TAPESTRY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN: BASED ON THE PAPER GIVEN AT THE 2011 ANNUAL LECTURE

The tapestry medium changed fundamentally in the course of the eighteenth century, in Britain as elsewhere in Europe. As the century began tapestry was still an art of Kings, a medium of international statecraft; at its close it was little more than an expensive and outmoded form of decoration. Changes took place in the production, use and the very meaning of tapestry, making the eighteenth century one of the most complex in its history.

The tapestries commissioned by John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough for Blenheim Palace between 1705 and 1715, mark a final grandiose flourish for tapestry as a medium of power and propaganda. Five vast tapestry sets were commissioned from the foremost Brussels weavers each celebrating his virtues and victories. These included detailed representations of the Duke’s military conquests based on maps, landscape sketches and portraits of the participants, and a series known as the Art of War, versions of which were also commissioned by many of Marlborough’s generals (Fig. 1).1 Marlborough’s tapestries were a powerful expression of their patron’s achievements, but also of the might of the British nation.

The Art of War stood at the end of a long tradition. In the early sixteenth century England’s most famous tapestry patron, Henry VIII, had amassed a collection of over 2,500 pieces and for him they were essential trappings of power, uniquely capable of expressing princely Magnificence through their visual richness, iconography, and their strategic display and use as gifts.2 A century later Charles I sponsored the Mortlake workshop to weave the finest tapestries in Europe. He acquired Raphael’s Acts of the Apostles as cartoons and lavished huge sums on tapestries laden with silk and gold thread, their designs

2 Thomas Campbell, Henry VIII and the Art of Majesty, Yale 2007.
Fig. 1  Embuscade from a set of the Art of War commissioned by the Earl of Orkney for Cliveden in 1705. Jacob van der Borcht, Brussels, after a design by Philip de Hondt. Cliveden, The Astor Collection (The National Trust). ©NTPL/John Hammond
intimately linked with the intellectual life of the court. Under Charles II the ceremonial importance of tapestry continued and many new sets were made for the King and his courtiers, often repeating the imagery of the previous reign, although their quality could not compare with Mortlake’s golden years. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 saw a dramatic change. A new Yeoman Arrasworker, John Vanderbank, was appointed, and the historical and mythological subjects favoured by the Stuarts were abandoned in favour of a new, decorative style. Vanderbank’s most popular series, known as ‘Tapestries after the Indian Manner’, consisted of small groups of exotic figures floating on little islands over a plain dark ground, the designs taken from a range of sources including Chinese lacquer, Indian and even Turkish manuscripts (Fig. 2). These tapestries seem to imitate the imported lacquer panels which were on occasion set into the walls of rooms.

In the early eighteenth century most grand houses continued to include at least one room decorated with tapestry, but styles and modes of display were evolving. The new trend for decorative, all-over designs flourished, for example in the Arabesques produced by Joshua Morris in Soho in the 1720s. With their designs of scrollwork, flowers and birds on a yellow ground the Arabesques resemble panels of embroidered silk, and they were often set into panelling, an increasingly popular way of displaying tapestries and one which originated in France.

Morris was succeeded in 1730 by William Bradshaw (1700–70), who would be the leading Soho tapissier until the mid 1750s. Bradshaw was the first of a new breed. An upholsterer by trade, he built up a large practice selling furniture, textiles and furnishings that enabled him to completely fit out an interior, with tapestry just one facet of his activity. This mode of working reflected a new reality, that tapestry alone was no longer a viable business proposition. Bradshaw’s most popular wall hangings were a series of Pastoral, of which numerous examples survive: the only set to be signed is today at Ham House where it was installed in 1742 (Fig. 3). The Pastoralcapitalised on the English vogue for the Fête Galante and were sold as ‘after Watteau’: but rather than obtain new designs each scene is made up of figures from prints after Watteau and his followers, skilfully recombined into what appear to be original compositions.

Tapestry upholstery for chairs, sofas and firescreens became extremely popular in the first half of the eighteenth century, again following French precedents. Some surviving examples can be attributed to Bradshaw, but others were made at smaller workshops. A beautiful series of chairs at Uppark with designs after Francis Barlow bears the signature ‘Danthon’, the name of one of the many Huguenots who revitalised London tapestry production in this period. Lacking the equipment and the capital to undertake large-scale tapestries on their own, many of these men resorted to furniture-coverings as a more manageable alternative. Although there is no record of it, the looms of William Bradshaw in his large Greek Street premises may well have been manned by immigrant French weavers too.


Bradshaw was so successful that he was able to buy a country estate and retire in 1755, handing over his business to George Smith Bradshaw and Paul Saunders. Saunders, Yeoman Arrasworker to George II and George III, was the main tapestry producer in the later eighteenth century and his death in 1771 marked the end of production in this country. Like Bradshaw he was also an upholsterer and produced tapestry furniture covers, notably a series of made in the early 1750s for the drawing room at Hagley Hall to harmonise with a set of second-hand Arabesques by Joshua Morris: the resulting room is a startling example of furniture and wall coverings conceived as a whole in the French manner, and anticipated developments later in the century.

Saunders was also responsible for an intriguing series of landscape hangings designed by Francesco Zucarelli, their exotic subjects including a Pilgrimage to Mecca with figures in Oriental dress riding on camels, other elements based on the illustrations to Robert Wood’s Ruins of Palmyra (1753). Examples survive at Audley End, Petworth and Holkham Hall. The Mecca tapestries, like Bradshaw’s Pastorals, are essentially decorative with no narrative content, and this reflects a more general development in eighteenth-century tapestry. Even more sophisticated French series like the Gobelins Fragments d’Opera or the Amours des Dieux increasingly presented picturesque moments with no overarching story. The

underlying reason for this was touched on by the poet Goethe who was shocked to see tapestries of the *Story of Jason* displayed at the arrival of Marie-Antoinette in Strasbourg in 1770: ‘Can it be permitted, to put before the eyes of a young queen an image of the most horrible marriage ever celebrated, as she first sets foot on the country she will reign over? Is there not among all the architects, decorators, tapissiers in France, one who understands that these images affect the sensibility and the soul, that they produce impressions, awake presentiments?’\(^9\) Essentially, what Goethe was complaining about was tapestry’s loss of allegorical power: its iconography no longer mattered in the way it had for earlier monarchs, and tapestry had become no more than an attractive wall covering.

But if tapestry had lost its power to move the soul and to articulate grand narratives, there was still room for this costly medium in fashionable new interiors, and the 1760s saw one final act in the story of British tapestry patronage. A new design known as the *Tenture de Boucher* was introduced at the Gobelins by the entrepreneur Jacques Neilson, and his first client was the Earl of Coventry who in 1763 commissioned a room for Croome Court with panels tailor made for the walls, separate overdoors and matching upholstery.\(^10\) The design was a sophisticated illusory scheme imitating silk damask wall hangings in carved and gilded frames, with fictive ‘paintings’ by François Boucher hanging from ribbons on each wall. This refined and exquisitely executed design started something of a craze with British patrons, and no less than four rooms were installed in the 1760s, with a fifth made for

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Osterley in 1775–6 (Fig. 4) and a sixth for Welbeck Abbey a decade later. The designs never really took off in France but appealed particularly to English and Scottish taste, and it is surely no coincidence that all but one of the rooms was installed in houses remodelled by Robert Adam.

The success of the *Tenture de Boucher* was not to mark a revival of tapestry; rather it was to be its swansong. In the playful, illusory design we find echoes of Vanderbank’s *Chinoiserie* imitating lacquer panels, or Morris’s *Arabesque* resembling embroidered silk: all perhaps evidence of the insecure position of the tapestry medium in the eighteenth century. On the one hand tapestry was fast losing its power as a public medium of statecraft, whilst on the other its function as a wall covering was increasingly shared with other forms of decoration, whose appearance it now mimicked.

