



## THE FURNITURE HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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### 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 out-moded 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).<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> Jeri Bapasola, *Threads of History: The Tapestries at Blenheim Palace*, Oxford 2005.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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 *Pastorals*, 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 *Pastorals* capitalised 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.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Jamie Mulherron and Helen Wyld, 'Mortlake's Big Swim', *National Trust Historic Houses and Collections Annual 2011*, June 2011, pp. 20–9; Jamie Mulherron and Helen Wyld, 'Mortlake's Banquet of the Senses', *Apollo*, March 2012, pp. 122–8.

<sup>4</sup> Edith A. Standen, 'English Tapestries "After the Indian Manner"', *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, vol. 15 (1980), pp. 119–42.

<sup>5</sup> Wendy Hefford, catalogue entry in Gervase Jackson-Stops (ed.), *The Treasure Houses of Britain*, exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1985, pp. 212–3.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Wyld, 'William Bradshaw's Tapestries after Watteau', in Christopher Rowell (ed.), *Ham House: 400 Years of Collecting and Patronage*, forthcoming: New Haven and London 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Wendy Hefford, 'Soho and Spitalfields: little-known Huguenot tapestry-weavers in and around London, 1680–1780', *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, vol. XXIV, no. 2 (1984), pp. 103–12.



Fig. 2 Chinoiserie tapestry from a set commissioned by Sir John Brownlow for Belton House in 1691, a year after the first set was made for Queen Mary at Kensington Palace. Signed by John Vanderbank, London. Belton House, The Brownlow Collection (The National Trust). ©NTPL/Graham Challifour

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.<sup>8</sup> 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

<sup>8</sup> Wendy Hefford, 'Tapestries by Zucarelli and Paul Saunders: dating and design sources', *Bulletin du CIETA*, vol. LXXII (1994), pp. 81–8; Gareth Hughes, 'The Paul Saunders Tapestries at Audley End House', *English Heritage Historical Review*, vol. 2 (2007), pp. 106–15.



Fig. 3 *Fruit Picking* from a set of *Pastorals* after Antoine Watteau, Jean-Baptiste Pater and Nicolas Lancret, installed at Ham House in 1742. Signed by William Bradshaw, London. Ham House, the Dysart Collection (The National Trust). ©NTPL/John Hammond

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?'<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Pascal-François Bertrand, 'Le XVIIIe Siècle: Un art du décor et de l'ameublement', in Fabienne Joubert, Amaury Lefébure and Pascal-François Bertrand, *Histoire de la Tapisserie en Europe, du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, Paris 1995, pp. 208–9.

<sup>10</sup> Edith A Standen, 'Croome Court: The Tapestries', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 18, no. 3 (November 1959), pp. 96–111.



Fig. 4 The north wall of the Tapestry Room at Osterley, installed in 1776. Signed by Jacques Neilson, head of the low warp workshop at the Gobelins, Paris. Osterley, the Jersey Collection (The National Trust).  
©NTPL/Bill Batten

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 *Chinoiseries* imitating lacquer panels, or Morris's *Arabesques* 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 Wylde

## 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](mailto: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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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.















## 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, upholder 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. Variagated 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, Rijksmuseum, PO Box 74888, 1070 DN Amsterdam, The Netherlands, tel. 00-31-20-6747220. E-mail: [r.baarsen@rijksmuseum.nl](mailto:r.baarsen@rijksmuseum.nl)

*The Forgotten History — Upholstery Conservation: Proceedings from the first International Conference in Europe* — Published by Linköping 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](mailto:karin.lohm@liu.se) An invoice will be sent with your order exclusive of postage.



















## 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](mailto:m.winterbottom@bath.ac.uk) or posted to Matthew Winterbottom, The Holburne Museum, Bath BA2 4DB.

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