



THE FURNITURE HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No. 174

MAY 2009

A LETTER FROM GEORGE BULLOCK'S WORKMEN

The National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum has recently acquired a fascinating letter addressed to George Bullock (c. 1782–1818) by the joiners in his employment, in 1816, voicing their dissatisfaction that, during his absence from the workshop, the cabinet-makers were given preference by his foreman, Mr Standford, at their expense (Fig. 1).¹ This letter, signed by the joiners as 'The Workmen of Your Factory', is so expressive and informative — indirectly as well as directly — that it seems well worth transcribing here in full. It is most unusual, for its date, as a complaint from a group of aggrieved (but highly articulate) craftsmen.

Even allowing for the bias of the writers, the fact that the joiners considered themselves to be favoured by Bullock over his cabinet-makers is remarkable in an enterprise that is best known for its cabinet furniture — and which frequently deployed cabinet-making techniques even in the manufacture of 'joined' furniture such as tables and chairs (see Figs 2 and 3). This raises critical questions about the operation not only of Bullock's practice but also of other comprehensive manufacturing firms of the period. It might be thought to imply that, long after the London guilds had ceased to exercise effective control, the furniture-making trades still divided on traditional lines. Alternatively, taken alongside our knowledge of Bullock's output, the letter might be read as evidence for a differently nuanced distinction between 'joiners' and 'cabinet-makers', by this date, from the division that had evolved since the seventeenth century.² In any event, the only work over which the foreman could have had much discretion was that made for stock rather than to commission. In most practices it was probably normal for stock work to make up a high proportion of a firm's activity; however, the implication that this was also true of Bullock's practice — given the large number of commissions to him on record — is perhaps surprising (but see Fig. 2).³

The letter also reveals the writers' perception of their engagement with prominent architects ('the first surveyors of the age'), above all with the late James Wyatt (1746–1813) —

London - November 1816

To Mr Bullock
Sir,

However deficient we may be to express ourselves in words adequate to the purpose on which we address you we most respectfully rely upon your indulgence, indeed we doubt not from your extensive goodness, felt deeply felt by us all - together with the enlarged knowledge you have of the trade, but that when you are acquainted that discord at this moment exists in the Factory your wonted activity will be instantly exercised to prevent its spreading to any considerable extent - it is our present object to point out the cause thereof

The judicious arrangements which you have made amongst us confirms our opinions that you wish to make every man in your employ as comfortable and united as possible nothing can display the superiority that a great mind has over contractedness than this nor could you have laid a surer foundation to ensure the good will and esteem of mankind, but particularly those who daily live as it were under your protection, then could we submit in silence and witness infringements made upon your good and wholesome regulations? nor do we should in so doing debase our characters as men, and shrink like cowards from our duty, we feel persuaded for you will commend us for informing you, doubting not but you will agree that whoever shall dare to breed strife and dissensions amongst men must be an enemy both to Master and man.

The decided preference you have given to Joiners our Cabinet makers we trust never in any way to have forfeited, this preference is given by every thorough judge in the business, but by none more so than that Great and competent man (now no more) Mr. P. Wyatt our work we know to have met with the approval of some of the first surveyors of the age, but what is infinite men gratification.

Fig. 1 The letter to George Bullock from his workmen, November 1816, detail of the first page. National Art Library, V&A, London.

and, incidentally, suggests that Bullock had a closer relationship with the latter than has hitherto come to light. While some of the furniture from Endsleigh, Devon, points to an association between Bullock and Jeffry Wyatt (later Wyatville),⁴ no direct collaboration between Bullock and James Wyatt (Wyatville's uncle) is otherwise recorded. However, they had presumably known each other since Bullock's Liverpool days (from c. 1801), for Wyatt was engaged with rebuilding Liverpool Town Hall for many years after the 1795 fire there, and in 1809–10 his former pupil Joseph Michael Gandy (1771–1843) briefly became Bullock's partner in Liverpool (where he too played a part in the Town Hall refurbishment).⁵

New names for investigation are presented too — not only the iniquitous Mr Standford (possibly Thomas Stanford, later in independent business),⁶ but also a Mr Conden to whom one of Bullock's 'best hands coming from the country' (i.e. from outside London, so perhaps from Liverpool?) had defected. Finally, this letter casts new light on the culmination of Bullock's brief life, which had taken him from his formative years as a sculptor in Birmingham (1797–1801) to his first business in Liverpool (1801–12/14) to his last five, highly productive but pressured years in London (c. 1813–18).⁷ The letter was written in the year of his most prolific activity, with orders from Edmund Rundell (of Rundell, Bridge & Rundell), Matthew Robinson Boulton (son of Matthew Boulton), Sir Walter Scott at Abbotsford, and Sir Godfrey Webster at Battle Abbey, among several others. These followed on from his most illustrious commission, the previous year, to supply the furniture and fittings for Napoleon's use in exile on St Helena. If, at the same time, he had to contend with 'strife and dissensions' in his factory, we can perhaps well understand how he finally succumbed to the strain, two years later — with the dying words, 'Oh, my poor back!'⁸



Fig. 2 A sofa table from Bullock's posthumous stock sale (Christie's, 3–5 May 1819, 2nd day, lot 34); rosewood and brass veneers, H. 70.6 x W. 172.5 x D. 91.3 cm. It is made largely of flat components to receive veneers and marquetry, reflecting the decorative skills traditionally associated with cabinet-making. National Museums Liverpool (Walker Art Gallery, inv. no. WAG 10747).