A nascent interest in historic tapestries can also be detected, perhaps in evidence at Houghton where a 1670s set celebrating the genealogy of Charles I was installed by Robert Walpole in the 1730s — an apparently strange choice of subject for a Whig Prime Minister. The display of over sixty mainly seventeenth-century tapestries covering virtually every inch of wall space at Cotehele House, probably in the 1750s, is an astonishing early example of the use of tapestry to create a consciously antiquarian interior, their subject matter sacrificed in favour of general effect. Both examples perhaps indicate that already the age of tapestry as a living art had passed.

Helen Wyld
ANNOUNCEMENTS

BACK ISSUES OF FURNITURE HISTORY

A former member has for disposal a run of Furniture History from 1992 to 2010. These could be disposed of as a lot or single volumes could be supplied. A donation to a charity of the new owner’s choice is requested. The volumes are in North London. If interested contact the present owner at robin@wendywilliams@virginmedia.com

NATIONAL TRUST COLLECTIONS WEBSITE LAUNCHED

Details of over three-quarters of a million National Trust objects have been made available online for the first time. The website also includes information about items in storage and objects that are too fragile to display, making it one of the largest online resources for historic collections in the world.

To view the National Trust Collections website see: www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk

Members may also be interested to receive copies of the Arts, Buildings and Conservation Bulletin or ABC Bulletin, which showcases the latest curatorial and conservation news, projects and expertise at the National Trust. If you would like to receive the Arts, Buildings & Collections Bulletin direct to your inbox, please email abc@nationaltrust.org.uk

The National Trust Bibliography lists over 4,000 books and articles published about National Trust properties and collections. To download in PDF format please see: http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/what-we-do/what-we-protect/collections/knowledge-bank/view-page/item629608

BOOK OFFER FOR MEMBERS

Woods in British Furniture Making 1400–1900: Advertising flyers for this book, to be published later in the year, are inserted in this issue of the Newsletter. Author Adam Bowett would like to offer the book to FHS members at a £20 reduction. To take advantage of the offer write ‘FHS’ in large letters on the order form and send the completed form with your cheque for £90 to the address given on the flyer by 31 July. If you wish to pay by credit or debit card please phone the publisher, Oblong, between 2.00 pm and 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday. Regrettably, the offer is open only to members living in the UK. The book is published in the UK, Europe, and other non-American countries by Oblong. Members from Canada, the USA, or South America may purchase copies from Kew Publishing c/o University of Chicago Press.

FUTURE SOCIETY EVENTS

BOOKINGS

For places on all visits please apply to the Events Secretary, Sara Heaton, 18 First Street, London, SW3 2LD. 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 either email the Events Secretary, or send your email address with your application to furniturehistorysociety@hotmail.com.

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. 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 £10.00 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

Duncan Phyfe: Master Cabinetmaker in New York, Peter M. Kenney

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

Wednesday 30th October, 6.00 pm for 6.30 pm–7.45 pm lecture

To those with even a passing knowledge of furniture history, the name Duncan Phyfe is instantly recognizable. The apotheosis of Duncan Phyfe, described in his own lifetime as the ‘United States Rage,’ from a successful furniture maker to an American icon in the early twentieth century provides a logical starting point for a reconsideration of this renowned master cabinetmaker. Phyfe’s brilliant craftsmanship and sense of design made him the leader of an entire school of cabinetmaking in early nineteenth-century New York. How Phyfe and the other cabinetmakers of this school forged their own distinctive version of the Grecian or classical style in its various iterations over time is a fascinating story of a celebrated master craftsmen and the dynamic city he called home throughout his long career.

Peter M. Kenny is the Ruth Bigelow Wriston Curator of American Decorative Arts and the Administrator of the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He is the curator of the current Duncan Phyfe retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum, where he has worked for the past twenty-three years, principally with the seventeenth-, eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century American furniture collections.

Admission to the Lecture is free, but attendance is by ticket only, which must be acquired in advance from the Events Secretary.

Numbers are limited to 90.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND WORKS IN PROGRESS TALKS

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

Saturday 24th November 2012, 11.00 am–1.00 pm

The Annual General Meeting for the year ending 30th June 2012 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 Works in Progress talks.
OCCASIONAL VISITS

Arlington Conservation, London SW8

Tuesday 18th September 2012, morning

Peter Holmes, FHS council member and Managing Director of Arlington Conservation, has agreed to show a small group of members around the Arlington Conservation studio.

Founded in 2001, Arlington Conservation has an international reputation for excellence in the field of fine furniture conservation and provides a wide range of skilled work from general cabinet making to detailed work such as marquetry cutting, veneering, decorative work and metal work.

Fee: £10 (to include tea and coffee)

Closing date for applications: 15th July 2012

Limit: 10 members (If the visit is popular, they have kindly agreed to do two back-to-back visits for 10 people during the morning)

Frogmore House, Home Park, Windsor

Wednesday 19th September, 2.00–4.30 pm

Since the late eighteenth century, Frogmore has been a Royal retreat from the grandeur and formality of court life at Windsor Castle. It was created by Queen Charlotte as a trianon for female activities and her daughters spent much time there during the summer months, drawing, botanising and needleworking. The house was restored at the end of the twentieth century to reflect the principal eras of use, namely those of Queen Charlotte; Victoria, Duchess of Kent, and Queen Mary. Rufus Bird, Deputy Surveyor of The Queen's Works of Art will lead a tour of the house which will include an opportunity to examine some of the furniture, as well as a rare chance to visit to the Gothic ruin nearby.

Fee: £35 (to include coach from Windsor and tea)

(For security reasons there is no independent travel to Frogmore, the group will meet at Windsor Riverside Station and be taken by coach to Frogmore. The coach will return the group to the station after the visit)

Closing date for applications: 15th July 2012

Limit: 20 members

The Wernher Collection at Ranger's House, London SE10

Wednesday 3rd October 2012, 10.30 am–1.00 pm

The Wernher Collection was amassed by Sir Julius Wernher (1850–1912) between 1880–1910. He had made his fortune from buying diamonds in South Africa and like many Victorian gentlemen, chose to spend his wealth on acquiring works of art and displaying them in both his London home Bath House on Piccadilly, and his county house Luton Hoo in Bedfordshire. Although Wernher's passion was for decorative art from the medieval and renaissance periods, he also filled his homes with furniture intended for decoration and use. These pieces range from the highly unusual travelling cabinet made circa 1755 by Jean Francois Oeben, to attractive but rather mundane suites of tapestry upholstered furniture in the styles of Louis XV and XVI.
The collection was placed on loan to English Heritage in 2002 and is now displayed at Ranger's House. Also at Ranger's House are items of English furniture made by George Bullock and Henry Flitcroft acquired over the last twenty years by English Heritage to enhance displays at the house. Annie Kemkaran-Smith, Curator (English Heritage) and Dr Eleanor Tollfree (formerly of the Wallace Collection) have agreed to show us the collection at Rangers House.

Fee: £20 (to include coffee)  Limit: 25 members
Closing date for applications: 15th July 2012

Longleat House, Warminster, Wiltshire
Friday 19th October 10.30 am–4.30 pm

Sarah Medlam (Curator, Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department at the V&A) and Dr Kate Harris, (Curator Longleat Historic Collections) and colleagues from the house will lead a study day at Longleat. Dating from 1567 the house was altered and modernised over subsequent centuries, but the most visible changes were made in the nineteenth century by Jeffrey Wyatville and J. D. Crace. The house will be open to the public during our visit, and members of the family may be in residence, but they have agreed to allow special access to selected pieces of furniture which will be opened for us. We will also be allowed into the private apartments and the Old Library, where we will see a small collection of nineteenth century photographs of interiors and their furniture. These images were taken just after and during the redecoration carried out by J. D. Crace. This will be particularly relevant as we will also be seeing the conservation project involving Crace’s architectural joinery on the ground floor. Amongst many significant pieces at Longleat we will see English, French and Italian furniture collected by the Thynne family. We may also see two desks recently commissioned from Senior and Carmichael.

