



1. John Wykeham Archer, *Old Entrance to Lyon's Inn*,
Holywell Street, Strand, April, 1847,
watercolour, showing William Schofield's shop, 36, Holywell Street, London.
© Trustees of the British Museum.

PREFACE

Regional Furniture 2006 stepped outside the mainstream of furniture studies to focus on 'the trade'. Roger Warner's *Memoirs of a Twentieth Century Antique Dealer* was keenly received, not just as a tribute to the fifty-year career of a discerning and generous man, but also as an introduction to a largely overlooked subject that holds great significance for the furniture historian. Warner was active between 1930 and 1980, but he carried on a profession that had its roots in the nineteenth century and before. The people and practices of this time, that had such an influence upon Warner, are the principal subject of this volume.

The *Dictionary of Antique and Curiosity Dealers* presented here is the first attempt to provide comprehensive biographical information about the community of interconnected characters that provided this legacy; those who invented and were first to represent the antiques trade in its modern form. It is hoped that the information it gives about the beginnings of the trade in furniture, the sources and distribution of stock, the scope of the profession and what happened to the furniture itself, will engage today's historian.

Interest in regional furniture types for their 'curiosity value' was by no means a new phenomenon in the nineteenth century – witness Horace Walpole's mania, during the mid-eighteenth century, for or the 'Glastonbury chair' or turned 'Great chairs' from the Welsh Border Country.¹ But items such as these appear to have been bought in a piecemeal fashion from auctions, or through tip offs from friends and agents primed to look out for the particular things that a purchaser desired. Notable collections developed in this way include those of Walpole, William Beckford, the Earl of Moray, and Walter Scott.² Some collectors, such as Scott, famously assembled anthologies of carved fragments with which to decorate and create new interiors and, by the time Abbotsford was nearing completion, the supply of antique woodwork for this purpose was established on a more organised footing.³ Christies, London, held their first sale of 'fragments for making interiors' in 1826.⁴ Regional dealers began to emerge; Robert Trappes, for example, of Clitheroe, Lancashire, supplied a great oak bedhead, aumbry, three armchairs and two chests to furnish a panelled 'Elizabethan' bedroom for the Tempest family at Broughton Hall, Skipton, Yorkshire, in 1834; part of a burgeoning trend for oak panelled bedrooms that was to last throughout the century.⁵ In 1833, John Claudius Loudon had noted that the trade in ancient carved woodwork or 'ornaments' was quite commonplace and he could even recommend London dealers who specialised in fragments from particular historical periods and countries.⁶

But carved woodwork, usually oak, has always been highly prized and, as country house archives reveal, was carefully re-used long before there was an established trade in the commodity.⁷ By 1830, however, its application had developed into two distinct strands. In addition to the commerce in woodwork intended for assemblage into interiors that would have a 'new and strange effect on the spectator', Loudon's *Encyclopaedia* recorded a fashion for making individual articles of hybrid furniture from ancient fragments supplied by specialist dealers. For example, talking about the appropriateness of massive chests and coffer for hallways, in his chapter 'Elizabethan Villa Furniture',

he recommended that the chest exteriors 'might be rendered curious, and highly interesting... by covering them with the Elizabethan, Dutch, Louis XIV, or Francis I ornaments which are now to be purchased in abundance, either at home or abroad'. He continued: 'Wilkinson of Oxford Street and Hanson of John Street, have extensive collections of Elizabethan and Dutch furniture and carvings, from which a judicious compiler of exteriors might clothe the skeleton frames, so as to produce objects of curiosity and interest, at a very trifling expense'. It is interesting to consider Loudon's aesthetic idea here, for he was not advocating a strictly authentic antiquarianism, but a creative art, conducted on abstract principles, that he was to give the loose title 'Elizabethan'.

However, a relation of this happy new art of furniture composition was the darker art of fakery. There were unscrupulous dealers who were prepared, not just to provide materials for making up into new articles of furniture with an antiquarian look, but who had no qualms about passing off newly made pieces as genuine antiques. The quantity of information on the antique furniture trade in this *Dictionary* that has been gleaned from court records is testimony to the widespread trade in counterfeit items that took place, particularly in the early nineteenth century.

Although Loudon referred to a number of specialist furniture dealers, it seems that in 1833, they were still a small group, mainly based in London. Most furniture, in the early nineteenth century, seems to have been sold by merchants who dealt in other things. At one end of a spectrum that may seem bizarre to the modern reader, one could cite cases from this *Dictionary* such as James Edwin, 'Tea and Ancient Furniture Dealer', or note that there are several instances of furniture being sold in bookshops, or even tobacconists. Tobacconists, and certainly those who deal in curiosities, are now unfortunately a thing of the past, but the practice of either selling, or at least having curious old wooden objects as decoration, still lingers on in some of the surviving second hand book dealers who have retail premises.

