



THE FURNITURE HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No. 193

FEBRUARY 2014

NICHOLAS LE NORMAND'S FEATHERWORK

As someone who has researched extensively the collections of Augustus the Strong, Dresden, and Meissen porcelain, Maureen Cassidy-Geiger approached the subject of the king's feather bed hangings through her interest in the *Japanisches Palais*, in an article she published in *Furniture History* in 1998. I approach the hangings from a different angle, through my interest in early eighteenth-century toyshops in London and Bath — those precursors of today's department stores that sold trinkets such as gold boxes, watches, seals, and much, much more.

Bath. Sept 11, 1732

There is likewise here the ingenious Mr Le Normond, Maker of the admired Bed of Feathers, shew'd several Years since to their present Majesties, and afterwards sold to the King of Poland. He exposes now to View, at Mr Bertrand's Toyshop, a Suit of Hangings and some Pictures, all done in Feathers, and which so surprisingly imitate Nature that they give general Satisfaction to all Connoisseurs and Lovers of Art.¹

Two extraordinary feather panels signed by Le Normand have recently come to light (figs 1 and 2). They are in remarkable condition and admirably demonstrate Le Normand's mastery of this unusual art form. One of these panels, depicting a monogram surrounded by a colourful garland of flowers is currently on display at The Harley Gallery in Nottinghamshire (Edward Harley: The Great Collector is at The Harley Gallery, Welbeck, until May 2014).²

¹ *London Evening Post*, 12 September 1732, issue 747, and others.

² The monogram is identified as that of Henrietta, Dowager Countess of Oxford in an MS annotation in the *Catalogue of the Ornamental Furniture, Works of Art and Porcelain at Welbeck Abbey*, privately printed 1897, by Richard Goulding, Librarian 1902–1929, referring to it in an *Catalogue of Pictures at Welbeck, 1747* by George Vertue (which exists as a copy of 1831).



Fig. 1 Featherwork panel, signed Le Normand, c. 1720–35, centred by a monogram.
508 mm high × 406 mm wide (Private Collection)



Fig. 2 Featherwork panel of tulips, signed *Le Normand*, c. 1720–35.
260 mm high × 324 mm wide (Private Collection)

The featherwork sold to Augustus the Strong is illustrated both in Maureen Cassidy-Geiger's article and in the German-language book sold at Schloss Moritzburg, to where the hangings were moved in 1830.³ (figs 3 and 4) The records of the sale to Saxony and the display of the hangings in the *Japanisches Palais*, are described by Cassidy-Geiger, who worked with sources at Dresden. She did not write of the Bath connection or of advertisements in the London press nor, understandably, did she pursue the possible influence of these hangings on Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800). After many years of restoration work (which included washing, then drying every feather with a hairdryer) the suite is on view once again at Moritzburg, the hunting lodge of the Wettin family just outside Dresden. It is an extraordinary creation.⁴

³ Maureen Cassidy-Geiger, 'The Federzimmer from the *Japanisches Palais* in Dresden', *Furniture History*, vol. XXXIV (1998), pp. 87–111. Ralf Giermann and Jürgen Karpinski, *Das Federzimmer im Schloss Moritzburg*, Dresden 2003, has a bibliography that includes research by Cornelia Hofmann and Birgit Tradler (1999).

⁴ The featherwork was removed from display in 1974 and restored 1985–98. The sale of treasure recovered from Moritzburg that had been buried during the Second World War was at Sotheby's London, 17 December 1999. It included the magnificent blackamoor's head, Christoph Jamnitzer, Nuremberg circa 1615, and the enamelled jewel casket by Johann Melchior Dinglinger, which he presented to Augustus the Strong at Christmas 1701.



Fig. 3 The Federzimmer, Nicholas le Normand, c.1708–20 (Staatliche Schlösser, Burgen und Gärten Sachsen gGmbH, Schloss Moritzburg und Fasanenschlösschen. Photographer: Jürgen Karpinski, Dresden)

Le Normand seems first to have exhibited and advertised his bed in Paris, and Cassidy-Geiger quotes at length the account of the bed given in *Le Nouveau Mercure* in March 1720. It supplies useful information: that Le Normand had a workshop in Putney,⁵ and that his London agents were Bosquet & Clerembault (of whom more below). The bed was then erected at Somerset House in London when, according to Bertrand’s advertisement, those who came to see it included the Prince of Wales (later George II). It was dismantled in October 1720 and by January 1720/21 was on show at Exeter Exchange. ‘Mr Le Normand Cany’ published lengthy descriptions in newspapers over the next six months, which in part replicated the information from Paris. The bed was taken down in July 1721.⁶

but he being willing that some of his Curious Works should be left in England, gives Notice that he will sell several fine Pieces of his feather’d Works, as Skreens and Pictures, by publick Sale to the best Bidder ... with several fine Prints and French Plate, and he now leaving England will sell all ...

⁵ I am grateful to Wandsworth Heritage Service for checking archives on my behalf. A search of Putney Parish Register 1620–1734 and Putney Parish Rate Book for 1736 (the earliest available) found no listing for Le Normand or Levett.

⁶ *Daily Courant*, 7 July 1721, issue 6150.



Fig. 4 The Federzimmer (detail), Nicholas le Normand, c. 1708–20 (Staatliche Schlösser, Burgen und Gärten Sachsen gGmbH, Schloss Moritzburg und Fasanenschlösschen. Photographer: Jürgen Karpinski, Dresden)

The bed is listed in the 1723 inventory of the Japanisches Palais in Dresden, which details the name 'Sieur Normann'. Its subsequent history is related by Cassidy-Geiger.