Fee: £45 (to include coffee, but no lunch)  Limit: 25 members
Closing date for applications: 15th July 2012

Overseas Events

Potsdam and environs, Germany
22nd–28th September 2012

This visit is now fully subscribed.

New York Study Weekend
30th November–3rd December 2012

Arrangements are currently being made for a weekend visit to New York, culminating on Monday 3rd December in a special private study day at the Metropolitan Museum. We will have a full day studying the exhibition 'Seductive Luxury and Innovation: Furniture by Abraham and David Roentgen' with the curator Dr Wolfram Koppe. For more information on the exhibition see Newsletter 185.

It is hoped to arrange some private views and dinners during the weekend. The FHS will not be arranging accommodation for this weekend, but a group booking has been made at the Hotel Wales which members may wish to consider.
For more details or to register your interest please apply in the normal way or email furniturehistorysociety@hotmail.com

A Proposed Visit to Australia: Sydney and Tasmania

April 2014

Douglas Blain, Tasmanian-born member of the FHS, and curator Warwick Oakman, have drawn up an itinerary for a ten day visit exploring the two oldest Australian colonies. The visit will start with three days in Sydney, visiting the Rose Seidler House, designed in 1948–1950, retaining its original modernist contents in a sylvan bush setting; the finest Colonial period Greek Revival interior in Australia, Elizabeth Bay House, the Gothic Revival Vaucluse House, and The Cottage, Mulgoa, the oldest inhabited dwelling in Australia, the home of architectural historian James Broadbent, furnished with his remarkable lifetime's collection of Colonial decorative arts. A further visit to the most comprehensive collection of Australiana including furniture and woodcarving in a private town house in the Colonial Rocks district of Sydney may be confirmed.

Northern Tasmania offers several private estates which still belong to the families for which they were developed. We would stay at the Woolmers Estate built for Thomas Archer in 1817 which retains its original delivery of furniture supplied by Gillows of Lancaster in 1839, including carpets, curtains, drawing room, dining room and full bedroom suites. Clarendon, the grandest house from pre gold rush times, was built for the second generation of the 'pure Merino' Cox family and is set in extensive parklands. The picturesque Colonial villages of Ross, Oaklands, Kempton, Bothwell and Hamilton lead to Hobart and Southern Tasmania.

At the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, the Director, Bill Bleathman, and Curator of Decorative Arts, Peter Hughes will lead a tour through the native hardwood and blackwood Colonial furniture collections. Other visits are planned to the Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, a private museum of Tasmanian Colonial Art housed at The State Library of Tasmania and the Hobart Synagogue. The finest Colonial period Egyptian Regency synagogue in Australia was completed in 1844; it retains its original gilded cedar furniture; the form and fittings were copied from William Bullock's Egyptian Museum in the Strand, London. The Greek Revival villas of Hobart's New Town include Runnymede with its collection of convict-made and Tasmanian Colonial furniture and scrimshaw, and Poplarville, the home of whaler Captain Pierce.

The seven day visit to Tasmania will conclude with Warwick Oakman's own home New Town Park with its Anglo-Indian and Anglo-Chinese furniture and Douglas Blain's family home, Brockley, with a dinner cooked to the standards of world class Spanish cuisine.

Please send expressions of interest by 1st July 2012 to the Events Secretary. We believe that this is a unique opportunity to explore Australian Colonial furniture and interiors with the leading experts.

The Tom Ingram Fund and the Oliver Ford Trust invite applications from MA/PhD students, junior curators or young professionals at an early stage of career development, for funding towards participation in this study tour. For details of funding and grant application form please contact Clarissa Ward, Secretary FHS Grants, email grantsfhs@gmail.com. Completed grant application forms for this particular tour must be returned for consideration by one month before the deadline for applications for the event being submitted to the FHS Events Secretary.
SPECIAL EVENTS FOR 'EARLY STAGE CAREER DEVELOPMENT'

SUPPORTED BY THE OLIVER FORD TRUST AND THE TOM INGRAM MEMORIAL FUND

1. Bonhams, New Bond Street, London W1 — Tuesday 3rd July 2012, 6.00 pm–7.00 pm

Following successful evening study sessions this spring at the Geffrye Museum and Blairmans, Bonhams have kindly invited the Society to hold an evening viewing, for junior curators, MA/PhD students and young trade professionals, of the highlights of the July Fine Furniture, Sculpture & Works of Art Sale. Francois le Brun, Bonhams Director of Fine European Furniture and Works of Art, will lead close inspection of objects which will include a seventeenth century Augsburg marquetry cabinet; a French eighteenth century Louis XV lacquer burea en pente, retailed by Beurdeley in the nineteenth century; a pair of mother of pearl and marquetry inlaid Italian commodes and an eighteenth century Portuguese bed. Also present, some fascinating giltwood work such as a French Régence wall bracket with its nineteenth century copy which will make interesting examples to compare; a pair of Italian rococo consoles and a French canapé by Henri Jacob, amongst a variety of European furniture and works of art, dating from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

Limit: 15 people (2 per institution).

For booking this free event please contact Clarissa Ward, FHS Grants Secretary, email grantsfhs@gmail.com.

2. FHS Research Seminar, The Wallace Collection — Friday 23rd November 2012, All day

By the time of publication of the May Newsletter, the FHS Grants Committee will have considered abstracts submitted by potential speakers. The programme will appear in the August Newsletter and members will be able to apply for tickets after 1st September 2012.

LECTURES, CONFERENCES AND STUDY DAYS

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

'Polished Thoughts: From Concept To Craft': Contemporary British Furniture & Winning Designs of the Annual Gordon Russell/Rycotewood Prize — Exhibition

Gordon Russell Design Museum, Broadway, Worcestershire

10th March–30th June 2012

Sponsored by Hans of Wycombe, the Gordon Russell/Rycotewood Prize recognises the very best of Britain's up-and-coming contemporary furniture designers and celebrates the legacy of the renowned 20th-century furniture designer Sir Gordon Russell MC (1892–1980). As well as presenting the winners finished pieces, this exhibition will feature each artist's original concept, design and working drawing, alongside a contemporary glass and textile design display.

For further information please contact the Gordon Russell Design Museum, 15 Russell Square, Broadway, Worcs WR12 7AP or see the website: http://www.gordonrussellmuseum.org
Open Furniture Month
Waddesdon Manor, Nr Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire
2nd–31st May 2012

Open furniture month provides the unique opportunity to see the hidden aspects of many of the fine French pieces of furniture from the Rothschild collection. The pieces often reveal secrets and technical aspects of use. Separate study sessions and special interest days have been organised to coincide with this event.

For further information see the website: http://www.waddesdon.org.uk/events/study-session-open-furniture

Windsors at Wycombe: A Definitive Exhibition of 18th-century Windsor Chairs — Exhibition
West Wycombe Park, Buckinghamshire
6th–31st May 2012 (Sunday to Thursday 2.00–6.00 pm)

The greatest collection of eighteenth-century Windsor chairs ever publicly displayed will go on exhibition this May at West Wycombe Park. The venue, seat of the Dashwood family, is a natural one. The area around the nearby town of High Wycombe has been synonymous with the manufacture of Windsor chairs from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries.

‘Windsors at Wycombe’ will display more than thirty-five of the very best examples of finely crafted eighteenth-century Windsor chairs known to exist in the UK. Exhibits will be drawn from both private and public collections, offering an unparalleled opportunity for connoisseurs, museum curators and lovers of this most ubiquitous of English furniture designs to appreciate the skill and diversity of styles used by a wide range of eighteenth-century chair makers.