Fig. 3 One of a set of chairs from a drawing-room suite attributed to Bullock, c. 1816–18; oak, partly gilt, with ebony and brass inlay, and ormolu mounts, H. 88 x W. 48 cm. The construction is more obviously the work of a joiner than for the table in Fig. 2, but the decorative techniques of cabinet-making are again deployed. Apparently supplied to the van Zeller family of Portugal, and not, as formerly supposed, to the 1st Duke of Palmella (Portuguese Ambassador to London). Sold Christie's (London), 25 June 1987, lot 173. © Christie's Images Ltd 1987.

London — November 1816

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Sir

However deficient we may be to express ourselves in words adequate to the purpose on which we address you we most respectfully rely upon your indulgence, indeed we doubt not from your extensive goodness, felt deeply felt [*sic*] by us all — together with the enlarged knowledge you have of the trade, but that when you are acquainted that discord at this moment exists in the Factory your wonted activity will be instantly exercised to prevent its spreading to any considerable extent — it is our present object to point out the cause thereof

The Judicious arrangement which you have made amongst us confirms our opinions that you wish to make every man in your employ as comfortable and united as possible nothing can display the superiority that a great mind has over contractedness than this nor could you have laid a surer foundation to ensure the good will and esteem of mankind, but particularly those who daily live as it were under your protection, then could we submit in silence and witness infringements made upon your good and wholesome regulations? no Sir we should in so doing debase our characters as men, and shrink like cowards from our duty, we feel persuaded

Sir you will comend us for informing you, doubting not but you will agree that whoever shall dare to breed strife and dissentions amongst men must be an enemy both to master and man.

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to our minds it as met with yours, therefore it must wound us to the quick to see in your absence Cabinet-makers employed by Mr Standford with his boasting too in various places that ultimately he will have every Joiner discharged from the premises, and which is absolutely boasted of at there house of call, for a proof of this we have an instance which we regret to have to state that one of your best hands coming from the country has in consequence of this prevelant report gone to work for Mr Conden prefering as he said a certainty to an Uncertainty, furthermore Sir, we beg to add, that there are now in the factory Cabinet makers and relations of M^r Standfords who have months work before hand while good and tried men in our line have not even a single days — you will not wonder that these things shall cause disunion and dissatisfaction, longing to tell you knowing well your penetration and your impartiality — your own expressions we well remember Sir that you would never employ a Cabinet maker more, how arrogant then to take them on in your absence, and thus presume to counteract your commands — It is unnecessary for us to say how the work was executed by them and how it is now executed by us now [*sic*], that Sir you well know — Surely then Mr Bullock never can submit to see his superior judgment suplanted by the petty narrow mindedness of any individual who wishes to subvert those broad and well regulated arrangments laid down by you for us to pursue we are persuaded you will not, and takes this early oppertunity of informing you — considering it a duty to ourselves as well as to you. Stedfast to the principal of acting according to your regulations we beg to subscribe ourselves Sir Your Humble and devoted Servants

The Workmen of Your Factory

[Endorsed:]

To

Mr G. Bullock

[and in faint pencil writing:]

+ 25,0000

1000 [two illegible words]

1000 [two(?) illegible words]

500 [two(?) illegible words]

Lucy Wood
Victoria and Albert Museum

¹ Purchased from Farahar Dupré, Calne, Wiltshire, June 2007. The letter's earlier provenance is unknown.

² For the gradual separation of cabinet-making (making dovetailed carcasses decorated with veneers) from joinery (mainly mortise-and-tenon construction including framed panelling) see Ralph Edwards (ed.), *Dictionary of English Furniture*, 3 vols, 2nd edn (1954), Vol. I, pp. 200–01; Vol. II, pp. 272–73.

³ A snapshot of Bullock's stock is given in the posthumous 'finished stock' sale, Christie's, 3–5 May 1819 (among which was the table in Fig. 2), but this may of course have included some uncompleted commissions.

⁴ John Cornforth, 'Endsleigh House, Devon — I and II', *Country Life*, Vol. 191 (9 and 16 October 1997), pp. 58–65 (p. 65, figs 8 (possibly by Bullock) and 12 (clearly by Bullock)).

⁵ Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1660–1840*, 3rd edn (London, 1995), pp. 1111, 388–89; June Dean, 'The Regency furniture in Liverpool Town Hall', *Furniture History*, Vol. 25 (1989), pp. 127–29, figs 1–3, 7–9.

⁶ *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers 1660–1840*, ed. by Geoffrey Beard and Christopher Gilbert (Leeds, 1986), p. 848.

⁷ *George Bullock, Cabinet-Maker*, exh. cat., London and Liverpool (London, 1988), *passim*.

⁸ Martin Levy, 'George Bullock's partnership with Charles Fraser, 1813–1818, and the stock-in-trade sale, 1819', *Furniture History*, Vol. 25 (1989), 145–213 (p. 145).