Le Normand was described as a 'natif de Rouen' and, writing before the Internet became such an important source of archival information, Cassidy-Geiger suggested that the name Cany, which was added to his name in press notices, might have been a mis-rendering of Quesnel (see below). It is worth noting, however, that Chateau de Cany, built in the 1640s by François Mansart, is today lived in by M. and Mme Thierry Normand. Cany-Barville lies just inland between Dieppe and Le Havre and north of Rouen.⁷

How long le Normand spent abroad, perhaps partly overseeing the installation of the bed in Dresden, is not known. He re-appears in 1732 in Bath and in the intervening years must have been working on the new set of hangings and feather pictures mentioned in Bertrand's advertisement. His choice of venue for the display of his work is interesting. Paul Bertrand and his second wife Mary had a toyshop in Terrace Walk, Bath. She was the daughter and sister of owners of the most renowned toyshops in London. Her father was John Dears, whose shop in Fleet Street was continued by her brother William in the Strand and then Piccadilly, where it was run by the third generation of the family until the 1780s. Her sister Elizabeth married Paul Daniel Chenevix; their shop in Charing Cross was the most fashionable of all, patronised and written about by the cream of the aristocracy. The ability to display such large items as the featherwork hangings raises questions about the internal arrangement of Bertrand's shop. He had a wide-ranging stock, and the shop's central location in Bath, near to both assembly rooms, meant that most visitors would have passed it several times a day. As Bertrand operated also as a banker, the footfall through the shop would have been considerable.⁸ For how long, one wonders, did Bertrand's shop contain at least some of the featherwork described in the advertisement?

Le Normand died towards the end of 1736,⁹ and he received a long notice in the *Daily Post*.¹⁰

2 December 1736. Last Week died at Windsor, in the 67th Year of his Age, Mr Le Normand, Native of Rouen in Normandy: He render'd himself famous in England about the Year 1720, when he completed his twelve Years Labour, that wonderful Bed of State, beautifully described at large in the *Freethinker*, No. 262, Sept 23 1720.

This consummate Piece of Art, undervalued in our own Nation, afterwards became the Purchase and Pride of that true Judge of Merit, the late King of Poland. The Excellence of the said Work, as well as of his other Pieces, consists chiefly in the Draughts of Flowers, Fruits, Animals &c (copy'd from Originals of Baptista and other most eminent Painters, as well as from Nature) wrought in Feathers of suitable Colours, so exquisitely interwoven, as to exhibit the most natural and lively Representations of Things imaginable. Tis hard to say, whether greater Genius, or Diligence, was requisite to the Accomplishment of each Design; but one may venture to say, that this Gentleman is the only one yet known, to whom an Art of so great Difficulty owed at once its Invention, all its Productions, and its Perfection. To enhance the Difficulty of the Work, it required no less than twenty Years to collect from all Parts of the Globe at a considerable Expence, all the necessary Materials for it.

His sedentary State of Life occasion'd an obstinate Jaundice, which Malady producing reciprocally an Aversion to Motion, and even to Life itself, made him, till he became helpless, decline seeking Help from Medicine.

⁷ www.chateaux-france.com/cany. M.C-G points out that Normand was a common surname in that region of France.

⁸ The building survives but was altered in the early nineteenth century.

⁹ He left a daughter, Mary Elizabeth, who married Thomas Kerr at St James's Piccadilly on 5 February 1738; she was then living in Marylebone.

¹⁰ *Daily Post*, 2 December 1736, issue 5374.

By his Love of Solitude he seem'd to make these incomparable Performances rather the Amusement than the Business of his Life; so that there are not many of them remaining undispos'd of.

With all the Virtues of a private Life his Courteousness was such, that at his Leisure Hours he was ready to oblige any curious Strangers with a View of his Works, and as he never fail'd of their Applause, so he receiv'd it without discovering the least Degree of that Vanity and Ostention, which detracts so much from the Merit of most Inventers.

Le Normand remembered old friends in his will. He left £100 each to Nicholas Bosquet 'a merchant living in Hackney near London' and to Anthony Clerembault (Clerembault or Clerimbault) 'a merchant living in New Broad Street, London Wall' — they were the agents mentioned in the 1720 Paris article.¹¹ To the latter's son Nicholas Clerembault he bequeathed 'the feather picture that he shall like best and twenty four volumes of my Books'.¹² Le Normand's connections with the family of Nicholas Bosquet and through him the Quesnel connection mentioned by Cassidy-Geiger, merit further research.¹³

When he died Le Normand was probably staying with or near his friends the Jenkinson family in Datchet, where travellers took the ferry (a bridge was built later) across the river Thames to Windsor; military reviews were held on Datchet Common. The Revd Thomas Jenkinson, the vicar of St Mary's Datchet from January 1686/7 until his death aged 93 in 1742, was one of three witnesses to Le Normand's will. To his son Thomas, a carpenter 'living at the corner of Black Swan Alley, Little Carter Lane, London' (on the south side of St Paul's Cathedral) le Normand left 'all my wearing apparel and six of my best shirts'; his daughters Mary Streeting, wife of George Streeting a farmer in Langley Marsh, Bucks, and Penelope Jenkinson, living at home with her father, were left money for rings.¹⁴ There seems to be no way of discovering the origins of this friendship.

¹¹ Cassidy-Geiger noted that Nicholas Bosquet and Anthony Clerembault were merchants trading with Lisbon in 1724; they were most probably brothers-in-law. Anthony Clerembault was married to Judith Bosquet. Her brother John died in 1719 (David Tanqueray 'a cousin' is mentioned in his will) and Nicholas Bosquet (died 1743) was possibly another brother. A Nicholas Clerembault 'of Calcutta' is mentioned in the will of Benjamin Longuet, 1761. Anthony Clerembault was a governor of the French Hospital and a member of the French Church in Threadneedle Street; he died in November 1758 aged 90, 'formerly an eminent merchant in New Bond Street' (*London Evening Post*, 4–7 November 1758, issue 4837), an address that does not tally with le Normand's will. Following his partnership with Anthony Clerembault, Nicholas Bosquet went into partnership with John Lagier la Motte. (See Henry Wagner, ed. Dorothy North, 'Huguenot Wills and Administrations', *Huguenot Society Quarto Series*, vol. LX, 2007.)