Spaces And Places: British Design 1948–2012 — Conference
Hochhauser Auditorium, Sackler Centre, Victoria and Albert Museum, London SW7
Friday 11th May, 10.30 am–8.00 pm and Saturday 12th May, 10.30 am–5.30 pm
In collaboration with the Modern Interiors Research Centre, Kingston University.

Explore the domestic spaces in which we live, the places in which we are educated, where we shop and how we travel. Speakers include: David Kynaston, Owen Hatherley, Thomas Heatherwick, Alison Clarke, Cheryl Buckley, Paul Gorman and Jules Lubbock. This event is part of the British Design Season at the V&A.

Day 1: £30, £25 concessions, £15 student (ticket includes entry to Thomas Heatherwick evening talk)
Day 2: £25, £20 concessions, £10 student
Each day requires booking separately

For further information and to book call 020 7942 2211 or visit www.vam.ac.uk/tickets
Butcher, Baker, Candlestick Maker: 850 Years of Livery Company Treasures —
Exhibition
Guildhall Art Gallery, Guildhall Yard, London, EC2
22nd June–23rd September 2012, 10.00 am–5.00 pm
This major exhibition showcases the collections held by London's livery companies, usually not on view to the public. Visitors are invited to marvel at the splendour of medieval illuminated manuscripts and wonder at the rituals of livery company life, as the objects reveal the stories behind some of the world's oldest crafts and trades.
£5/£3 concessions.
Free to Under 16s, Art Fund members and City Residents with proof of address.
As part of Celebrate the City Weekend, the exhibition will be free for one day only on Saturday 23rd June.

Masterclasses at Paxton House —
Study Days
Paxton House, Berwick Upon Tweed
Led by David Jones, expert in Furniture History at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, the following three study days may be of interest to Members.

Mon 2nd July 2012
Thomas Chippendale the Elder at Paxton House: a Study Day
This full-day study course will enable its members to recognise and understand the Paxton Style, considering such areas as furniture type, technical construction, details of styling and quality of timber. The morning session will form an introduction to the elder Thomas Chippendale, leading to the particular context of the Paxton commission and a scrutiny of the transcribed documents that relate to the surviving furniture. After lunch in the Paxton Stables restaurant, the whole of the afternoon will be devoted to hands-on analysis of the Chippendale pieces spread throughout the house, rounding up with an identification session in which participants' newly-acquired Chippendale recognition skills will be tested.
Places are limited to twenty.

Mon 23rd July
Thomas Chippendale the Younger at Paxton House: a Study Day
This full-day study course will enable its members to recognise and understand the unique style of Chippendale the Younger, whose repertoire has for so long languished in the shadow of that of his illustrious father. His particular contribution to the late eighteenth century phenomenon of neo-classicism will be considered as will his relationship with French design. Areas such as furniture type, technical construction, ornament and ornamental timbers will be covered in detail. The morning session will form an introduction to the younger Thomas Chippendale, leading to the particular context of the Paxton commission and a scrutiny of the transcribed documents that relate to the surviving furniture. After lunch in the Paxton Stables restaurant, the whole of the afternoon will be devoted to hands-on analysis of the Chippendale pieces spread throughout the house, rounding up with an identification session in which participants' newly-acquired Chippendale recognition skills will be tested.
Places are limited to twenty.

Mon 3rd September
William Trotter at Paxton House: a Study Day

The course will provide a clear insight into the personality of Trotter furniture, a style that is frequently talked about, but rarely identified with accuracy. William Trotter’s particular contribution to the early nineteenth century phenomenon of the Greek Revival will be considered as will his relationship with French design. Areas such as furniture type, technical construction, ornament and timber finishes will be covered in detail. The morning session will form an introduction to the Trotter company, leading to the particular context of the Paxton commission and a scrutiny of the transcribed documents that relate to the surviving furniture. After lunch in the Paxton Stables restaurant, the whole of the afternoon will be devoted to hands-on analysis of the Trotter pieces, rounding up with an identification session in which participants’ newly-acquired Trotter recognition skills will be tested.

Places are limited to twenty.

The Masterclasses will run from 9.30 am to 4.30 pm. Each day will cost £60 per person, including lunch and all refreshments. A discounted price of £150 will apply if all three masterclasses are booked in advance. A deposit of £10 will be required at time of booking. Cancellations will receive a full refund if made up to 2 weeks prior to the event, otherwise we are sorry but we cannot refund the cost of the ticket.

For further details call Paxton House Tel: 01289 386291, Email: info@paxtonhouse.com

Diplomats, Goldsmiths and Baroque Court Culture: Lord Raby in Berlin and at Wentworth Castle 1701–1739 — Conference
Wentworth Castle, Barnsley, South Yorkshire
Friday 3rd–Sunday 5th August 2012

This conference has been arranged by the Wentworth Castle Trust, in association with the Silver Society, to mark the saving for the nation of Lord Raby’s massive silver wine cistern. Magnificent in scale and brilliantly crafted it formed part of the ambassadorial plate made for Lord Raby’s embassy to Berlin in 1705. The conference will be held in the baroque splendour of Wentworth Castle. The programme includes lectures by leading international historians and experts in goldsmiths’ work including Philippa Glanville (V&A), Jet Pijzel-Domise (Gemeentemuseum, The Hague), James Lomax (Temple Newsam), Christopher Hartop (the Silver Society), Ellenor Alcorn (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), Alfred Hageman (SPSG Berlin–Brandenburg). There will be an evening at Temple Newsam to view the cistern and other baroque works of art followed by a dinner and concert.

Please register your interest by emailing: heritagetrust@wentworthcastle.org or calling 01226 776040
REQUESTS FOR HELP AND INFORMATION

HENRY TATAM

Jon Culverhouse, curator of Burghley House is trying to learn more about a remarkable — but almost unknown — cabinetmaker. Henry Tatam (1747–1812) was a cabinetmaker and upholsterer who flourished in Stamford, Lincolnshire during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Before setting up his firm in Stamford in 1772, Tatam served his apprenticeship in London under the illustrious John Cobb.

Between 1772 and 1799 the daybooks of Brownlow, 9th Earl of Exeter (1725–93) and his successor, Henry, 10th Earl (1754–1804) record payments to Tatam of approximately £680, with a further £265 paid in 1804. Whilst some of this sizeable sum may have been for repairs, it seems certain that Tatam supplied furniture for Burghley. The only item extant that can be definitely attributed to him is a gorgeous walnut Pembroke table with satinwood inlay and many sophisticated features. This table bears his trade label (Fig. 6)

If any member can offer any information, or indeed owns an item bearing Tatam’s label, I would be most grateful to hear from them.

Jon Culverhouse, Curator, Burghley House, Stamford, Lincolnshire, PE9 3JY.

A transcription of the trade label:
Henry Tatam (From Mr Cobb’s London)
Cabinet maker, upholsterer and appraiser
The corner of the Butcher Row Stamford
Lincolnshire
Makes & sells every article in the
Upholstery and Cabinet Business
NB Noblemen and Gentlemen may have their
furniture made in the French mode or
any other taste. Variegated with different
kind of wood, as well executed as in
London, & on as reasonable terms.’
W. Darling fect. Gr. Newport Street

Fig. 6  Image of the Henry Tatam Trade Label
Steffen Thomas

Steffen Thomas was a German born artist and sculptor living in the Atlanta, Georgia, area from 1930 until his death in 1990. During the period around 1940 he was under contract with the National Youth Administration to assist North Georgia colleges in the study of art. Steffen designed a table (Fig. 5) and a rug which were made by students at Habersham College (now North Georgia Technical College) in Clarksville, Georgia. The Steffen Thomas Museum near Madison, Georgia, has the rug, but the table has not been found. If anyone has any knowledge of these items, please contact Lisa Thomas Conner, Acting Museum Director of the Museum of Art at 4200 Bethany Road, Buckhead, GA 30625. Telephone: (706)-342-7557.