UNKNOWN PIETRE DURE TABLE TOP

The occasion of the marvellous exhibition about *pietre dure* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the visit to it by an FHS delegation last September, prompts the brief presentation of a hitherto unknown table top in *pietre dure* in a private collection. It measures 115.0 by 236.7 cm (which could correspond to 2 by $4\frac{1}{16}$ th Florentine *bracci* or $3\frac{1}{4}$ th by 8 Roman *piedi*). The Carrara white marble slab, that forms the basis (including the integral moulded edge and the white separation fillets of the inlay work), is 3.7 cm thick or $\frac{1}{16}$ th of a Florentine *braccio* or $\frac{2}{16}$ th of a Roman *piede*.

The place of production may have been either Rome or Florence. Its period is less firmly identifiable, but may be *c.* 1600, if compared to similar works (e.g. MMA exhibition, cat. 11 and 15; Prado 2001 catalogue, cat. 3–5, 7). The main feature of all these table tops is a lavish piece of highly ornamented alabaster as a centre point, cut in a special shape: round, oval, octagonal or polygonal. The one presented here contains an oval piece of alabaster, possibly from Palombara, with a motif reminiscent of an agate.



The other stones used in this table top are all marbles, except small pieces of lapis lazuli, ovals in green serpentine and (probably) diaspore:

* around the onyx: dark red *porta santa* and Aosta Valley green (also called *vert Patricia*), with *bleu belge* (black with some white veining) and Carrara white fillets;

* in the central rectangle: *broccatello di Spagna* (yellow and red) background, Verona pink, unidentified brown, light grey *arabescato*; the two large circles are in *Litomarga* (*pietra paesina*), the four smaller ones in purple Serravezza (Carrara), and the oval ones are in a white *breccia* (left) or serpentine (right);

* in the outer rim: between two rectangles of *bleu belge* and on a background of Aosta Valley green, are cartouches of two unidentified brown marbles around oval pieces of a lightly speckled *pietra manziana* (from the lakes of Bolsena and Bracciano) in the middle of the long sides, *bardiglio* grey in the middle of the short sides, Greek grey and white *cipollino* on the left and probably Sicilian diaspore (or some other form of chalcedony) on the right; the circular pieces are *fior di pesco* and the corner ones Siena yellow.

Considering the size of the table top, the opulence of the alabaster and *Litomarga* pieces, but also the limited use of expensive hard stones as opposed to marbles and the general relatively simple design, could this be a mid-range production from the Florentine Grand-Ducal or a Roman workshop?

Dr Leon Lock

l.lock@lowcountriessculpture.org

BRITISH AND IRISH SECULAR INVENTORIES

AN APPEAL

‘Mr J. G. Nichols requests to be favoured with references to any topographical or other works into which inventories of household furniture and other property, particularly of the time of Elizabeth and James I, have been introduced.’

Gentleman’s Magazine, 15, 1841, p. 2

In 1986 the present writer proposed that the FHS should publish a List and Bibliography of British and Irish Secular Inventories. Various changes of circumstance caused this scheme to run into the sand. From 2004 it was revived and in late 2008, to cut the story short, active compilation commenced. I have now assembled a list of over 6,000 published transcriptions of inventories from 1275 to 1841, arranged by county under each year, taken from some 400 different publications.

However I am well aware that I may be ignorant of many published transcriptions. Thus I am repeating John Gough Nichols’s appeal of 1841, reproduced above. I would be most grateful if Members could tell me of any published transcriptions of secular inventories known to them, which I may have overlooked. There must be many lurking in obscure or unexpected places, but I may also have missed the obvious. I am, incidentally, aiming to include the Channel Islands and ‘published’ means printed in a book, pamphlet or article. The transcriptions should be full, not selective. Full references should be given. Please send any information to me at 45 Bedford Gardens, London W8 7EF or at ss.jervis@btopenworld.com.

The planned publication will include indices of persons, places and trades, and should constitute a simple but useful tool for historians in many areas.

Simon Swynfen Jervis, Chairman

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 A STAMPED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE FOR EACH APPLICATION, INCLUDING REQUESTS FOR DETAILS OF FOREIGN TOURS AND STUDY WEEKENDS.

OTHER EVENTS

Please note that the events listed under this section are not organised by the FHS. Booking information appears at the end of each listing.

FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE HISTORIES OF THE HOME

Friday 5 June 2009 at Queen Mary University, London

This academic conference will examine approaches to the study of the home from the eighteenth century to the present day within a British context. The event aims to bring together academics, archivists, museum professionals and postgraduate students to spark new ideas and foster interdisciplinary dialogue, drawing upon documentary sources, paintings, written testimonies and contemporary ethnographic studies.