The bundling together of apparently incongruous items is a consistent theme throughout this *Dictionary*, particularly in the records of auction lots bought by dealers. These seem to be the precursors of the 'job lot'; something else that has only just survived into the twenty first century. For instance, Italian bronzes, *Buhl* cabinets and old oak might all appear in the same auction lot, or 'Windsor and Venetian Gilt Chairs' might be catalogued together.⁹ This might have something to do with a difference in perception of the historical object between now and then. In 1830, an 'old Scots Quaigh' seemed to have just about the same curiosity value, to both vendor and buyer, as a Louis XIV bronze. To the early-nineteenth century dealer, they were all 'antiques', but a clear delineation between different branches had not emerged completely. It is interesting to observe that the first appearance of the term 'antique furniture dealer' in United Kingdom trade directories is in 1817, and that it is only after this that specialised categories such as 'Old Chair Seller', begin to occur.⁹

Accompanying the increased fragmentation of dealers' specialities in furniture came regional spread, or the rapid development and expansion of the trade outside metropolitan centres. In the United Kingdom, reasons for the establishment of different regional foci may have been various. Cockermonth, for example, in Cumberland, may have become important because of the tourist trade that arose in the English Lake District, or more likely, because of the sheer quantity of old oak furniture and carved

woodwork that could be sourced in the area. Warwick, which became an important regional centre that still retains a few furniture dealers, was well placed in the heart of England and therefore within reasonably easy reach of a large buying population, but it was also situated at the centre of a county with a particularly strong antiquarian tradition. It is valid to note that some of the key houses of the early Gothic Revival; Radway Grange, Arbury Hall and Charlecote, are all in Warwickshire.

Some of the notable dealer-towns outside London were significant ports of entry for imported goods; Hull and Yarmouth, for example, both of which supported healthy clusters of old furniture sellers from an early date, and which still retain the faint whiff of a reputation as being good places to buy 'junk', were ideally situated just across the North Sea from the Netherlands and Flanders, from where furniture and woodwork was purchased in wholesale quantities. Other county towns, such as Northampton, for example, possibly provided a decent living for entrepreneurs because of the number of good patrons in the immediate area.

The gentry continued to be loyal supporters of the trade throughout the nineteenth century; important historic house refurbishments, such as that of Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, between 1839-49, were lucrative, and the 13th Earl of Eglinton, fuelled by Walter Scott and a fervour for things mediaeval, literally provided the dealers with a field day in supplying the props for the chivalric *Tournament* held at his Ayrshire castle in 1839.¹⁰ The dealers were more important in these commissions than is generally acknowledged; A W N Pugin, for example, might be given credit for the interior decoration of his Roman Catholic client Charles Scarisbrick's Lancashire treasure house Scarisbrick Hall between 1835 and 1852, but the scheme appears to have been masterminded by Scarisbrick himself, with the essential aid of the dealers Hull and Deschryver, who supplied all the Flemish antiquities and gothic carvings. Pugin was very dependent on the dealers.

At this time, there seemed to be no shortage of furniture, arms and armour and other items of ancient pedigree on the market; interestingly, J C Loudon made comment on the reasons for such a quantity of good stock becoming available for sale in the early decades of the 1800s, writing that:

the French Revolution and the recent change in fortunes of the English nobility have exposed to sale Louis XIV, Henry VIII and Elizabethan furniture."

A market flooded with saleable items and a developed network of dealers establishing itself in the regions now made antique furnishings and objects of curiosity available to a new consumer market – just the kind of person who would buy or read Loudon's *Encyclopaedia*. He put it nicely, saying: 'the furniture of the great' has 'attracted the notice of gentlemen of less opulence'. Taste had transferred to the middle classes.

As the nineteenth century advanced, another change occurred; the market became internationalised. In the United Kingdom, a certain amount of this was due to the prevalence of Jewish dealers, based mainly in London but also in other cities such as Liverpool and Glasgow. The universality of the Hebrew language aided easy communication, whilst the special network of trust amongst the Judaic community enabled the easy raising of credit and swift transfer of funds. They were able to use their contacts in Continental Europe to buy and sell goods, and regularly attended foreign

sales, including the more important ones such as Soltikoff, St Petersburg, 1861 and Spitzer, Paris, 1893. But as early as 1833, J C Loudon had noted that the English capital had become something of an *entrepôt* for the world antiques trade, writing:

as London has a direct and cheap communication with every part of the world by sea, the American citizen or the Australian merchant who wishes to indulge.. may do it with the greatest ease, and may purchase real antiques at much less expense than he could have the articles carved by modern artists"

So, in the early nineteenth century, the London trade was selling to the gentry, the new bourgeoisie, visiting Americans and Colonial businessmen; but there were other customers of note. The extent of recycling and remodelling of old furniture that went on in the early 1800s was greater than is generally realised and perhaps the greatest perpetrator of the fad was His Majesty George IV. In the furnishing of Carlton House and other properties, but particularly in his refurnishing of the Private Apartments at Windsor Castle during the 1820s, he provided the antique furniture community with constant business. Since much of his taste was for Louis XIV and *Buhl*, he used French dealers such as Delahante and Deschryver, but this *Dictionary* illustrates his other tastes too, and his patronage of English dealers such Hull and Swaby."