Fig. 5 NYA Table, ca. 1940, Designed by Steffen Thomas and executed by Habersham College students (Location, unknown).

BOOK REVIEWS

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

The Forgotten History — Upholstery Conservation: Proceedings from the first International Conference in Europe — Published by Linkoping University, Sweden. A new book from the successful 2002 conference is available, with 15 articles about different upholstery techniques. Authors include Nicola Gentle, Kate Gill, Elizabeth Lahikainen, Deborah Trupin, Xavier Bonnet, Mats Grennfalk and Nancy Britton. For further information please email karin.lohm@liu.se An invoice will be sent with your order exclusive of postage.
STUDY VISIT TO MALTA, 20TH TO 23RD OCTOBER, 2011

St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta

The Co-Cathedral laid the foundations to our visit as it is a monument to the Knights of St John, who governed Malta from 1530 until they were ejected by Napoleon in 1798, and who shaped much of the history and infrastructure of Malta. Anthony Casha, museum officer, guided us on our visit. The Co-Cathedral was built in the 1570s to the design of the Maltese architect Geromo Cassar, as the conventual church of the Order of St John, and in the 19th century was raised to equal status with St Paul's Cathedral in Mdina, hence the term 'co-cathedral'. Cassar, true to his training as a military engineer, built a severely plain façade with twin bell-towers, a design later copied by almost every church in Malta. But the interior, lavishly decorated over the following two centuries, is a stunning contrast, and a master piece of Maltese baroque art. The Maltese cross and the arms of the Order, a white cross on a scarlet background, can be seen everywhere in the Cathedral. A principal point of interest is the floor paved with brightly coloured pictorial marble memorial slabs, which were commissioned by the Knights during their lifetimes, and made by visiting Italian craftsmen, some of whom married into the Maltese community and founded firms lasting generations. Mr Casha allowed us to view at close quarters the 16th century carved walnut choir stalls and double-sided choir lectern. The Cathedral ceiling is painted with scenes of the life of St John the Baptist by Mattia Preti (1613–99), an Italian who settled in Malta to become the greatest Maltese painter of the 17th century. Preti also designed the carved work, involving leaves, scrolls, and Maltese crosses, which, remarkably, was deeply cut into the solid stone walls of the cathedral. Six chapels on either side of the nave, each allocated to a 'langue' or nationality of the Order and dedicated to the patron saint of the langue, are filled with remarkable sculptural wall monuments to deceased knights, paintings and silverware.

The Oratory, built in 1603 for the instruction of novices, is now part of the Cathedral Museum and contains the Caravaggio's altarpiece, the 'Beheading of St John the Baptist' (c. 1608). The executioner, reaching for a knife to finish the job, and the horrified Salome with her platter are depicted with chilling realism. A second Caravaggio painting, 'St Jerome', hangs on the east wall. We are grateful to the Curator Cynthia De Giorgio for permitting us privileged early access and to Anthony Casha for his expert guidance to the Cathedral.

The National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta

The National Museum of Fine Arts has occupied the former Admiralty House since 1974. Originally built by Knight Jean de Soubiran in the late 1590s, the original basement, loggia and courtyard have been absorbed into the 1760s rebuilding to the designs of Andrea Belli for the Portuguese knight Ramon de Sousa y Silva. The double staircase is one of three similar eighteenth century examples and the finest of its type in Malta. Admiralty House was the official residence of the chief commander of the British Fleet from the 1820s to 1961. Our visit was led by Sandro Debono, Senior Curator with Heritage Malta, together with Vincent Abela, the furniture conservator, who was able to add valuable details about the furniture we examined. Mr Debono outlined the history of the collections before we examined key pieces. The fine arts collections of the National Museum were formed from 1922 onwards. The museum collections were acquired through individual bequests, through the transfer of items once belonging to the Order of St John, acquisitions on the
local and international art market and from government owned churches and public buildings. The furniture on display, almost all made in Malta, dated from the late 17th century. Two 17th-century chestnut dower chests stood at the entrance to the museum; a bombé commode, c. 1720, in the French style, carved from white deal, was decorated with silver leaf and bore the coat of arms of the Portuguese knight Manuel de Vinella. A late 18th-century sedan chair in panelled wood with applied carved gilt decoration had benefitted from recent restoration. We learnt to recognise the distinctive features of Maltese cabinet furniture. Desks and cupboard-shaped chests of drawers were veneered in local olive wood and inlaid with paler orangewood and made in a standard format. These cupboards often have canted corners with half columns at the angles. The inlaid ornamental motifs include fantastical birds characteristic of furniture decorated in Palermo and Syracuse where locally grown lemon and orangewood were also used for inlay.

A serpentine-fronted bureau demonstrated Germanic influence and was supported on small cabriole legs characteristic of Maltese 18th-century furniture. Another late 17th-century chest of drawers, the gift of the Hon. Mrs. W. Howard, veneered in olivewood, with inlay of orangewood and carob, may have had an association with premier English Catholics, the Howards, the family name of the Dukes of Norfolk. Two prie-dieux or kneelers, characteristic of furniture made for use in private family chapels, demonstrated the use of première partie and contre partie inlay in two halves of the same decorative motif.

A 17th-century ebony and ivory table cabinet, hitherto thought to be Portuguese, was reckoned by most present to be Neapolitan. The ivory ground was engraved in black and the ebony highlighted in gold. Its drawer fronts were decorated with animals. The collection included two traditional Maltese painted wooden wall clocks, which are often decorated with flowers below the dial and with central harbour scenes. Dating from the 18th century, such clocks are still made today. A painting by Antoine de Favray, a French artist who spent most of his working life in Malta, of a Maltese lady playing a social visit, records the interior of a mid-18th-century private residence.

The Grandmaster's Palace, Valletta

For the afternoon we were again guided by Sandro Debono, whose responsibilities include The Grandmaster's Palace. It was built in 1571 to the designs of Girolamo Cassar, with later additions and whole wings built over time. The gateways and balconies were the last features to be added in 1741–3. With the advent of British rule in 1814 the building became the Governor's Palace, and since independence in 1964, has served as the official residence of the President. The outer courtyard was renamed by Governor John Gaspard Le Marchant after the visit of Queen Victoria's second son, Prince Alfred, who came to Malta in 1858 as a midshipman. In 1861 the statue of Neptune attributed to Leone Leoni was moved from the Valletta Fish Market to the second inner palace courtyard. The statue was originally commissioned by Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt (1601–22). The shallow marble steps of the palace staircase were intended to facilitate the carriage of occupied sedan chairs to the piano nobile.

The palace corridors were decorated by the Sienese painter Nicolo Nasoni in the 1720s; the marble pavement, commissioned by Governor Le Marchant from the Darmanin family firm in the 1860s, incorporates the British royal coat of arms and those of Malta. An early 18th-century long case clock in japanned case decorated with hand-coloured engravings was signed by Peter Dupont, London.

The Chapter Hall of the Order of the Knights of St John became the Hall of the British Order of St Michael and St George after 1818. Its upper walls are painted with scenes of the Great Siege, 1565, by Matteo Perez d'Aleccio. The minstrels' gallery depicts six scenes from
the Book of Genesis by Filippo Palladini. The gallery once formed part of the poop deck on the grand carrack in which the knights sailed from the Island of Rhodes in 1530. The floor of the Chapter Hall originally had a solar clock and calendar which was lit by a slit in the side wall overlooking the courtyard.

