

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

**'A WASTE OF GOOD WOOD'?  
GILLOWS AND THEIR FURNITURE, 1760-1800**

**IN TWO VOLUMES**

**VOLUME ONE**

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM  
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES**

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The candidate confirms that this is the result of work done wholly while she was in registered postgraduate candidature. She also confirms that this is her own work and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

**ERRATA**

E. M. Quince, Doctor of Philosophy, September 2003

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

**ABSTRACT**

**CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM**

**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**‘A WASTE OF GOOD WOOD’?**

**GILLOWS AND THEIR FURNITURE, 1760-1800**

**By Eleanor Mary Quince**

This study asks a question of three bodies of material: who were Gillows? As a furniture-making firm, working between 1760 and 1800, Gillows have been recorded within furniture history, within a biography by historian Lindsay Boynton and within their own records, their autobiography.

Furniture history is viewed within this thesis as a construction, a history that both includes and excludes. Roland Barthes’ exercise in the semiology of fashion, The Fashion System, is used as a means of viewing the taxonomic system of classification that the furniture historians have employed to categorise old English furniture. I assert that this, the furniture system, has sought to use style, age and author to determine the nature of eighteenth-century furniture. A discussion of how Gillows have been viewed by the furniture historians provides an image of the firm as provincial, middle class makers, followers rather than leaders in the field of eighteenth-century furniture design. From this history I move to Boynton’s biography of the firm of Gillows, Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800. It is my contention that Boynton has sought to question the furniture historians’ view of the firm, by reasserting their authorship over their work, introducing to us a constructed author: the Firm of Gillow, whilst at the same time trying to locate Gillows’ furniture within the furniture system. Gillows themselves have left behind an archive of their letters and books, presenting what I view as their own autobiography. By asking of this archive a series of questions, it becomes clear that the image of the firm presented to us by the furniture historians and by Lindsay Boynton is unsatisfactory. However Gillows’ own story is also incomplete. Thus the differing interpretations of Gillows that these three bodies of material present to us shed light on how the story of one firm has been created and how the agendas of the individual authors have altered the tale, challenging the constructed history of furniture.

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MS 301 is the Lindsay Boynton archive at the Hartley Library Archives, Southampton University, for a full list of contents see my appendix II.

The numbers after the Gillows' designs refer to the Gillows' books in the WCA, MSS 344 and 735, the number directly preceding this refers to the folio number, and the number after that is the page number, see my appendix I.

*Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800* is by Lindsay Boynton, (Royston: Bloomfield Press, 1995).