¹² The 24 volumes were: *Morey's Dictionary*, 2 volumes; *Ditto of ffurnetiere*, 3v; *History of the World by Chevere*, 4v; *Ditto of the Jews*, 5v; *Cesar's Commentaries*, 1v; *Apologies of Herodotus by Henry Estienne* (this book is scarce) 1v; *Rablais* 1v; *Tavenots Voyages* 4v; *Amours of the Ladys by Bussi* 1v; *Bussis Memoirs* 2v.

¹³ Using the websites *Family search* and *Find my past* reveals a problem. They give a Nicholas Le Normand who was married in August 1698 to Elizabeth Longuet and another marriage in April 1698. Cassidy-Geiger quotes a Mary Quesnel, married to Nicholas le Normand, witnessing the baptisms of Nicholas Bosquet's children in Threadneedle Street. Either le Normand was married twice (and the websites do not show a Quesnel/Normand marriage) or there was more than one man named Nicholas le Normand. Nicholas Bosquet was married on 4 July 1717 to Mary du Coudray. They both feature in the will of her aunt Mary du Coudray, or de la Coudre, (PROB 11/693 proved 29 November 1738) who was married in 1690 to Nicholas Quesnel. Was he the brother of the Mary Quesnel mentioned above?

¹⁴ PROB 11/680 proved 17 December 1736. Datchet was a poor agricultural parish, now separated from Langley by the M4 motorway. The parish paid tithes to St George's Chapel, Windsor (the church was rebuilt in 1857). It is worth noting that Mary Streeting had a son named Nicholas (PROB 11/831).

In April 1735 the *Mercur de France* had published a further piece on le Normand (extensively quoted by Cassidy-Geiger), part of which is translated here. Interestingly it refers to 'the late M. le Normand' some eighteen months before he died.¹⁵

Nothing could be more relevant in this article from the 'Beaux Arts' than the works of Master Levet, English, pupil of the late M. le Normand, native of Rouen, inventor of these ingenious works, which are made in a type of feather material and are neither sown nor stuck but woven on the loom which creates a sort of Tapestry [Cloth], which is not thicker and is as soft as Damask and as strong in order to last; with the advantage that the dust never settles on it, that it always keeps its lustre and its strong bright colours; as only real feathers are used with no additional colouring and the best and most appropriate are only chosen. In fact it is not easy to give an accurate idea of these works; one has to see them at the Maker [Manufacturer/Creator], rue Taranne, Fauxbourg S Germain, at M Paris, an English Gentleman. We have recently seen two works by his hand which seemed to us of great beauty. The first is a Vase of flowers, with a Border of exquisite taste on a white background, for a fire screen, which The Duke of Leeds, English, has just purchased. He is actually working for the same Lord and in the same taste, on a Piece where a Peacock will be represented, from the Drawing/Design by M Oudry, Painter to the King.

The other item/piece which we have seen represents a Tree from India, also on a white background, of which the border, the Fruits and Terraces are admirable. He also makes these on black backgrounds with blue and white Vases, imitating the most beautiful Japanese Porcelain.

Master Levet offers his Works at reasonable prices, and several Lords have ordered some from him; such as Wall Hangings for a small study or Alcoves, Screens, and etc. which he will complete during the time which he will spend in Paris.

Now the 4th Duke of Leeds (1713–89) was first cousin to Margaret, Duchess of Portland (1714/15–85); their shared grandfather was Robert, 1st Earl of Oxford. The Duchess of Portland's interest in botany and natural phenomena is well known; she had a very large collection of porcelain and was a regular customer of Chenevix and other toyshops. Several of the duchess's intimates, including Elizabeth Robinson (who married Edward Montagu in 1742), were regular visitors to Bath and to Tunbridge Wells, where Elizabeth Chenevix (Bertrand's sister-in-law) ran a seasonal shop. Elizabeth Robinson was in Bath in 1739–40 and several of her siblings were there in the period 1739–43.¹⁶ Might one of le Normand's feather pictures have been in the toyshop then?

There seems to be no first-hand evidence that the Duchess of Portland or Elizabeth Montagu saw the work of either le Normand or of his student Levet in London or Bath. But there is evidence that the ladies were dabbling with featherwork decades before the well-recorded breakfast given by Mrs Montagu in 1791 to show off her feather room in Montagu

¹⁵ I am most grateful to Elizabeth Bellord for this translation. Screens were sold from Hornby Castle, Yorks 2–11 June 1930 lot 412, see Cassidy-Geiger note 47. See Cassidy-Geiger for a transcription of the 1735 article. It seems odd that this appears to be the only known reference to Levet: if he was an apprentice or assistant to Le Normand this must mean that he did not continue working on his own account, or if he did, his work is unsigned, unrecognised or has not survived; and as yet no archival references have been found. There seems to be little chance of finding out who Levet was: it is a common surname. However it is worth mentioning that there was an India merchant named John Levett, whose brother Francis was a merchant with the Levant Company in Leghorn, then in Florida. It seems unlikely that Le Normand's student was Robert Levet (1705–82), who spent time in Paris early in his life but then went on to work in medicine (see his *DNB* entry).

¹⁶ Paul Bertrand's bank account has several entries for Elizabeth Robinson, Matthew, Mathew Morris and Sarah between 1739 and 1743. Sarah, who contracted smallpox in 1741 and later made a disastrous marriage to George Lewis Scott, subsequently lived with Barbara Montagu in Bath.

House, the mansion designed for her by James Stuart. The evidence lies in her correspondence.¹⁷

As early as 1737 (the year following Le Normand's death) Elizabeth Robinson was asking her brother to bring shells and feathers home from a trip to the East Indies. She made no claims to be creative herself, writing that '... it is an unreasonable thing of people to expect me to be handy', so her request may have been on behalf of the duchess or the artistic and nimble-fingered Mrs Pendarves; but when her feather room was completed in 1791, it was claimed that it was 'executed by Mrs Montagu herself, assisted only by a few female attendants, instructed for that purpose'.¹⁸ There is no way of knowing the scale of her contribution to the feather tapestry, but a screen was created in the late 1740s that also appears to have been a joint effort. In the autumn of 1749, now married, she wrote to Anne Donnellan:

Our screen goes on well. I wish you would be so good as to get Lucas to send half an ounce of French partridge feathers, and half an ounce of the best dyed yellow feathers to you; and that you would be so good as send them in covers. Pray has not the macaw dropt some small blue or yellow feathers?