Speakers will include:

Victoria Kelly (University for the Creative Arts): *Cleanliness, shine and polish on working-class and middle-class material culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.*

Jane Hamlett (Royal Holloway, University of London): *Middle-class homes examined through literature, diaries, social correspondence and inventories, 1850–1910.*

Dianne Lawrence (Lancaster University): *Borders of Distinction and Fashionable Friezes — wallpaper and wall decoration in colonial homes in Tasmania, latter half of 19th century.*

Sara Pennell (Roehampton University): *Home is where the Hearth is? The uses and meanings of the hearth in Restoration London.*

Kate Retford (Birkbeck): *Fabricating the Domestic Interior? The conversation piece in Georgian England.*

Tim Richardson (independent scholar, freelance garden historian): *The importance of biography and connections in understanding the emergent English landscape garden, 1680–1720.*

Divya Tolia-Kelly (Durham University): *Material cultures of home — the South Asian diaspora in Britain*

Tickets: £45/£35 concessions (includes light lunch and refreshments)

Bookings: Contact Krisztina Lackoi on 020 7739 9893 or klackoi@geffrye-museum.org.uk

V&A LAUNCHES 'FURNITURE FUTURES': AN INTERNATIONAL DESIGN SYMPOSIUM

Friday 18 September; 10.00–17.30

Sponsored by John Makepeace and the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers

The V&A will launch a new series of biennial design symposia featuring some of the most influential contemporary design practitioners and commentators including John

Cedarquist, Sebastien Bergne, Alexander Payne, Chris Lefteri, and Lois Le Gaillard to discuss current concerns in furniture design. The first symposium will coincide with the V&A's summer exhibition *Telling Tales: Fantasy and Fear in Contemporary Design* (13 July–18 October 2009) and the London Design Festival.

The symposia will provide a platform for established and emerging designers, makers, architects, interior designers, collectors and design commentators to discuss and debate contemporary themes and issues in furniture design. Speakers will explore furniture as an expression of contemporary culture and consider issues related to both the future of design and the practicalities of furniture making.

The first symposium, *Furniture Futures*, will explore a growing interest in furniture that crosses the boundaries between art, craftsmanship and design. Topics raised will include furniture as art; the role new materials and sustainability in design; and the parts that individual creativity and collaboration play.

The programme will be structured around three main themes: Creative Directions; Changing Practice; and Promotion and Communication. Speakers will include fine art furniture maker John Cedarquist; furniture and industrial designer Sebastien Bergne; materials specialist Chris Lefteri; design writer and professor of design at the RCA Jeremy Myerson; dealer and gallerist Lois Le Gaillard; contemporary design collector and author Alexander Payne; and design critic Alice Rawsthorn.

Tickets: £45 (concessions available). Includes a special reception with speakers and viewing of *Telling Tales: Fantasy and Fear in Contemporary Design*.

To book visit www.vam.ac.uk/tickets or call 020 7942 2211

OTHER ITEMS

AN ALMOST COMPLETE SET OF *FURNITURE HISTORY* FOR SALE IN AID OF THE INGRAM FUND

This set belonged to the late Jean Schofield and a number of the volumes have her book plate or name neatly written on the title page. It consists of Volumes II (1966) to XXXII (1996), *The Hardwick Hall Inventories of 1601* edited by Lindsay Boynton (1971), and four index volumes. The set is thus complete to 1996 excluding only volume I (1965). Volumes after 1996 are available as new copies from the Society if required. The set is in good second hand condition with slight cover soiling or marking on some volumes. In one or two volumes there is slight underlining or annotation and there are a number of loose cuttings between the pages. The set may be inspected by appointment at Haywards Heath.

Bids are invited and members wishing to purchase should submit their maximum purchase price by post, telephone, fax or email to Brian Austen, 1, Mercedes Cottages, St. John's Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 4EH (tel/fax 01444 413845, email: brian.austen@zen.co.uk). Bids will be accepted until 30 June 2009. The highest bidder will be the purchaser at £5 above the next highest bid. The purchaser will be informed and will need to collect the books from Haywards Heath or pay for the carriage to the address required. A guide price of £200 to £300 is suggested but they may sell for less or more.

CALL FOR POSTERS

LIVING IN THE PAST: HISTORIES, HERITAGE AND THE INTERIOR,
Kingston University

Thursday 14 and Friday 15 May 2009

The annual conference of the Modern Interiors Research Centre has established itself as a leading forum for international interdisciplinary debate on the history and theory of the modern interior. In 2009 the Conference will bring together art, architectural and design historians, practitioners and curators, to examine and debate the theme of the interior as a marker of history. For further information on the conference please see: www.kingston.ac.uk/design/MIRC/conference09.html and for booking online see: www.kingston.ac.uk/designbookonline

The conference convenors welcome posters that address the specific themes of the conference and/or the themes that form a focus for the Modern Interiors Research Centre's work, which include:

- * identity and the design of the modern interior
- * modernity, modernism and the interior
- * domesticity and anti-domesticity in the modern interior
- * professional and amateur design practices
- * the relationship between interior design and other areas of design practice
- * the tensions between interior decoration and interior design
- * representations of the modern interior
- * the reconstructed modern interior

All submitted posters will be displayed and exhibitors who attend the conference will have the opportunity to discuss their work with other delegates. Posters should provide a quick, visual and engaging way of communicating research work and promoting informal discussion. They should contain a mix of images and text with an ideal layout of about 20% text, 40% graphics and 40% blank space. People must be able to see the poster from about a metre away so it helps to use a dark 28-point font for body text. We recommend printing on A1 size matt-coated paper, 170 gms. Please remember to include contact details on the poster itself (name, institution, email address).

Posters should be submitted to the conference organisers at 'Living in The Past: Histories, Heritage and The Interior', The Modern Interiors Research Centre, Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture, Kingston University, KT1 2QJ. The deadline for receipt of posters by post is Monday 11 May 2009. Delegates may bring their poster with them to the conference. We are unable to accept electronic submissions.