In addition to Royalty, the list of Public Museums that bought furniture and other items from dealers listed in this *Dictionary* is impressive. The British Museum, The South Kensington Museum (Victoria & Albert) and The Architectural Museum in Canon Row, Westminster, were all regular customers who depended upon the antiques trade to develop their collections, and in some cases, relied upon its expertise to authenticate objects."

Although there has never been a legal requirement for dealers to mark their goods, certain firms in London started in the early nineteenth century to use stamps or punches, usually applied in a discreet position on pieces of furniture. Notable amongst these were EHB (Edward Holmes Baldock), BUTLER of Dublin and, later in the century, EDWARDS & ROBERTS of London. These dealer's stamps can be a little confusing, because, in some cases, the companies manufactured furniture from scratch and applied the same stamp that they used for genuine old items. Edwards & Roberts were certainly known to do this, but there are some surprises in the combined field of dealing and manufacturing. For example, Cookes of Warwick, who manufactured virtuoso exercises in antiquarian hand-carved furniture such as the Kenilworth sideboard, (now at Warwick Castle), were also dealers in antiques and are listed accordingly.

Dictionaries are not normally read from beginning to end, and some are better to browse than others. This one is rewarding because there are so many interconnections between entries. Dealers frequently sold to each other, as they do today, and it is sometimes possible to trace the journey of items from significant sales, such as Strawberry Hill, 1842, through the different dealing outfits to the collections where they now reside.

Lastly, it is heartening to learn that there are other strong elements of continuity between the antiques trade of the early nineteenth century and the early twenty first. Some of the businesses listed in the following pages are still trading." Who knows what their future will be in the next two hundred years?

David Jones

REFERENCES

1. Horace Walpole, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, ed. W S Lewis, (1937–84), XXXIII. Clive Wainwright, *The Romantic Interior, The British Collector at Home, 1750–1850*, New Haven and London, 1989, is the most comprehensive study of antique furniture and curiosities from the collector's point of view. Chapter 4 deals with Walpole and his furnishing of Strawberry Hill.
2. For the Earl of Moray's collection, made between 1798–1812, at Darnaway, Morayshire, see David Jones, 'The Hall and Lobby', Chapter 5 in *The Scottish Home*, ed. A. Carruthers, Edinburgh, 1996
3. The principal dealers involved at Abbotsford were William Bullock and Daniel Terry. See David Jones, 'Scottish Furniture at Abbotsford' in *Abbotsford and Sir Walter Scott, the Image and the Influence*, ed. I.G. Brown, Edinburgh, 2003, pp. 90–8
4. Simon Jervis, *High Victorian Design*, London, 1983, p. 16
5. Tempest Papers, Broughton Hall, Skipton, North Yorks. Bundle 17.
6. 'Elizabethan Villa Furniture' in J. C. Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farmhouse and Villa Architecture and Furniture*, London, 1833, pp. 1098–1104
7. The Wentworth family archive (Bretton Hall, Yorkshire, Y.A.S. DD. 70–85) records sixteenth century oak furniture and carved panelling that was transferred and remodelled in a succession of houses on the same site, including new interiors of 1650 and 1720. The estate passed by descent to Viscount Allendale who, before selling Bretton Hall, gave the panelling and furnishings to Temple Newsam House, Leeds, for insertion in an Early Tudor Room in 1947.
8. For example, see entry for Lewis Nathan
9. See entry for Joshua Simmons
10. Ian Anstruther, *The Knight and the Umbrella: an Account of the Eglinton Tournament*, 1839, London, 1963
11. Loudon, *ibid.* p. 1039
12. Loudon, *ibid.* p. 1102
13. See Hugh Roberts, *For the King's Pleasure, the Furnishing and Decoration of George IV's Apartments at Windsor Castle*, London 2001, pp. 25–39
14. The Architectural Museum, London, was founded in 1851 by a group of architects led by George Gilbert Scott. It was closed down and the collections dispersed in 1916.
15. Martin Levy of Blairman's, Colnaghi, and Godden, all of London, represent businesses that have been trading continuously since the nineteenth century or earlier.