And in December 1750 Mrs Montagu enquired of Miss Anstey¹⁹ 'How goes on your feather screen? If you want grebes, or any sort of dyed feathers, let me know when I am in town.'

As described by Elizabeth Montagu's great-great-niece and editor Emily Climenson, the screen was '... in six panels, one of which was worked by Miss Anstey, in imitation of one of the Duchess of Portland's ... it was the Duchess of Portland's original idea'. Another letter that year we find that 'Mr and Mrs Vesey ... desired leave to see the house and celebrated feather screen, so I have wrote to Betty to have the house in order, and to set the screen for them.'

This was Betty Tull, who became the 'forewoman' of the featherwork project for Montagu House. Little is known of her, but it seems possible that she might have been in some way connected with a Mrs Tull, peruke maker in Whitechapel, who is mentioned in 1753.²⁰ It is unclear whether the screen was part of the project for the room, or something different. Elizabeth Montagu kept friends up to date with the progress of the featherwork.

1786: As Mrs Tull's feathers would mount on the wings of the wind if she worked in her usual place, or anywhere in the body of the house (now partially roofless) the grand octagon drawing room must be dedicated to the feather manufactory, and as she has a delicate constitution I must put her up a bed there

December 1788: Poor Betty Tull is I fear going to take her flight to another world. As a Virgin she might claim the white plume of the ostrich for her Hearse, but her triumphs over the whole feathered race may give her pretensions to every feather of every bird from the Eagle to the Wren, from the croaking Raven to the chattering Parrot. Macaws she has transformed into Tulips, Kingfishers into bluebells by her so potent art.

¹⁷ Matthew Montagu, *The letters of Mrs Elizabeth Montagu*, 3 vols, 1813; letters of 1720–61: Emily J. Climenson, *Elizabeth Montagu, the Queen of the Blue-Stockings*, 1906; letters of 1762–1800: Reginald Blunt, *Queen of the Blues*, 1923. The report of the breakfast given in the *St James's Chronicle*, 11–14 June 1791 included: 'The other apartment particularly noticed is the feather-room: the walls are wholly covered with feathers, artfully sewed together, and forming beautiful festoons of flowers and other fanciful decorations. The most brilliant colours, the produce of all climates, have wonderful effects on a feather ground of a dazzling whiteness. This room was designed by Bonomi ...'. The *Oxford DNB* describes it as 'A special room ... contained Montagu's feather work. This was a large tapestry designed by James Wyatt and the Wright family, the royal embroiderers; it was made entirely of feathers of all kinds by Montagu and a number of other women who had worked for years on this project'. Phoebe Wright is first known of in 1742; she died in 1778.

¹⁸ *St James Chronicle*, 11–14 June 1791.

¹⁹ Sister of Christopher Anstey (1724–1805), author of *New Bath Guide*, published in 1766.

²⁰ *Public Advertiser*, 1 October and 12 December 1753, issues 5905 and 5967.

June 1791: . . . in the mornings I have generally gone to Portman Square for 2 or 3 hours to attend to the fixing up the feather work and some improvement in the hanging the curtains in my great room.

Had she finally realized an ambition inspired by work Le Normand had for sale in Paul Bertrand's shop in Bath? Or is any attempt to connect the work of Le Normand and Levet with that of Betty Tull a non-starter? It is surely Le Normand's work that was remembered by an anonymous correspondent to the *Morning Post* in 1788:²¹

A paragraph in your paper of yesterday says, the idea of fitting up a room with hangings of feather-work *first* originated with Mrs Montague: I shall not take upon me to determine with whom any idea may have originated, as such a decision seems subject to some difficulty; but I can venture to assert with whom the idea in question did not originate. It did not originate with Mrs Montague: because a Mr Abraham Gosset, of the Island of Jersey, had in his possession, more than twenty years ago, a set of feather-work hangings for a room, the panel in light grey feathers, and the festoon at top in coloured ones. This is a fact — and though a trifle, yet I thought it would be proper to set the feather upon the right bird.

It is worth noting that the family of Matthew and Isaac Gosset, renowned in London for their frames and wax models, came from St Helier. They appear to have been close to the Clerembault family.²² Matthew and Gideon Gosset feature in the bank account of Paul Bertrand — Matthew being the uncle of Isaac and Gideon.

Augustus the Strong's hangings were exhibited at Somerset House shortly after Elizabeth Montagu was born. His featherwork has survived but hers, which had to be dismantled because of the dust it collected, can only be imagined through the words of William Cowper:²³

The birds put off their every hue
To dress a room for Montagu . . .

The Moritzburg bed has the feathers woven into the hangings. The feathers in the two pictures illustrated (figs 1 and 2) appear to be glued, but the works have not recently been taken out of their frames. The brilliance of their colouring and the skill and inventiveness of their creator is truly astonishing: the image of tulips transcends time and speaks strongly to twenty-first century taste. Perhaps more will be discovered about le Normand and how he went about sourcing the feathers: potentially a rich source of study for ornithologists and botanists.

And another question arose when I was looking at the featherwork pictures: could le Normand's work have been the inspiration for Mary Delany's cut-paper work?²⁴

Vanessa Brett

Vanessa Brett, *Bertrand's toyshop in Bath: luxury retailing 1685–1765* (1) will be published in mid-2014.

²¹ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 2 April 1788, issue 4693. Abraham Gossett of Jersey 1701–85.