For any queries please contact mirc@kingston.ac.uk

PUBLICATION — MATTHEW BOULTON: ORMOLU BY NICHOLAS GOODISON

To celebrate the bicentenary of Matthew Boulton (1728–1809), Christie's are delighted to offer FHS members the opportunity to purchase Sir Nicholas Goodison's seminal work: *Matthew Boulton: Ormolu* at a special price of £52.00 (r.r.p. £80.00).

Nicholas Goodison revisits his earlier exhaustive study of Boulton's ormolu ornaments and his manufactory at Soho, and unearths new and previously unpublished material. This book covers the factory between the years 1768 and 1782, the methods by which ornaments were designed, made and marketed, and Boulton's own keen interest in promoting the

business. It is a comprehensive account of the range of vases, candelabra, clock cases and other ormolu ornaments and of the customers who bought them.

To purchase or for further information, please contact Claudia Dilley on 020 7389 2482 or by email cdilley@christies.com

For details of the FHS Matthew Boulton study day see p. 9

SUBSCRIPTIONS OR PRE-PUBLICATION ORDERS SOUGHT FOR NEW PUBLICATION

Following the article about japanned metal and papier mâché furniture in February's *Newsletter*, subscriptions and pre-publication orders are sought for *Japanned Papier Mâché and Tinware, c1740–1940*, by Yvonne Jones, which is to be published by 'The Antique Collectors' Club' in 2010. In the current climate, however, the book will not be published unless its production costs are met by subscriptions or advance sales, the terms of which are:

Subscription edition: £65.00 (+ p&p*) will include your name in the book and be signed by the author

Standard edition: r.r.p. £45, or you may purchase the book at the reduced Special Offer price of £36 (+ p&p*)

* UK £4.00 per book, Europe £6.00 per book, rest of world £10.00 per book

Closing date for subscription and special offer price books is June 2009.

For further details, please contact Yvonne Jones at: yvonne.jones23@btinternet.com

2008 SMITH AWARDS: THE DECORATIVE ARTS SOCIETY HONORS

Margaretta M. Lovell was one of two winners for the 2008 Smith Award for the most distinguished articles in the decorative arts, for her essay entitled 'The Forest, the Copper Mine, and the Sea: The Alchemical and Social Materiality of Greene and Greene'. Her essay combined analysis of documents and artifacts for a new understanding of the Greene brothers. It was written for the catalogue of an exhibition entitled 'A New and Native Beauty: The Art and Craft of Greene & Greene', a collaboration between The Gamble House, University of Southern California School of Architecture, Pasadena, and the Huntington Art Collection, San Marino, California. Emphasised in Lovell's essay were Charles and Henry Greene's concern for the visual and tactile qualities of materials and the technology in preparing and assembling them.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Following the publication of *Irish Furniture* by Desmond FitzGerald, the Knight of Glin and James Peill in 2007, Angela Alexander is completing a survey of nineteenth-century Irish cabinetmakers with a view to publishing a companion volume. She is seeking information on labeled or stamped Irish furniture to c. 1870, with the intention of including photographs. Many Irish cabinetmakers are now simply names in the directories and it is hoped to illustrate as wide a variety of makers as possible.

Angela Alexander, 4 Sunbury Gardens, Dartry, Dublin 6, angela-alexander@hotmail.com

WALLACE COLLECTION MA IN DECORATIVE ARTS AND HISTORIC INTERIORS

This unique collaborative programme between the Wallace Collection and the University of Buckingham on French and British eighteenth-century interiors and decorative arts, is due to be revived this September. The MA, partly based at The Wallace Collection, emphasizes the first-hand study of furniture, silver and ceramics within historic interiors, and includes a Country House Study Week and a trip to Paris. The MA will appeal to those seeking careers in The National Trust, antique-dealing/auctioneering, museums, conservation or interior design, though FHS member Jeremy Howard, the Programme Director, welcomes applications from candidates with a strong personal interest in the subject. For more information contact Linda Waterman at the University of Buckingham (linda.waterman@buckingham.ac.uk; 01280 814080) or visit: www.buckingham.ac.uk/london/decorative-arts.

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.

Gillian Wilson a.o., *French Furniture and Gilt Bronzes, Baroque and Régence, Catalogue of the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008), 404 pp., 121 col., 405 b. & w. illus., 19 diagrams. ISBN 978-0-89236-874-7, £80.

A catalogue of some four hundred pages with a mere forty-four entries (several, admittedly, describing pairs) might be considered indulgent. Knowledge that the collection of which it describes a part was financed by J. Paul Getty, the Croesus of his day, might reinforce a suspicion of extravagance. Vanity publishing or a contribution to scholarship? Gillian Wilson's compact introduction on the formation of the collection sets the tone — clear, factual and, if anything, understated. It reveals that five entries were acquired by Mr Getty (this formality of address is always observed) before she joined the Museum in 1971, a further ten were added during his life-time on her advice (he died in 1976, a year after Sotheby's first Monaco sale in May 1975 initiated a new epoch of opportunity — at a price), while the rest were bought under her direct control. As an illustrated appendix of the other objects from the same period in the Museum further demonstrates, the whole collection is very much her creation.