1. Gillows' sketch of a painted pier table, dated 25<sup>th</sup> April 1793, for Asheton Esq., no. 19487; satinwood, made by S. Cooper, 344/96/965, reproduced from f. 10 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
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10. 'Draughtsman' desk of Gillows' design no. 9833, photograph from J. W. Needham catalogue 1986/7, reproduced from MS 301, box 20, part 2.
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16. Photograph of the interior of a desk showing lettered boxes within. Boynton contends that these lettered compartments were a particular speciality of Gillows as they appear within lots of pieces of their furniture, reproduced from MS 301, Box 20, part 5.
17. Gillows' sketch of a dressing table, open to display the contents and mode of use, dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1789, for Sir William Milner of Nun Appleton Hall, Yorkshire, made by C. Procter, 344/95/518, reproduced from f. 31 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
18. Photograph of a dressing table similar to that in fig. 17, also open, reproduced from MS 301, box 18, folder 5.
19. Gillows' sketch of a kidney-shaped writing table, dated September 1792, for John Dumbell, Esq., no. 17938, made by T. Romney, 344/96/896, reproduced from f. 40 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
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23. Photograph of a 'Watson's' writing-table, reproduced from MS 301, box 21, folder 2.
24. Gillows' sketch of a Pembroke games table, dated 25<sup>th</sup> August 1793 made for the London shop by T. Escolme, 344/96/1033, reproduced from f. 64 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
25. Photograph of a Gillows' Pembroke games table at Farnley Hall, Yorkshire, reproduced from MS 301, box 21, folder 1.
26. Gillows' sketch of a circular snap table, dated 27<sup>th</sup> January 1798 for Sir Thomas Hesketh, Rufford New Hall, Lancashire, no. 36759, made by John Kilner, 344/97/1415, reproduced from f. 68 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
27. Photograph of the circular snap table from fig. 26, no. 36759, now at Easton Neston, reproduced from MS 301, box 19, folder 1, part 2.
28. Gillows' sketch of a tea table, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1786 for John Carstens of Hamburg, no. 1120 made by John Wainhouse, carved by John Dowbiggin, 344/93/417, reproduced from f. 73 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
29. Photograph of a similar tea table to that in fig. 28, from Hotspur Antiques, reproduced from MS 301, box 18, folder 5.
30. Sketch of a design for a China Table, reproduced from plate LI from the third edition, 1762, of Thomas Chippendale's *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966).
31. Photograph of a Chippendale tea table, c. 1760, reproduced from plate 13 of the appendix 'A Biographical sketch of Thomas Chippendale', to Thomas Chippendale's *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966).
32. Left, Gillows' sketch of a work-bag table, not dated, circa October 1793, for Satterthwaite, no. 20082, made by Robert Fell, 344/96/1027, reproduced from f. 78 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*. Right, Gillows' sketch of a 'Frame for a marble top' table, one of a pair, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1795 for William Egerton of Tatton Park, Cheshire, mahogany, designed and made by Thomas Romney, 344/96/1027, reproduced from f. 79 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
33. Photograph of Gillows' work table, reproduced from MS 301, box 19, folder 1, part 2.
34. Gillows' sketch of a sideboard table with a carved tablet, dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 1789, for S. Jones, Esq., no. 9884, made by C. Proctor, carved by Mr. Gibson, 344/95/485, reproduced from f. 89 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
35. Photograph of a carved tablet, like that of fig. 34, from a Gillows' sideboard sold by Hotspur Antiques, reproduced from MS 301, box 18, folder 5.

36. Gillows' sketch of a sideboard table dated 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1788, for T. Unsworth, Esq., made by H. Walling, with a carved tablet by Bayley from London, 344/94/386, reproduced from f. 95 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
37. Photograph of a Gillows' pier table in the same design as the sideboard table, fig. 36, from Hotspur Antiques, reproduced from MS 301, box 18, folder 5.
38. Gillows' sketch of a sideboard table, dated 27<sup>th</sup> October 1789, for the Rev. Mr. Hudson, no. 10896, made by J. Hessledon, 344/95/542, reproduced from f. 99 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
39. Photograph of a Gillows' sideboard table of the same design as fig. 38, from Mrs. Johnson at Halton Green, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 2.
40. Photograph of Gillows' stamp from a drawer in the sideboard, fig. 39, from Mrs. Johnson at Halton Green, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 2.
41. Gillows' sketch of a night table, dated 25<sup>th</sup> May 1797, 344/97/1348, reproduced from f. 100 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
42. Photograph of a Gillows' night table, closed, from Belle Isle, Windermere, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 2.
43. Photograph of the Gillows' night table of fig. 42, open, from Belle Isle, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 2.
44. Gillows' sketch of a corner washing stand, dated 20<sup>th</sup> March 1797, 344/97/1325, reproduced from f. 113 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
45. Photograph of a Gillows' corner washing stand from Ardgowan, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 2.
46. Engravings of designs for a washing basin stand from 1792, featuring a design (centre) similar to that of Gillows, fig. 44. Reproduced from plate 42 from Thomas Sheraton's *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing Book* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972).
47. Above, a Gillows' sketch of twelve designs for bookcase doors, 'Prices Per Pair', dated 1792, 344/67/168. These illustrate Gillows price per part as mentioned in their book of prices, sent to fellow cabinet-maker William Mass in 1783, reproduced from f. 143 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*. Below, a provenance for fig. 48.
48. Photograph of a large bookcase, possibly by Gillows, which features tracery door design priced at 14 shillings from the sketch in fig. 47, reproduced from MS 301, box 20, folder 2.
49. Gillows' sketch of a secretaire and bookshelf dated 28<sup>th</sup> June 1798, ordered by the London shop for the Countess of Derby at Knowsley Hall, Lancashire, no. 37,242,