²² Mary Clerembault (died 1785) bequeathed to Catherine Bosquet two portraits by Gossett of herself and her brother John (died 1784); now in the Royal Collection. Presumably they were children of Anthony of Clerembault, Nicholas (note 11 above) being their brother. She also bequeathed to John Robert le Cointe a feather picture by 'Mr le Nordian'. John Clerembault bequeathed £1,000 to Catherine Gossett. (Wagner, op cit)

²³ 'On the beautiful Feather-Hangings, designed for Mrs Montagu', published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1788.

²⁴ Derek Adlam, *The Great Collector, Edward Harley, 2nd Earl of Oxford*, The Harley Gallery, 2013. Ruth Hayden, *Mrs Delany Her life and her flowers*, London 1980.

FUTURE SOCIETY EVENTS

BOOKINGS

For places on visits please apply to the Events Secretary Anne-Marie Bannister, Bricket House, 90 Mount Pleasant Lane, Bricket Wood, St Albans, Herts., AL2 3XD, Tel. 07775 907390 enclosing a separate cheque and separate stamped addressed A5 envelope for each event using the enclosed booking form. There is no need to send an SAE if you provide a clearly-written e-mail address as where possible, joining instructions will be dispatched by e-mail. NB. PLEASE NOTE NEW EVENTS E-MAIL ADDRESS: events@furniturehistorysociety.org

Applications should only be made by members who intend to take part in the whole programme. No one can apply for more than one place unless they hold a joint membership, and each applicant should be identified by name. If you wish to be placed on the waiting list please enclose a telephone number where you can be reached. Please note that a closing date for applications for visits is printed in the *Newsletter*. Applications made after the closing date will be accepted only if space is still available. Members are reminded that places are not allocated on a first come, first served basis, but that all applications are equally considered following the closing date for applications.

There is now an extra facility on the website for members to express interest in certain events and then pay, if assigned a place after the closing date (where this is applicable). This is now possible for all day events and the Annual Symposium. This is a test of the new capability for on-line booking and is therefore limited only to these events at present but hopefully will be extended to all in the future. The normal blue form should be used for booking other events until further notice. If you have no on-line facility or are uneasy about using this new procedure, please just use the blue form as usual or e-mail events@furniturehistorysociety.org. WHERE POSSIBLE, JOINING INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE DESPATCHED BY E-MAIL SO PLEASE REMEMBER TO PROVIDE YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS IF YOU HAVE ONE.

CANCELLATIONS

Please note that no refunds will be given for cancellations for events costing £10.00 or less. In all other cases, cancellations will be accepted up to seven days before the date of a visit, but refunds will be subject to a £5.00 deduction for administrative costs. Separate arrangements are made for study weekends and foreign tours and terms are clearly stated on the printed details in each case.

OTHER NOTICES

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

SIR AMBROSE HEAL: Special Book Offer to Members

Oblong, the company which produces the Society's *Journal* and *Newsletter*, will publish in the Spring *Sir Ambrose Heal and the Heal Cabinet Factory, 1897–1939* by Oliver Heal with an introduction by Christopher Claxton Stevens. The 324-page, large format (330 × 240 mm) hardback is generously illustrated and includes reproductions of Heal's original designs alongside photographs. Detailed descriptions of the furniture, its design and manufacture, are supplemented by a biography of Heal the man and an informed analysis of Heal the retailer. The book is priced at £58 in the UK but members can obtain it for £49.50 if ordered from Oblong before 31 May. The offer is restricted to one copy per member; please write **FHS member** on the enclosed order form. Overseas members, please contact the publisher for special offer rates.

MANCHESTER ANTIQUE TEXTILE FAIR

Sun 2 March 2014

Armitage Centre, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6HE

In addition to the Fair, there will be a display from Guilds, Societies, Artists, Museums, Academics and Practitioners, and up and coming design students taking part in the Textile Society Bursary Competition, maintaining links with history and tradition, but looking forward through conservation, and innovation within textile design and practice. The theme for the Talks Programme will be based around Russian and Eastern European Textiles.

Profits from the Textile Society's Antique Textile Fairs provide student bursaries and museum awards, reflecting the Society's commitment to developing and supporting education and knowledge within textile disciplines.

CALL FOR PAPERS: The Period Room: Museum, Material, Experience

19–20 September 2014

The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, County Durham

This conference, held at the Bowes Museum, which redisplayed its own collection of Period Rooms in 2007–10, aims to consider the Period Room from a wide variety of perspectives in order to address some key questions about Period Rooms and the history of Period Rooms display in Museums: Should Period Rooms be considered objects in their own right, or merely 'contexts' for related material? How, and in what ways, did Period Rooms satisfy ideas of museum interpretation, and how and why did these attitudes change? What was the role of the evolving frameworks of national/local heritage in the appearance of Period Rooms in museums? What were/are the theoretical, technical and aesthetic frameworks for the display of Period Rooms in museums? How, and in what ways, is the Period Room different from, or similar to, the Historic Interior?

We invite papers to explore these themes and relationships from a wide range of perspectives and from a wide range of organisations, institutions and disciplines, from academics (historians, art historians, literary and film historians), museum curators and professionals, exhibition designers, technicians and craft-workers).

Please send abstracts of no more than 400 words to the conference organisers:

Dr Mark Westgarth (School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds) m.w.westgarth@leeds.ac.uk

Dr Jane Whittaker (The Bowes Museum) jane.whittaker@thebowesmuseum.org.uk

Dr Howard Coutts (The Bowes Museum) howard.coutts@thebowesmuseum.org.uk

Closing Date for Abstracts: 31 March 2014

FABRIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE, Chester Cathedral

The cathedrals of England are protected and supported by the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England (CFCE) which ensures that the statutory Care of Cathedrals Measure is upheld and conducted in partnership with the Chapter of each cathedral. Each cathedral also has a Fabric Advisory Committee, (FAC) a body comprising professional experts which acts as a 'critical friend' to the work of each cathedral, balancing the need to conserve and protect these most historic and precious buildings while, at the same time, adapting them to the necessities and benefits of usage in the twenty-first century. Chester Cathedral is looking to replace a retiring member of its FAC and to extend its membership for the future, and would be interested to hear from anyone who would wish to be considered in this role, especially from those with an expertise in historic furniture and the wider aspects of contemporary design.