In the Ambassadors' Room the Grand Masters received foreign dignatories and gave private audiences. Portraits of Louis XIV by De Troy, Louis XV by Van Loo and Louis XVI, the last two in contemporary French giltwood frames, were presented by these monarchs. The furniture included an eighteenth century Italian giltwood settee and a pair of Maltese console tables with Gozitan marble tops. The adjacent Pages' Room was used by boys aged 12 and over who were enrolled by their noble European parents. At 18 they could apply to become a Knight of the Order. In this room, the furnishings included a group of oriental porcelain vases on late 17th-century gilt wood stands and two desk and bookcases with inlaid with marquetry; in the original wood panels in the upper section had been replaced with glass to effectively display ceramics. Another table inlaid in native Maltese woods is very similar to one in the collection at the St John's Gate Museum.

The Grandmasters' Council Chamber is hung with the only complete set of Gobelins' tapestries 'Les Teintures des Indes' which were ordered by Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful (1636–1720). The tapestries are based on the paintings given to Louis XIV in 1679 by the explorer Prince Johann Maurice of Nassau, Governor of the Dutch East India Company. The room was used by the knights in winter; a 19th-century painting by Charles Frederick de Brocktorff shows the room in use. The Grand Masters would raise their hands to the crucifix painted at cornice level when swearing oaths. This remarkable set of tapestries is in astonishing condition and exceptionally well documented as a recent article by Gerlinde Klatte in the Burlington Magazine, July 2011, has demonstrated.

The dimensions of the tapestry cartoons had to correspond exactly to the dimensions of the room and the order consisted of ten tapestries and six overdoors; two more than earlier sets. The elephant and the horse were divided into two; the Indian hunter also became ‘the ostrich and the fisherman’. The contract, dated 22nd October 1708, demonstrates that the tapestries were 100 livres cheaper per square cubitt than when Louis XIV had ordered a set in 1694. 17 letters survive between Perellos and his agents in Paris, Jean Jacques de Mesmes and the Order's Ambassador, Bailli Jacques De Noailles, who was considered by Perellos as ‘home de bon gout'. The commission was a private order from the Gobelins' weaver Etienne Le Blond, although Louis XIV's permission had to be obtained before the cartoons could be copied. The tapestries were based on paintings by Frans Post (1612–80) & Albert Esckhout (c.1610–64); the geography, people, flora and fauna were documented by natural scientist George Marcraft (1610–43) and physician Wilhelm Piso (1611–78). The earliest set, woven in Delft for the Grand Elector Friedrich Wilhelm von Brandenburg in 1668, no longer survives. The set took eighteen months to weave and was delivered by mule via Lyon from Paris and by sea in the Sainte Croix from Marseilles to Malta. Perellos had ordered a previous set of 29 tapestries after cartoons by Rubens and Poussin at the start of his reign as Grand Master in 1697. Each of these, housed in the Cathedral museum, bear Perellos' coat of arms — the cross of St John linked with pears — a rebus for his name.

We are grateful to Sandro Debono and his team for making our visit so informative and enjoyable.

Tessa Murdoch

Casa Rocca Piccola, Valletta

In the evening we visited the Casa Rocca Piccola, where we were given a tour by its enthusiastic owner, the 9th Marquis de Piro. The house belonged originally to the Langue
d’Italie, which provided admirals to the Order of the Knights of Malta and takes its name from one of these in the 16th century, Don Pietro La Rocca. The house was sold in the 1780s and the de Piro family is the third Maltese family to have lived in it, bringing to it very varied collections of paintings and decorative arts.

The collections reflect family enthusiasms through several generations. On the landing were paintings by the present owner’s great-grandfather, the Maltese painter Giuseppe Calì. Also notable were the collections of Maltese miniature pieces in silver, assembled by our host’s paternal grandmother, and the collections of lace, which included a dress in silver-thread lace dating from the 18th century. This skill, which occupied at least 6000 people on the islands in the 18th century, is fostered today by an annual competition, which is held in this house. The Marquis brought out for us to enjoy many items of textile including a fragment of saddle cloth, with matching holsters for pistols, embroidered in silver thread on a ground of apricot silk velvet, and dating from the mid-18th century. We also saw maiolica from Caltagirone on Sicily, of which Malta has particularly rich collections.

Amongst the furniture, we saw in the Drawing Room the first of the typical Maltese house altars we were to encounter later, in the form of gigantic bureaux, the doors of which open to reveal an altar, the false drawer fronts folding down to provide the necessary steps for a sanctuary for the altar. This one had belonged to the Testaferrata de Noto family and dated from the 1770s, the exterior painted with polychrome flowers on a cream ground, in the manner of Italian silk. Also of interest was the mid-18th century sedan chair in the Cabinet, painted with flowers on a gold ground, made originally for Fra Victor Nicolas de Vachon Belmont, the French General of the Galleys between 1764 and 1766. In the Library we saw 17th-century painted panels said to have been made for Grand Master Lascaris to decorate the interior of a ship. The arms of Lascaris also decorated an early 18th-century bureau in the Porphyry Room.

Images of all the interiors and a good guide to the Palazzo and its collections is on-line at www.casaroccopiccola.com.

Sarah Medlam

St Paul’s Cathedral, Mdina

We were guided around Mdina Cathedral and the Cathedral Museum by the curator, Father Edgar Vella. St Paul’s Cathedral, Mdina, originally built in the 12th century on the side of the villa of the Roman Governor Publius, was rebuilt after an earthquake which destroyed the buildings on the western side of the island, in 1693. The original Cathedral door, now reused as the door to the Sacristy, is of Irish oak. The choir was built by Lorenzo Gafa in 1679 during the reign of Grand Master Perellos. During the 19th century the cathedral floor was embellished with memorial slabs to members of the Maltese nobility and clergy by the Darmanin workshop and others, although the colour range is greater than those in the Co-cathedral of St John’s incorporating expensive lapis lazuli, usually reserved for use on the high altar. The frescoed ceiling was the work of Antonio and Vincenzo de Manno, although the dome was repainted in the 20th century. Micro-mosaic representations of St Peter and St Paul, either side of the main altarpiece depicting St Paul’s shipwreck by Mattia Preti, were made in Rome in 1873. Beneath these mosaics, silver mounted stools decorated with the symbols of the four evangelists, provide seats for the Bishop. Successive Bishops of Malta are commemorated in the slabs on the floor of the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. That altar is adorned with figures of putti attributed to the Neapolitan sculptor San Martino.

The adjacent building, now the Cathedral museum, was commissioned by the Knights of St John in 1743. It houses a spectacular series of baroque silver sculptures representing the...
Twelve Apostles, the Virgin Mary, St Paul and St John the Baptist. These were ransomed in exchange for all the sacred silver then in use in the Cathedral, which was looted by Napoleonic forces in 1798. A contemporary inventory in both French and Italian lists 94 silver candlesticks, mostrances and chalices. Nonetheless, the museum today displays a range of sacred silver including the silver cross brought by the Knights from Rhodes in 1530; an altar card stand, book bindings, a sanctuary lamp, a lectern, a monstrance throne, set of flower vases. A 14th century Venetian bell, a 14th century portable altar with a porphyry altar stone, decorated with Limoges enamel, a rock crystal and ebony casket dated 1681 presented by the Testaferrato family, and a monstrance embellished with coral made in Trapani, Sicily. A portable chest containing a silver set for pontifical mass was also given by the Testaferrato family in 1843. Our thanks are due to Father Edgar for his expert guidance on our visit.

Further reading:
Dr Mario Buhagiar, 'The Treasure of Relics and Reliquaries of the Knight Hospitallers of Malta', Essays on the knights and art and architecture in Malta, 1500–1798, 2009.