The catalogue entries are janus-faced in that in every case a full description and commentary, with a note on provenance and a bibliography, the work of the Museum's curators, Gillian Wilson herself being responsible for nineteen, Charissa Bremer-David for thirteen and Jeffrey Weaver for twelve, is complemented by a technical description, these involving thirteen members of the Conservation Department, under the aegis of Brian Considine. In the healthy modern manner there is complete frankness about the vicissitudes objects may have suffered. Inevitably some gilt-bronze mounts prove to be replacements, including the Bacchus and lion masks on the superb Boulle medal cabinet from Houghton, whose unaltered pair is in the Hermitage, and escutcheon mounts on a handsome commode which is proved to come from Maisons. The mounts on a Cressent commode appear to have been altered at an early date, as is the case with a small tripod table attributed to Pierre Gole, which incorporates a central roundel after Daniel Marot, but not original to the piece. Within the technical descriptions is included much information on

materials, techniques and the latest methods of investigation, applicable elsewhere; for instance the cementation process of making brass is explained in a note. The most striking revelation is that the figures supporting the celebrated Gort cabinet were originally bronzed, an effect demonstrated in a convincingly simulated photograph; their analysis includes a substantial and useful account of bronzing techniques. A standard list of woods in English, Latin and French provides consistency, although it may be wondered whether 'wamara' with its 'banded parenchyma' will catch on for 'ironwood' (*ferreol*).

The curatorial commentaries are also full of useful and apposite guidance: an account of the Demidoff dynasty, biographies of the Crozats, Antoine and Pierre, and of Chester Beatty (and it is nice to learn that Philip Sassoon was an *aide-de-camp* to General Haig), notes on crowned Cs and stamps, and an excursus on the 'cul-de-lampe' (which does not, however, note this as a contemporary term for graphic ornaments) being but a selection. Throughout there is a concentration on documents, particularly sale catalogues and inventories, which are liberally quoted, and on comparisons. Boulle pedestals comparable to the pair made to support bronzes by Girardon and Marcy are cited in sales from the Comte de Pontchartrain in 1747 to Gregory Gregory of Harlaxton in 1878, and there is an individual appendix to the entry on the bureau Mazarin made for Maximilian II Emanuel of Bavaria, listing nine comparable objects (after the catalogue went to print this piece regained its *gradin* which resurfaced in 1975). The evidence once marshalled the assessments of every piece are carefully argued and judiciously framed: there is no concession to speculation, still less any jumping to easy conclusions.

Inevitably the odd imperfection catches the eye: 'Julliene' for 'Jullienne' (p. 235), a 'photograph' in the 1829 Gwydir catalogue (p. 57), two separate mounts conflated (p. 219), the 'Earls of Cowper' for 'Earls Cowper' (p.175), a wrong cross-reference in a note (p.95, n. 9). And is the stand of a cabinet from Gopsall (p. 36) really English? Equally inevitably one may quibble with the odd description: they may have been described as 'à huit pans' in 1788, but the chamfered faces of the 'Girardon' pedestals are surely corners, not 'sides' (p. 226). And 'auricular' is not right for a cartouche on a *Régence* armchair (p. 248). But enough: 'due diligence' has been demonstrated and the harvest is exiguous.

Two aspects of this catalogue remain to be celebrated. The first is the illustrations, which are plentiful and of very high quality, including many direct comparisons, as well as design drawings and prints. Doubtless colour could have been afforded throughout, but, sensibly, black-and-white, which is often so much more legible for details, also plays a major role. The second is its sheer concentration of Boulle. Gillian Wilson's first article (*Furniture History*, 8, 1972) was on Boulle and her longest entry is on the Gort cabinet. Fifteen other individual objects attributed to Boulle are described and three further in the 'Boulle' technique, not to mention the three Boulle clocks in her earlier catalogue (1996). All are now accessible, and the business of attribution and ordering, evaluation and interpretation, can advance on firmer foundations. Not to speak of speculation: Gillian Wilson leaves open the possibility that Hercules and Hippolyta on the Gort cabinet may originally have supported something else, and in a note she mentions Michele Todini's amazing musico-sculptural triad in the Metropolitan Museum, New York as the sort of context into which they might have fitted. But might not a coach have been a better candidate? The three great Roman coaches of 1716 in Lisbon incorporate figures in a variety of comparable supportive poses, not to speak of coach designs by Schor, Ferri and Daniel Marot. Another sculptural coach, that designed by Bernard Picart for the entry of the Duke of Osuna to Utrecht in 1713, had a 'Boulle' floor, and Picart's design for this was also used in João V's Crown Coach in Lisbon, of about 1715. The Osuna and Lisbon coach floors are of a quite different character to the 'Boulle' floor in Charles XI's coach in Stockholm, made by Oppenordt, lighter and

sprightlier. Could Picart, to speculate again, be a candidate for the design of the 'Boulle' marquetry on the Maximilian II Emanuel desk, and its relations?

Enough has been said, it is hoped, to demonstrate that this is a model catalogue of a major collection. Roll on its successors.

Simon Swynfen Jervis

Joseph Cunningham a. o., *The Artistic Furniture of Charles Rohlfs* (New Haven: American Decorative Art 1900 Foundation/Yale University Press, 2008), 304 pp., 321 col., 16 b. & w. illus. ISBN 978-0-300-13909-9, \$65.

Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *Studio Furniture of the Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum* (Washington, DC: Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian American Art Museum/Fox Chapel Publishing, 2008), 224 pp., 148 col. Illus. ISBN 978-1-56523-365-2, \$60.

A mild anxiety arises from the near-simultaneous publication of these two books on twentieth-century American furniture: in one hundred years, will scholars be painstakingly reconstructing the careers of today's studio furniture makers? This is certainly what Joseph Cunningham has had to do in the first volume under review, which subjects the curious case of turn-of-the-century maker Charles Rohlfs to scrupulous analysis. A biography and *catalogue raisonné*, it also serves as the catalogue for an exhibition of the same title, which opens in June 2009 at the Milwaukee Art Museum and tours thereafter. The second book, presenting the work collected by the Renwick Gallery, a satellite museum of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, serves to remind us how little work has been done on many of today's furniture artists.

The Arts and Crafts Movement was a broad church, but even so the work of Charles Rohlfs sat only uneasily within it. As recently as 1960, according to Bruce Barnes' foreword, one of his elaborate carved candlesticks was acquired by the Brooklyn Museum of Art as an anonymous turn-of-the-century work — possibly French? With Cunningham's book in hand, it is hard to imagine a moment when Rohlfs was obscure: the authors have reconstructed his life in exhaustive detail. We learn about his family life in Buffalo, New York; his brief, abortive career as a political agitator; and his all-too-enthusiastic work on the stage. Above all, we get his furniture. Cunningham has employed an unusual, but effective structure in which analyses of individual objects are woven into a biographical text. This is possible only because he has been able to date each of Rohlfs' works very precisely, much in the manner that it has been possible for scholars to date the contemporaneous production of Gustav Stickley — by comparing extant pieces to published black and white images.

Cunningham's approach is particularly effective in the early stages of the book, when Rohlfs was 'casting about' for a career, waiting for his big break as an actor and yet to realize that his woodworking hobby might be a satisfactory professional outlet for his restless energies. The process by which he developed his aesthetic may have involved the close cooperation of his wife, the mystery novelist Anna Katharine Green — the recounting of these early years makes for captivating reading. Cunningham is also evocative in discussing later works in Rohlfs' oeuvre; his usual method is to begin with speculation on the sources of the eclectic design vocabulary (which range from Owen Jones to Jugendstil and Charles Rennie Mackintosh to Oceanic tattoos). He then provides exhaustive physical descriptions of objects — from the fake pegs that Rohlfs used to cover screws to the use of odd materials like kappa shells for a table lamp — and tracks the exhibition and publication histories of many objects, which helps to date them but also provides hints as to which works Rohlfs himself considered to be important. Also included is a full facsimile of a large

set of printed advertising cards and pamphlets (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art) that record images and original prices for a huge number of Rohlfs' designs — some of which survive only in photographic form.

Cunningham is much given to praising Rohlfs' work, which is understandable given that he and his partner Bruce Barnes, operating as the American Decorative Art 1900 Foundation, have assembled an outstanding private collection of his work. But, particularly when faced with the lavish photography in the volume, one scarcely needs convincing that Rohlfs was a genius. That fact jumps out like a jack in the box comparing his works to the collection assembled by the Renwick Gallery since 1975. While the conceptual and stylistic palette of furniture has expanded radically since 1900, few of the makers represented in this volume even approach Rohlfs' craftsmanship, design sensibility, and adventurousness. It is worth speculating, briefly, on why this might be. The answer, I believe, is somewhat counterintuitive. As Sarah Fayen explains in her introductory essay in the Rohlfs book, he got his start in carving as a teenager, working not in the furniture trade but as a pattern-maker for a cast iron stove manufacturer. Rohlfs was not proud of this industrial background — he excised it when later relating stories of his early career — but once you know this bit of personal history, it is impossible to look at the low relief carving on his works and not see his rote training being put to good use. Another reason that Rohlfs' furniture was so good was that he employed a staff, who were professionals within the Buffalo, New York, furniture manufacturing industry. As Fayen points out, these men were making just the sort of 'parlor suites of mahogany or rosewood with Rococo Revival floral patterns' that Arts and Crafts advocates despised. It is a delicious irony that without the skill base that mass production was able to support, and without the practice of divided labour that William Morris hated above all things, Rohlfs' designs could never have been realized.

Fast-forward the better part of a century, and those factory-based skills are of course no longer available — or at least, are hardly ever exploited by studio furniture makers. The craft movement ideology of artistic individualism scarcely permits it. It is perhaps no coincidence that the sole exceptions to this principle in the Renwick Collection are also its most famous works: Wendell Castle's iconic *Ghost Clock* and the subtly modulated, Scandinavian-tinged furniture of Sam Maloof, which were both made using highly skilled support staff. Many other objects in the collection don't approach that standard; those that do tend to fly on sheer chutzpah (like John Cederquist's cabinets, which employ a tricky play of perspective and imagery, or Garry Knox Bennett's postmodern masterpiece *Boston Kneehole Desk*) or a combination of keep-it-simple-stupid design and uncommon technical expertise (Jere Osgood's refined desk, Michael Hurwitz's rocking chaise, and Kristina Madsen's chip-carved chair).