Further details from Roy Archer (FHS member since 1964): roy.archer@btinternet.com

BOOK REVIEWS

Suggestions for future reviews and publishers' review copies should be sent to Simon Swynfen Jervis, 45 Bedford Gardens, London W8 7EF, tel. 020 7727 8739. E-mail: ss.jervis@btopenworld.com

Reinier Baarsen, *Paris 1650–1900. Decorative Arts in the Rijksmuseum*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, in association with the Rijksmuseum, 2013, 607pp., 786 col., 106 b. & w. illus. ISBN 978-0-300-19129-5, £175.

For many, this large and handsome book will no doubt come as a considerable surprise. The Rijksmuseum is so justly celebrated for its paintings that its decorative arts holdings were always in danger of being sidelined, particularly in the museum as it was arranged before its recent very lengthy but much praised refurbishment. Reinier Baarsen, whose responsibility for the decorative arts in the Rijksmuseum and wide-ranging knowledge of other public and private collections places him in an ideal position to look anew at the museum's holdings, has manifestly devoted much time and energy during the closure period of the museum to undertake, with the assistance of a number of colleagues, the considerable research that this book has required, and the result is this excellent publication.

Unlike so many '*Treasures of ...*' books, this is no mere coffee table scissors-and-paste compilation. Rather, the author has boldly and sensibly taken Paris as his starting point, observing the curiously indefinable yet somehow obvious Parisian-ness of everything made in that city — by makers of whatever nationality — and noting the extraordinarily magnetic effect that Paris had on European taste from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. This approach provides a well-defined skeleton for the book, and using it in a clear-headed way, the author rigorously examines the effect of Paris style on Dutch patrons

and collectors during this period, while mourning in the process both the break-up of many Dutch collections at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the absence of any decorative arts museum in Holland until the beginning of the twentieth century, long after such museums had been established in France and England. Fortunately for the Rijksmuseum, this slow beginning and slim holding of French decorative arts were to be transformed at a stroke in 1952 with the arrival of the splendidly rich collection of the German banker Dr Fritz Mannheimer. The author provides an intriguing insight into the unusual background and war-time vicissitudes of that collection, and despite the loss of much relevant documentation manages to give some amusing glimpses of the flamboyant lifestyle of Mannheimer himself before the Second War. With many similarities to the kind of collections formed at a slightly earlier period by members of the Rothschild dynasty — including some pieces with actual Rothschild provenances — the Mannheimer collection provides a highly suitable vehicle for the author's careful survey of the great age of the decorative arts in France — from the reign of Louis XIV to the eclipse of the First Empire — and this properly occupies the main part of the book.

Using the Mannheimer collection in this way, and combining it with the museum's acquisitions from other sources, the focus becomes a chronological account of the changes and developments in Parisian taste and fashion, weaving *ébénisterie*, *menuiserie*, prints and drawings, textiles, gold boxes, porcelain, gilt-bronze, silver and silver gilt into a sustaining and informative narrative. Happily, the museum's holdings include major — or at the very least, good — examples of the work of almost every leading maker or designer from all these categories, and the author has used these high points to recapitulate the salient details of the craftsmen and artists involved, and the patrons where known, summarising and consolidating the most recent and relevant published information, and adding to these resumé's his own acute observations and the fruits of his own research. Each object is subjected to careful analysis: descriptions (including damage, alterations and faults) are thorough enough to be helpful without overwhelming the narrative; summaries of the latest scholarly views are recorded, discussed and weighed where appropriate; and pertinent accounts of comparable or related pieces and their makers are included. The discussion around the writing table attributed to Dubois (no. 29) typifies this model approach; and many of the entries are enhanced by the inclusion of photographs of normally inaccessible marks and inscriptions. Readers who are used to rather dry furniture history will also find the inclusion of the author's subjective judgements as to quality and workmanship refreshing: he is not frightened of the adjective 'beautiful'; nor, by the same token, does he hesitate to downgrade an object where that is justified. The porcelain-mounted table previously attributed to Carlin, and published as such (no. 121), turns out on careful examination to be one of Mannheimer's relatively few geese, and the analysis that accompanies this revision is exemplary.

Pieces from later in the nineteenth century include a small but fine group of furniture, porcelain, silver and jewellery, much of it adventurously acquired by the museum since 1987. Among the most striking is the extraordinary suite of marquetry furniture (no. 122) made — as we now know — in Paris in 1834 by Friedrich Frickhinger and Ernst Blechschmidt. Frickhinger's signature, evidently discovered after the auction at which the suite was purchased in 2008, allows the author to piece together an account of the careers of these otherwise obscure makers and to throw light on furniture making at this intriguingly transitional moment. It would be interesting to know if they had any links with their Parisian contemporary Louis-Alexandre Bellangé, with some of whose work this suite bears comparison.

The pleasures of this elegantly-written book, which are many, are greatly enhanced by the careful design and, above all, the superb photographs, especially those of details which

it would be difficult to appreciate with the naked eye. The entries for snuff boxes, porcelain and gilt bronzes in particular benefit from this approach. At just over 600 pages, this is in every sense a weighty volume, but one which anyone with an interest in the decorative arts will find invaluable.

Hugh Roberts

Christopher Rowell, ed., *Ham House. Four Hundred Years of Collecting and Patronage* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and The National Trust, 2013) 536 pp., 250 col. illus., ISBN 978-0-3001-8540-9, £75

For furniture historians Ham has always been a mythic place and this rich and varied book celebrates its 400th birthday very fittingly. Christopher Rowell has brought together specialists in a variety of fields to produce 28 chapters or essays that illuminate facets of the house and its collections. It cannot be a comprehensive study of such an immense subject, but it is a substantial one, and reflects the importance of continuing to work on houses and collections that might have been thought to have been comprehensively 'done' already. The essays are generously illustrated and supported by a number of appendices, including transcriptions of the inventories and for the bills of the 1630s, together with family trees and plans of the house.