Our second visit in Mdina was to the Palazzo Falson, built originally in the 13th century and owned by the Falson family in the 16th century. Its current identity as a museum of fine and decorative arts was established in 1927, when it was bought by Captain Olof Frederick Gollcher (descended on his father's side from Swedish shipowners long settled in Malta). He was a keen collector and an amateur artist, whose studio with its easel working furniture, survives. On his death in 1962, the house passed to a trust and, since 2001 it has been run by the Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti (The Maltese Heritage Foundation). With bougainvillea in its central courtyard and its fountain modelled after one at Monreale in Sicily, the house is highly reminiscent of that other eclectic collection, made by Isabella Stewart Gardner in Boston and opened to the public in 1903. Did Captain Gollcher ever visit Fenway Court? The collection combines his personal enthusiasm for contemporary Maltese art with the collecting of French, Dutch and Italian paintings. He also filled his house with prints, medals, watches, fans, porcelain, oriental rugs and books and manuscripts. Understandably, seascapes and ship models appealed and a large display of blue and white earthenware made for the various messes of a Royal Navy ship was particularly striking. In woodwork the simpler objects included spinning wheels and pipes — both object types that were also avidly collected by larger museums, including the V&A, in the early 20th century.

Despite the general loss of provenance for Maltese furniture, there were pieces here that offered clues. In the Refectory were four Maltese armchairs of 17th century date, one carrying the device of the cotton plant carved on its front rail — an element in the arms of the Cotoner Grand Masters (Raphael and Nicolas) who led the Order successively between 1660 and 1680. In the Kitchen the low cupboards with drawers above introduced us to a type knowns as tas-sagristija, this later name reflecting the fact that the type was often found in the sacristy of local churches. Elsewhere in the house were good examples of the...
dark/light marquetry in olive and orangewood which, as we had already seen, was a feature of Maltese furniture in the first half of the 18th century. We also saw an example of the painted Maltese wall clocks — 'tal lire' in Maltese, presumably derived from the German term 'telleruhr' clocks, with their similarly large dials.

The collections were shown to us with great enthusiasm and knowledge by its curator Francesca Balzan and we are grateful to her for leading our tour. Unfortunately, Mr Joseph Galea Naudi, who has done so much to promote the study of Maltese furniture, was unable to join us because of ill health, but we had much to engage us in this highly personal and intriguing collection.

Further information can be found on-line at www.palazzofalson.com.

Sarah Medlam
Palazzo De Piro and Xara Palace, Mdina

In the afternoon we were met by Nicola Paris at the Palazzo de Piro. Built for a noble family in the 17th century, the palace was left to the convent school of St Dorothy's in the 1920s. After the school relocated, the Cathedral at Mdina (which abuts the Palazzo de Piro) became the owner and undertook a comprehensive restoration. Although plans are for a museum to be installed at a later date, the palace now serves as a multi-functional venue to host private functions. The interior is currently sparsely furnished, but five wax reliefs attributed to Melchoirre Gafà (or Cafà, 1636–67) were on view in the temporary exhibition space.

The Annunciation, The Glory of St. Rose of Lima, The Adoration of the Shepherds, The Nativity, and The Glory of St. Catherine were the subjects of these wax reliefs. The first four of these reliefs were recently rediscovered in the Cathedral of Mdina. Melchoirre Gafà is a very important Maltese-born sculptor. His brother, Lorenzo, was a leading architect in Malta. Mark Sagona (who later in our visit met us at St Paul's Shipwreck Church where there is a magnificent carved and polychrome sculpture of St Paul made during Gafà's Roman period), believes the wax reliefs may be by another hand.

After our brief visit to the Palazzo de Piro, Nicola Paris accompanied us to The Xara Palace, which is now part of the Relais & Chateaux group of hotels. The Palace was built for the noble family of Moscati Parisio in the late 17th century; the foundation of the palace was constructed directly upon the ancient bastion walls which encircle Mdina. Occupied by the British during the war, Xara Palace was utilized as a hotel as early as 1949 but fell into disrepair. The Palace was recently re-opened in 1999 after undergoing a 4-year restoration program overseen by the Department of Museums. The Piano Nobile, the central Atrium and the façade were reconstructed as closely as possible to its original design. After visiting several guest rooms furnished with Maltese Antiques we ascended the central staircase to the open rooftop terrace with a spectacular view over the island to the sea where the group enjoyed a moment to savour the sights. Many thanks to Nicola Paris for arranging these visits.

Ann Rogers Haley
St Paul's Shipwreck Church, Valletta

We walked through the Victoria Gate (1884), the main route that all English tourists into town from the harbour, and up the steep Triq Il Lvant (previously Strada Levante) past no. 45, the former site of the Darmanin marble-working premises, although apparently rebuilt following WWII bombing. A marble table top, originally sold here and now in the V&A collection, was the starting point for our trip.

From here we made our way onto a hillier side street entering via the sacristy into the small, dark atmospheric St Paul's Shipwreck Church, where we were met by Mark Sagona,
artist and historian, who gave us an introduction both to the church and to the continuation of the baroque tradition in Malta into the 20th century. The church, though a cohesive whole, has been altered and embellished by many generations up to the present day. Originally begun in 1639 to celebrate the shipwreck in 60 AD of Paul the Apostle (recorded by Luke 27–28), the church was built over 40 years during the rule of three Grandmasters of the Knights of Malta (Jean-Paul Lascaris Castellar (1636–57), Nicolas Catoner (1663–80), Gregorio Carafa (1680–90)) and bishop Laurentius Astirais (1669–78); the dome was designed by Lorenzo Gafà (1630–1710). The façade facing the narrow street was rebuilt in 1855 to the design of Nicolà Zammit (1815–99). The marble sculpture for the church was carved in Rome and decorated in Malta and the 14 bronze stations of the cross by Tavani of Milan were donated in 1935; the baptismal font of 1693 is carved in solid oak; some of the tomb slabs on the floor are signed by the Darmanin work-shop. A fragment of the Roman column on which Paul was beheaded has a silver head of Paul on gold cloth with a gold halo and was donated by Pope Pius VII in 1818 as thanks for the work of the church during the plague of 1813. In the sacristy we stood on the diamond pattern black and white marble floor beneath the recently restored ceiling and Venetian chandeliers donated in 1842 and only uncovered on feast day, and admired the cupboards used to store church plate; executed in 1732 after designs by Italian architect Romano Carapecci, the cupboards were made of red deal with applied lime carving and an original decorative scheme of dark brown paint to the carving and red brown paint to the ground. On the feast day (10th February) the plate would be used to decorate the altarpiece of the shipwreck by Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, begun in 1692, and painted with scenes from the life of St Paul painted by Attilio Pamombi (1860–1913). Our thanks are due to Mark Sagona for an excellent introduction to the church and for travelling from Gozo especially for our visit.

Edgar Harden

Manoel Theatre, Valletta

A short walk brought us to the third oldest working theatre in Europe, the Manoel Theatre, built by Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena in 1731 using the theatre Santa Lucia in Palermo as a model. The theatre was then the only form of entertainment and the Knights, some of whom were castrati like Farinelli, performed. The small oval auditorium, which was originally fitted with benches and had stone thrones on stage for the Royals (now in the Presidential Palace), has three levels of Renaissance revival strapwork cartouche carved boxes beneath a turquoise-painted and parcel-gilt coffered ceiling, the result of an 1811 makeover. In 1844 the stone walls were lined with wood panelling, which drastically improved the acoustics, also aided by water below the stage. The landscape paintings to the fronts of the boxes are by Angelo Ercolan. Hidden by a simple façade, the building was not bombed by the Germans during WWII. From the 1920s to the 1950s the theatre was used as a cinema with the ceiling open to the sky, and it was frequented by British Forces. It was restored and reopened in 1960. The theatre museum retains the original wooden wind and rain machines used during productions.