The Renwick's catalogue is notable mainly for its institutional honesty. The collection has been shaped by three curators — Lloyd Herman, Michael Monroe, and Kenneth Trapp — and Oscar Fitzgerald has not been shy about characterizing their different approaches. Of the three, Monroe was the most accomplished collector. He consciously adopted a relatively conservative stance, acquiring only major pieces by acknowledged leaders within the field. This means that the core strengths of the collection are almost all his contributions. Herman, before him, worked in a different and humbler era in the history of the craft movement; most of his acquisitions came from exhibitions held at the Gallery, with mixed results. Trapp was a risk-taker, and had an aesthetic sense diametrically opposed to Monroe's: he liked jokes, colour, pattern, and guts. As Fitzgerald points out he also sought out younger makers, trying to give their careers a boost. He made the strange choice of acquiring work by reproduction makers and artists like Robert Erickson and Michael Sterling, who make frankly derivative work. Generally though, his whimsical eye was a

tonic for the collection. Few of the objects he acquired have the charisma or weight of Monroe's but they add much-needed froth to what might otherwise seem a predictable gathering.

Fitzgerald's account of the present situation is somewhat troubling. Since Trapp's departure in 2003 the Renwick has acquired exactly one piece of furniture, an Arts and Crafts chest made at the Byrdcliffe colony (arguably outside of the institution's remit). 'A new mission statement promulgated in the fall of 2005,' Fitzgerald notes, 'charged the Renwick with collecting quality work by significant artists and moves away from Trap's philosophy of collecting work by lesser-known makers' — a seemingly innocuous, but in fact unusually frank, airing of a museum's business. Elsewhere in the book Fitzgerald seems more interested in number-crunching than hard hitting analysis (he has added an appendix with a statistical breakdown of contemporary makers within the collection, based on a series of questionnaires that asked about training, shop practices, and other matters). His discussion of the individual works in the collection is always readable and interesting, but rather brisk — though the photography is again excellent.

Glenn Adamson

SHORTER NOTICES

Caroline Campbell, *Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence* (London: The Courtauld Gallery and Paul Holbertson Publishing, 2009), 128 pp., 64 col., 1 b & w. illus. ISBN 978-1-9034709-1-6, £20.

This excellent publication accompanies the small eponymous exhibition being held until 17 May at the Courtauld Gallery, which is centred on that institution's pair of carved, gilded and painted chests made for the marriage of Lorenzo di Matteo Morelli and Vaggia di Tanai Nerli, celebrated in Florence in 1472. Although these chests have undergone considerable restoration in the nineteenth century, they are among the best preserved examples of their kind which are moreover unique in having retained their *spalliera*, the painted backboard that was displayed on the wall above them. Originally probably one long object, this has subsequently been divided into two individually framed panels of the width of the chests. Extraordinarily, the commission of these grand pieces of representational furniture is recorded in great detail in the groom's accounts which survive. The first of the introductory chapters examines the history of the great painted wedding chests, originally probably known as *forziere*, made in Florence from the late-fourteenth to the late-fifteenth centuries. Ordered by the husband or his family, the chests — often in pairs — were usually displayed in his chamber (*camera*) which, however, was used for gatherings of the entire family. The workshops where the chests were made are discussed, and the second chapter concentrates on the painted scenes whose content and iconography is shown to have close links with contemporary compendia of religious, historical and literary texts. The third and final chapter deals with the growing popularity of painted panels from chests from the early nineteenth century onwards and the 'creation' of complete cassone — as by then they were universally known — to satisfy a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century clientele. The entries on the ten items shown in the exhibition further elucidate the subjects broached in the introduction. Beautifully illustrated, this exemplary catalogue presents an accessible account of new, highly pertinent research on a topic for which interest has grown explosively in recent years.

Martina Droth (ed.), *Taking Shape: Finding Sculpture in the Decorative Arts* (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2008), 210 pp., 156 col., 56 b. & w. ills. ISBN 978-1-905462-21-6, £25.

This lavish catalogue is of an exhibition first shown at the Henry Moore Institute and now, in modified form, at the J. Paul Getty Museum (until 5 July). Based on a selection of works of art from the Getty Museum and Temple Newsam House, Leeds, it addresses the relationship between sculpture and the decorative arts, particularly furniture, concentrating on the middle of the eighteenth century. In her introduction, Martina Droth states that these art forms are normally appreciated in radically different ways — failing to note that this is largely a feature of modern museum and university practice — and proceeds to describe several ‘inherent commonalities’ between them. From an historically informed point of view these seem mostly self-evident, as transpires in the entries on the individual objects featured in the exhibition. These contain much useful information, but might actually have inquired more consistently into the involvement of sculptors in the works of art under discussion, as well as investigating how those works were appreciated by patrons and contemporary critics. The best example of such an approach is Anthony Wells-Cole’s thorough and fascinating account of the gallery furniture at Hagley and Temple Newsam, the veritable centre-piece of the catalogue (cat. nos 22–25). This further includes entries on a number of rococo ornament prints, four short essays on issues related in various ways to the theme of the exhibition, and an astonishingly generous photographic record of its installation in Leeds. Like so many recent exhibition catalogues, it fails to successfully pull together the work of a great many contributors.

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.

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 June**. Copy should be sent, preferably by email, to M.Winterbottom@bath.ac.uk or posted to Matthew Winterbottom, The Holbourne Museum of Art, Bath, BA2 4DB, tel. 01225 820813.

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