- satinwood, with stringing and crossbanding in purplewood, made by T. Drape, 344/97/1456, reproduced from f. 155 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
50. Colour photograph of a secretaire with bookshelf, reproduced from MS 301, box 20, folder 3.
  51. Colour photograph of detail from the secretaire, fig. 50, showing stringing, handles and patination, reproduced from MS 301, box, folder 3.
  52. Rough sketch of a cistern by Gillows, dated 6<sup>th</sup> May 1767, for Mr. Philip Howard of Corby Castle, Cumberland, the brass handles from London, 344/90/43, reproduced from f. 177 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
  53. Photograph of a Gillows' cistern at Dalemain in Cumbria, ordered by Edward and William Hassell in 1774, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 3.
  54. Photograph of a brass handle with lion's head detail from the cistern at Dalemain, fig. 53, reproduced from MS 310, box 17, folder 3, part 3.
  55. Gillows' sketch of a gardevine, dated 8<sup>th</sup> November 1788, for John Christian of Workington Hall, Cumberland, made by John Dixson, carved by H. Gibson, 344/94/440, reproduced from f. 182 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
  56. Photograph of a Gillows' gardevine, similar to that in fig. 55, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 3.
  57. Gillows' sketch of a gardevine, not dated, circa May/June 1787, to hold six bottles, 344/94/24, reproduced from f. 183 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
  58. Photograph of a Gillows' gardevine of the same design as fig. 57, from Finsthwaite, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 3.
  59. Gillows sketch of two dumb waiters, one with three tiers and another with two, dated 14<sup>th</sup> December 1787, 344/94/180, reproduced from f. 186 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
  60. Photograph of a Gillows' three-tiered dumb waiter from Finsthwaite, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 3.
  61. Photograph of a Gillows' two-tiered dumb waiter from Rode Hall in Cheshire, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 3.
  62. Gillows' sketch of a vase and pedestal, not dated, circa May/June 1787, for Sir James Ibbetson of Denton Hall, Yorkshire, no. 1983, inlaying and engraving by John Dowbiggin, 344/94/34, reproduced from f. 189 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.

63. Colour photograph of the vase from the Denton Hall vase and pedestal set, fig. 62, now at Constable Burton, Yorkshire, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 3.
64. Engravings illustrating the uses of vases as knife cases, reproduced from plate 39 of the third edition, 1794, of *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide* by George Hepplewhite, (New York: Dover Publications, 1969)
65. Engravings illustrating the use of pedestals as plate warmers and vases with attached taps as containers for water for rinsing cutlery, reproduced from plate 36 of the third edition, 1794, of *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide* by George Hepplewhite, (New York: Dover Publications, 1969)
66. Gillows' sketch of an oval looking glass, dated 30<sup>th</sup> March 1797, 344/97/1331, reproduced from f. 195 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
67. Photograph of a Gillows' oval looking glass, akin to that in fig. 66, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 2.
68. Gillows' sketch of an oval firescreen on a tripod base, dated 30<sup>th</sup> September 1788 for John Christian at Belle Isle in Westmoreland, no. 7093, satinwood made by Samuel Cooper, 344/94/414, reproduced from f. 225 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
69. Photograph of the firescreen, fig. 68, taken at Belle Isle, reproduced from MS 301, box 27, folder 2.
70. Gillows' sketch of a hall chair with shield back and carved figure in centre, dated 1788, for Stephen Tempest, Esq., Broughton Hall, Yorkshire, 735/1/22, reproduced from f. 254 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
71. Photograph of a Gillows' hall chair of the same design as fig. 70, but with arms, from Broughton Hall, Yorkshire, reproduced from MS 301, box 19, folder 2
72. Gillows' sketch of 'old balloon' back chair [left], introduced in 1785, 735/1/ f.9, Gillows' sketch of a 'new balloon' back chair [right], introduced in 1786, 735/1/ f.41, reproduced from f. 264 and f. 265 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
73. Gillows' sketch of a drapery and feather back armchair, dated 19<sup>th</sup> January 1788, for N. Crompton, Esq., Manchester, made by John Kilner and carved by H. Gibson, 344/94/212, reproduced from f. 273 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
74. Detail of a chair back of the same design as fig. 73, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 1.
75. Gillows' sketch of an armchair, dated 30<sup>th</sup> July 1789, for John Trafford, Esq. Of Trafford Park, Lanchashire, 344/95/514, this version taken from 735/1/14, reproduced from f. 274 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.