Edgar Harden

Visit to a Private Collection, Valletta

Alexander Debono, the Museum Manager and Senior Curator of the National Museum of Fine Arts (Heritage Malta), kindly arranged a private visit to a private residence. Greeted with a welcome glass of Bucks Fizz, our host escorted us around his collection and pointed out just a few of the highlights. The house was built at the end of the 19th century by the
The British barracks in Malta; he razed the earlier residence that was on the site. The multi-layered collection was acquired through inheritance and judicious purchases and it contains a number of important pieces of furniture and paintings. Particularly interesting and the subject of much discussion was a mid-18th-century bureau de dame inlaid with a Maltese cross and the coat of arms for Manuel Pino da Fonseca (1681–1773), the Portuguese-born 68th Prince and Grand Master of the Order of Malta from 1741–73. The consensus was that it had been made in France, not Italy or Malta. The collection of furniture includes such items as a pair of Louis XV encoignures, a 17th century German kunstkammer and a mid-18th-century cylindrical desk believed to have been made in Naples. With such an array of objects, it was not possible to examine any particular item closely. The ceramics collection was also very impressive with the numerous Blanc de chine objects displayed in several rooms alongside Capodimonte, Meissen and Maltese examples. We viewed a Mortlake Tapestry depicting Hero and Leander, circa 1640–60; this version is believed to have been made earlier than the one in the V&A collection. Another tapestry, a Flemish example depicting Titus & Vespasian, was also discussed with references made to an example or two now in the collections in St Petersburg. An important silver chandelier probably made by a Huguenot silversmith in the late 17th century was hung in the dining room. A large collection of silver hollowware made in Malta was displayed. This diverse hoard included a number of sugar basins and tea wares as well as a highly important charger made on the island. A particularly interesting early 19th-century sugar basin had a tripod base of three cast mermaid figures.

We were very fortunate to have the opportunity to visit such a unique collection which reflected what we had seen and learned during our brief stay on Malta. Many of the furnishings of palaces and churches are largely comprised of objects made elsewhere and brought to the island and augmented with Maltese-made objects purchased by both local and foreign residents.

Anne Rogers Haley

The weekend was arranged by Kate Hay, of the Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Kate's research on the Darmanin workshop (See Furniture History Vol XLVI, 2010, pp. 157–188) inspired her to further her studies on Malta and Maltese furniture.

Welsh Houses Study Day, 22nd October 2011

This day was significant as a joint FHS/RFS visit, to Cowbridge in the Vale of Glamorgan, where the importance of oak furniture is emphasised in the furnishings of both cottage, farmstead, and of the gentry houses.

Our organisers, Philip and Christine Havard, held a shop exhibition of locally sourced furniture from the Vale and Carmarthenshire. This included a rare collection of coffer bachs, small bridal chests, on turned bun feet, with flat carving incorporating tulip heads, birds and flowers, usually associated with the Gower Peninsula. One was carved MC 1782. A highly unusual exhibit from the 18th-century religious revival in Wales was a preacher's chair, which originally would have had a detachable stool so the preacher could stand behind the chair at outdoor country meetings. Philip pointed out two Welsh single chairs which illustrated a construction detail often seen on Welsh high back single chairs of the late 17th and early 18th centuries, where the rear stretcher lines up on the inside, rather than the outside, of the back leg.

Our first visit was to St Mary's church at nearby Penmark. Here we looked at an unusual design of altar table with six legs, in yewtree and carved on the frieze with RA17W09TA, presumably the date and initials of the churchwardens. The baluster leg turning was very...
similar to that of the altar rails, also in yew tree and early 18th century in date. The
discovery in the vestry of another yew tree table, a sidetable of the mid 18th century, led to
a discussion of the significance of the use of yew in church furnishings, and the many
surviving ancient yew trees in Wales. We also examined two wainscot armchairs, both with
the overall appearance of a South Wales type with high straight arms. Unusually the rear
stiles of one chair were shaped in the solid with a buttress cut out.

Our first house visit was to a farmhouse where we looked at highly-provenanced furni-

ture, moved from Gelli, Glamorgan, where they were illustrated in interior photographs
taken c. 1895. Amongst these was a long, high back panel settle, still with graduated pewter
plates displayed in the Welsh manner with their polished backs outwards. There were also
a bureau bookcase and linen press, both with panelled cupboard doors with wavy-edge
mouldings, so similar to South Wales and Bristol longcase hood doors of the late 18th and
early 19th centuries. For the Gelli interiors see Richard Bebb's two-volume work,


Our next visit was to a 'Great House', the name used in the Vale to denote a squire's
house. This proved to be a setting for a collection of Welsh furniture, treen, samplers and
Llanelly pottery. The coffer bachs included a rare example on short cabriole legs instead of
bun or bracket feet, while amongst the clocks was a 30-hour longcase by the farmer and
self-taught clockmaker Samuel Roberts of Llanfair Caereinion, the dial numbered 224, in a
 naïve panelled case dated 1765. In his surviving account book for 1755–74 Samuel Roberts
records that 224, made for Evans Davies of Rhosalfo township in the parish of Llanfair
Caereinion, was finished May 30th 1765 and cost £2.7.0. (See the work of W. T. R. Price and
the late T. Alun Davies, a notable member of both the FHS and RFS,


The Welsh equivalent of a court cupboard is either a two-piece 'cwpwrdd dueddarn' or
three-piece, 'tridarn': here was one of the latter, an excellent Snowdonian example with
carved dragon heads and chequered inlay in bog oak and holly, dated 1695 and illustrated
in Macquoid. In the dining room was an early 19th-century mahogany, ebony and brass
inlaid sideboard typical in detail to those known from the workshop of Morley of Carmar-
then, and with the workman's pencilled signature.

The 'Georgian town house' of our final visit turned out to be just 20 years old, built
convincingly from architectural fragments both within and without, which included a fun
water garden. Crossing the moated entrance we found ourselves in panelled rooms
containing choice George II furniture, amongst which was a sophisticated north country
veneered walnut chest of drawers, its writing slide with secret drawers, and with rare
canted brass column corners. In the dining room was a long Welsh, six legged table with
panelled frieze, the two plank top held together by the traditional Welsh detail of tongue
joints with three pegs in each, set in each plank. The afternoon was completed with tea and
Welsh cakes, cooked on the griddle while we were exploring the house.

Our thanks for a most informative day and much hospitality go to our three hosts, the
churchwarden at St Mary's, and especially to Philip and Christine Havard for all the
arrangements they made on our behalf.

Andrew Jenkins and Polly Legg

Visit to the Exhibition,
Le château de Versailles raconte le Mobilier national: Quatre siècles de création, Versailles, 14th November 2011

On arrival at Versailles, we were welcomed by Bertrand Rondot, head curator at the palace,
and one of the curators of the exhibition. He explained that the Mobilier National is a state
The Oliver Ford Trust and Tom Ingram Memorial Fund

In line with one of its roles — the promotion of 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. Grants will be awarded by 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 tours and study weekends are particularly welcome from scholars. Successful applicants are required to acknowledge the assistance of the Fund in any resulting publication and must report back to the FHS Grants Committee on completion of the travel or project. All applications should be addressed to Clarissa Ward, Secretary FHS Grants Committee, 25 Wardo Avenue, London SW6 6RA, grantsfhs@gmail.com, who will also supply application forms for the Tom Ingram Memorial Fund and the Oliver Ford Trust. Please send sae with any request.
The FHS Grants Committee requests that applications for study trips/weekends be made well in advance of the deadline for booking with the FHS Events Secretary — preferably one month before.

Copy Deadline

The deadline for receiving material to be published in the next Newsletter is 15th June. Copy should be sent, preferably by email, to m.winterbottom@bath.ac.uk or posted to Matthew Winterbottom, The Holburne Museum, Bath BA2 4DB.

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