The chapters follow no particular order, although the general drift is chronological, with a detailed study of the Green Closet by Christopher Rowell following immediately after an essay on the building of the first house at Ham, by David Adshead, and then a wide menu from which one can choose to read about the parquetry in the house, the court life of Lauderdale, or the wardrobe of Lionel Tollemache, 4th Earl of Dysart. Reading the essays consecutively brings some inevitable repetition, but in terms of working into the heart of the house, it is rather like preparing a flower bed for sowing: as one double digs in some essays, where one's own knowledge is weaker (for me, Claire Gapper's celebration of the 'endless ingenuity' of the plasterworkers' schemes), in others one can enjoy the pleasure of hoeing and raking over better-known material to produce a fine tilth — and in doing so, still turning up new knowledge even in areas where one thought one was relatively well informed.

For furniture historians, the chapters to turn to immediately are the one already mentioned on the Green Closet, Reinier Baarsen's on seventeenth-century European cabinet-making at Ham (which introduces recent new thought about The Hague as a centre of cabinet-making) and Lars Ljungström's on an English commode made in the manner of Pierre Antoine Foullet, but by whom? There is merit here in raising the questions, as important as finding the answers in archival work. But then one is led to David Adshead's chapter, with Christopher Rowell, on the decorative woodwork, and perhaps then to the chapter on the scagliola maker, Baldassare Artima, written by Christopher Rowell from work in 2010 by Adam Bowett. Like many chapters in this book, it connects one to other houses, as here, amongst others, to Drayton and its related mirror, table and stands. This is appropriate for a house so rooted in connections — to the court, to overseas centres and to other houses by dynastic ties and by the employment of the same craftsmen or designers. Two chapters by Helen Wyld deal with the (largely departed) tapestries of the seventeenth century and the Bradshaw set after Watteau from the mid-eighteenth century. Annabel Westman writes on the textiles which are such a vital part of the spirit of the house, illustrating the huge variety of fabric and colour that was used.

Several of these writers succeed not just in recording the history of such elements but in making us look in detail at some aspect of a room's furnishing, and wishing to check this

against reality when we next go to Ham. This is as it should be, that we take note and enjoy the detail that was carefully selected and created by the patrons and craftsmen who put these things in place. This vast book underlines that understanding such detail is as much a work as creating it.

The book extends over the full 400 years of Ham's history, including an essay by Michael Hall on the work of Bodley & Garner and of Watts & Co. for the 9th Earl at the end of the nineteenth century, and an essay by Simon Jervis on the post-1948 life of the house and in particular the constraints on Peter Thornton who, nonetheless, was the great animator of Ham in the 1970s and 1980s and who raised its profile not only with scholars throughout the world but also with the public, who began to visit in ever larger numbers. The portrait is of a house constantly in motion, sometimes re-creating itself with vigour, at other times adapting itself gently to the needs of a new generation. With this in mind, it is easy to think that the post-1948 years have been the most destructive, but perhaps we should accept that the curator, sometimes with no intention of doing so, alters an interior quite as much as any patron.

Sarah Medlam

Susan Weber (ed.), *William Kent: Designing Georgian Britain*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2013, 656pp., 624 col. illus. ISBN 978-0-300-19618-4, £60.

William Kent's reputation has never fully recovered from George Vertue's catty eighteenth-century appraisal, and despite periodic re-assessment it has been difficult to shake off the prejudice that his work, however impressive, was always a little second-rate and vulgar. And didn't he owe it all to Lord Burlington anyway? This catalogue, which accompanies the current exhibition at the Bard Graduate Centre in New York, aims not just to restore Kent's reputation but to place him at the very centre of English art and architecture in the first half of the eighteenth century. The ambition is lofty and the result impressive; rarely has such a powerful array of scholarship been brought to bear on an English artist of any age.

The book covers all aspects of Kent's life and work, from Bridlington to Rome, from town houses to villas, Royal commissions to public buildings, garden lodges, landscape design, book illustrations, metalwork, Gothic revivals and furniture. Three things set it apart from previous studies; first, the sheer scale of the book, which omits little or nothing. Most of us will never need to buy another book about William Kent. Second, the wide scope, which places Kent more fully in context than any previous study. In this respect the chapters on the political culture of the Georgian court and on Kent's patrons are particularly illuminating. Third, the ambition, which is to install Kent as the foremost artist of his day, an innovator who broke the mould in interior decoration, planning and architecture. The one thing the book does not seek to do is reinstate Kent as a figure painter, for the evidence is simply too damning.

It will certainly be difficult henceforth for anyone to claim that Kent was merely Burlington's creature. Kent here emerges as a fully autonomous artist, reliant of course, as all artists were, on patronage, but with a precocious talent wholly his own. According to John Harris, Kent was 'an extraordinary artist... who created an architecture stylistically far in advance of anything in Europe, who transformed English garden design, and who completely changed the mode of presenting architectural designs'. For Steven Brindle, Kent's work at Kensington Palace 'represented a revolution in approaches to interior decoration in Britain'. And for Julius Bryant, Kent 'brought a new level of splendour and convenience' to Britain's grand houses, 'setting standards of opulence and invention for the homes of the world's wealthiest new elite'.

