers and the French Connection*  
11.35 – 11.55 am Dr James Yorke, Furniture Historian  
*H. W. Inwood (1794–1843), the Erectheion and the Grecian furniture of St Pancras Church*  
12.00 – 12.25 pm Max Donnelly, Curator of 19th Century Furniture, Victoria and Albert Museum  
*John Pollard Seddon and the Medieval Court of 1862*  
12.25 – 12.55 pm Q&A chaired by Charles Hind  
1.00 – 1.55 pm Lunch  
2.00 – 2.30 pm Matthew Williams, Curator, Cardiff Castle  
*William Burges and the Marquess of Bute — the furniture at Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch*  
2.35 – 3.00 pm Dr Irena Murray, Sir Banister Fletcher Director and Research Director, British Architectural Library  
*Modern Movement Furniture in Central Europe between the two World Wars*  
3.05 – 3.25 pm Dr Alan Powers, School of Architecture, Design and Construction, University of Greenwich  
*The furniture of Raymond Erith (1904–73)*  
3.30 – 4.00 pm Abraham Thomas, Curator of Designs, Victoria and Albert Museum  
*Contemporary Architects and Limited Edition Furniture*  
4.05 – 4.25 pm Q&A chaired by Julius Bryant  
4.25 – 4.30 pm General Thanks (Simon Jervis)  
4.35 – 5.00 pm Tea/Coffee available

Tickets must be purchased in advance and early booking is recommended.

Fee: £40 for FHS and RIBA members (£35 for FHS/RIBA student members and FHS/RIBA OAP's)

All non-members £45. Ticket price includes morning coffee and afternoon tea.

A light lunch will be available for FHS members in the Meeting Room at the Wallace Collection at a cost of £20 to include a glass of wine. Tickets for lunch must be purchased at least 7 days in advance from the Events Secretary. The Wallace Collection Restaurant will be open for bookings (Tel: 0207 563 9505) and there are plenty of local cafes/restaurants.

All ticket bookings must be made via the Events Secretary, email [events@furniturehistorysociety.org](mailto:events@furniturehistorysociety.org). Tel. 07775 907390

## SUSSEX STUDY WEEKEND

Friday 6 – Sunday 8 September 2013

Based at West Dean, participants will have the opportunity to visit the restoration workshops for Furniture, Clocks and Metalwork with the expert tutors and see work in hand in addition to viewing the interiors and furnishings collected by Edward James. We will enjoy a private visit to Goodwood House with the curator James Peill and Curator Emeritus Rosemary Baird. We will also have the privilege of private visits to Knepp Castle and Parham and we hope to visit Petworth House. We will visit the Bishop's Palace, Chichester Cathedral with its spectacular painted Tudor ceiling and early English oak furniture by kind permission of the Bishop of Chichester, the Cathedral Treasury with its fine collection of English medieval parish chests and there will be an early evening reception and supper at Pallant House, Chichester. The weekend will be led by Tessa Murdoch, Victoria and Albert Museum and James Rothwell, National Trust.

Full details, including further visits and costs, are still being finalised but will be confirmed in the May newsletter and posted on the FHS website as soon as available. Please register your interest by e-mail, or by using the blue form as usual and you will be contacted once plans are confirmed.







#### REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Coromandel lacquer

I am researching a late 17th-century mirror frame in the V&A collection which is veneered in Chinese 'Coromandel' lacquer, now displayed in the Dr Susan Weber Gallery. I have so far found only two comparable mirrors, those at Boughton House and Ham House. I would be grateful if members would let me know of any other mirrors, table tops or cabinets made in Britain before about 1710 and veneered in imported Coromandel lacquer. Please contact: Kate Hay, Department of Furniture, Textiles and Fashion, V&A (k.hay@vam.ac.uk)

#### END OF POST-DOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP SEMINAR: Change or Damage? Effect of Climate on Decorative Furniture Surfaces in Historic Properties

19 April 2013, University College London

Since May 2010, *Change or Damage?* has researched the effect display environments have on veneer and marquetry furniture surfaces. This half-day, end of project seminar will discuss the findings from *Change or Damage?* and how these can be used to improve collections

management. The seminar will also provide the opportunity to see the laboratory test samples and analytical techniques in practice.

Refreshments will be provided during the seminar, which is free of charge to attend, however places are limited to 50 people. If you are interested in attending please contact Naomi Luxford, email: [n.luxford@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:n.luxford@ucl.ac.uk)

#### BRITISH PICTURE FRAMEMAKERS, 1610–1950 NEW EDITION

A revised and substantially expanded 3rd edition of this online resource has just gone online on the National Portrait Gallery website. This dictionary resource has doubled in size since first launched in 2007. Thirty-five additional makers have now been added and the starting point for coverage taken back to about 1610. Although most entries have been researched and written by Jacob Simon, this new edition also features articles by Lynn Roberts and Edward Town. Further contributions would be welcome.









## 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](mailto: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 March. Copy should be sent, preferably by email, Elizabeth Jamieson [ea.jamieson@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:ea.jamieson@tiscali.co.uk) or posted to Elizabeth Jamieson, 10 Tarleton Gardens, Forest Hill, London SE23 3XN.

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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, e-mail: [brian.austen@zen.co.uk](mailto:brian.austen@zen.co.uk)

EVENTS SECRETARY: Anne-Marie Bannister, Bricket House, 90 Mount Pleasant Lane, Bricket Wood, St Albans, Herts, AL2 3XD. Tel: 07775 907390

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

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

*Council members can be contacted through the Events or Membership Secretaries whose details are shown above. Contributors can be contacted through the Newsletter Editor who in the case of this issue is Matthew Winterbottom at The Holburne Museum, Great Pulteney Street, Bath, BA2 4DB, tel 01225 388 542 or email: [m.winterbottom@bath.ac.uk](mailto:m.winterbottom@bath.ac.uk)*

*This issue edited by Matthew Winterbottom*

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