As one would hope, there are substantial chapters on Kent's furniture, written by Susan Weber. One discusses Kent's sources, the other the furniture itself. Both are profusely illustrated, so the book will immediately become an invaluable point of reference. The research is thorough but mostly familiar, although recent discoveries such as the provenance of the Wilton settees which, it transpires, came originally from Wanstead House, and were acquired by the eleventh earl of Pembroke at the sale of 1822, may be unfamiliar to those who have missed the relevant articles. However, there is throughout a worrying inclination to attribute almost any furniture associated with a Kent commission to Kent himself. These range from Stephen Langley's flashy seat furniture made for the Garden Room at Chiswick House, to a set of entirely undocumented gilded chairs at 10 Downing Street, to two pairs of very ordinary hall chairs from Wanstead and Shotover. None of these possesses an iota of Kent's powerful architectonic style. That such uninteresting objects are included in the catalogue suggests a failure to understand what makes Kent Kentian. One of the most obvious characteristics of Kent's furniture is that it is essentially carver's work; this is illustrated by the mahogany and gilt Red Saloon suite at Houghton which, from a chair-maker's point of view are structurally and ergonomically weak. That didn't matter to Kent (or presumably Sir Robert Walpole), because his furniture was designed to be part of the elevation of a room — Jonathan Harris calls it 'wall furniture'. Everyday chairs and tables, no matter how rich, were not Kent's concern.

To be fair, the lack of supporting documentation has always inhibited a better understanding of Kent's furniture, and we sorely lack detailed knowledge of the relationship between the designer and the maker(s), and of the extent to which makers such as James Moore, who furnished Sherborne Lodge, might independently create furniture in the Kentian mould. Until and unless new information comes to light, that is likely to remain the case, and until then this book will be our best point of reference. At £60 it is a bargain.

William Kent: Designing Georgian Britain opens at the V&A on 22 March 2014.

Adam Bowett

THE OLIVER FORD TRUST AND TOM INGRAM MEMORIAL FUND

In line with one of its roles — the promotion of interest in interior design — the Oliver Ford Trust has generously expressed the desire to sponsor a place on each FHS study weekend or foreign tour. Applicants should either be a student with a particular interest in interiors, or a junior museum professional. Applications from non-members will be considered. Grants will be awarded via the Tom Ingram Fund, to which candidates should apply.

The Tom Ingram Memorial Fund makes grants towards travel and other incidental expenses for the purpose of study or research into the history of furniture (a) whether or not the applicant is a member of the Society; (b) only when the study or research is likely to be of importance in furthering the objectives of the Society; and (c) only when travel could not be undertaken without a grant from the Society. Applications towards the cost of FHS foreign and domestic trips and study weekends are particularly welcome from scholars. Successful applicants are required to acknowledge the assistance of the Fund in any resulting publications and must report back to the Panel on completion of the travel or project. All enquiries about Grant applications to the Tom Ingram Memorial Fund or Oliver Ford Trust should be addressed to Clarissa Ward, Secretary FHS Grants Committee, 25 Wardo Avenue, London SW6 6RA, email grants@furniturehistorysociety.org, or the application form can be downloaded from the Grants page of the Society's website, www.furniturehistorysociety.org.

The FHS Grants Committee will now meet quarterly to consider all grant applications, either for independent travel/incidental expenses for the purpose of study or research, or for participation in FHS foreign and UK study trips. Completed application forms should be submitted, with current Curriculum Vitae, by the following deadlines so that they can be considered at these meetings:

March 10, June 10, September 10 or December 10.

The importance of the scholarships we are able to offer through the Tom Ingram and Oliver Ford funds is summed up by Jo Norman from the Victoria and Albert Museum who took part in the intensive Rome study tour, April 2013: 'As a relative novice to the world of furniture, but knowing that my interests are concentrated on Italian furniture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the trip offered me an unparalleled opportunity to study a far greater number of pieces of furniture — as well as entire collections — in private as well as public hands, than I would ever manage to see on my own. The experience of looking at such a number of pieces, usually on my knees and armed with a torch, has

helped greatly to increase my confidence in learning to trust my eyes and instinct when looking at unknown pieces for the first time. In particular, I greatly appreciated the privileged access that we were granted during our visit, the generosity of our hosts, and the collegiate atmosphere of the FHS group, which offered a scholarly and yet unthreatening environment in which to pose questions, suggestions, and from which I have learnt a great deal. Quite simply, it has provided me with the greatest and most concentrated opportunity to date in which to look and learn, and will, I know, provide me with the most fantastic basis on which to build in my future work on Italian furniture.'

COPY DEADLINE

The deadline for receiving material to be published in the next *Newsletter* is **15 March**. Copy should be sent, preferably by email, Elizabeth Jamieson ea.jamieson@tiscali.co.uk or posted to Elizabeth Jamieson, 10 Tarleton Gardens, Forest Hill, London SE23 3XN.

OFFICERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS

President: Sir Nicholas Goodison

Chairman of the Council: Christopher Rowell

Honorary Secretary: Clarissa Ward

Honorary Treasurer: Martin Williams

Honorary Editorial Secretary: Elizabeth White

*Council Members: Yannick Chastang, John Cross,
Max Donnelly, Helen Jacobsen, Fergus Lyons,
Annabel Westman*

*Honorary Newsletter Editors: Elizabeth Jamieson
and Matthew Winterbottom*

Website Editor: Laura Ongaro

Events Committee Chairman: Sarah Medlam

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY (MEMBERSHIP, SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, AND PUBLICATIONS): Dr Brian Austen, 1 Mercedes Cottages, St John's Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 4EH. Tel. and fax 01444 413845, e-mail: brian.austen@zen.co.uk

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

TOM INGRAM MEMORIAL FUND/FHS GRANTS: Clarissa Ward, 25 Wardo Avenue, London SW6 6RA, e-mail: grants@furniturehistorysociety.org

Web site: www.furniturehistorysociety.org

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

This issue edited by Matthew Winterbottom

*Published by the Furniture History Society c/o Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department,
Victoria and Albert Museum, London SW7 2RL*

Produced in Great Britain by Oblong Creative Ltd, 416B Thorp Arch Estate, Wetherby LS23 7FG

The views expressed in this Newsletter are those of the respective authors. They are accepted as honest and accurate expressions of opinion, but should not necessarily be considered to reflect that of the Society or its employees.

Registered UK Charity No. 251683