76. Colour photograph of two chairs in the 'Trafford style' from Sotheby's Sale catalogue, 1985, as referred to by Sarah Nichols, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 1.
77. Gillows' sketch for 'Wyatt's pattern chair' [left], first mentioned in 1782, this version 1791, 735/1/ f.12, and Gillows' sketch for a hall chair [right] with oval back, dated 1<sup>st</sup> March 1786, for Samuel Hibbert Esq., Manchester, 344/93/309, reproduced from f. 275 and f. 253 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
78. Gillows' sketch of a cabriole armchair, dated 29<sup>th</sup> October 1788, for John Christian, Esq., Workington Hall, Cumberland, made by Lupton and Milner, carved by T. Romney, 344/94/432, reproduced from f. 281 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
79. Photograph of a Gillows' cabriole armchair, of fig. 78, originally from Workington Hall, now at Belle Isle, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 1.
80. Gillows' sketch of a dining or parlour chair with carved splats, undated, circa 1790, design no. 18235, this version from 735/1/17, reproduced from f. 282 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
81. Photograph of a Gillows' chair of the same design as fig. 80, from Farnley Hall, Yorkshire, reproduced from MS 301, box 19, folder 2.
82. Photograph of the Gillows' stamp on the back of the leg of the chair at Farnley Hall, fig. 81, reproduced from MS 301, box 19, folder 2.
83. Gillows' sketch of a chair with plain splats, undated, circa 1790, 735/1/17, reproduced from f. 283 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
84. Photograph of a Gillows' chair, like that of fig. 83, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 2.
85. Gillows' sketch of a 'French' sofa, dated 31<sup>st</sup> October 1786, for Robert Peel, Esq., no. 1864, made by R. Slater, carved by Henry Gibson and painted by J. Ripley, with late rococo style curves and scrolls, 344/93/440, reproduced from f. 289 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
86. Photograph of a Gillows' sofa from Ardgowan, MS 301, box 18, folder 4.
87. Gillows' sketch for small sofa, dated 31<sup>st</sup> October 1787, for Mrs. Henry Rawlinson, painted beech, designed and painted by Thomas Romney, 344/94/82, reproduced from f. 290, *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
88. Gillows' sketch of a satinwood commode with inlaid and painted oval panels, dated 1788, 735/1/87v and 344/94/374, supplied to John Christian at Workington Hall, Cumberland, reproduced from colour plate 12 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.

89. Colour photograph of the commode, fig. 88, now at Belle Isle, reproduced from MS 301, box 21, folder 1, part 2.
90. Photograph of inlaid and painted man from the commode fig. 89, reproduced from MS 301, box 21, folder 1, part 2.
91. Photograph of inlaid and painted woman from the commode fig. 89, reproduced from MS 301, box 21, folder 1, part 2.
92. Gillows' sketch of a painted chair, of 'Garforth' pattern, in 1795 ten of these chairs were supplied to Peter Garforth of Embsay Hall, Skipton, 735/1/39, 38 and 344/97/1434, reproduced from colour plate 30 B in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
93. Photograph of two Gillows' mahogany chairs of the same design as fig. 92 from Apter-Fredericks' Auction House, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 1.
94. Photograph of a Gillows' side or dressing table from Ayer Antiques, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 2.
95. Provenance for the table of fig. 94, from Ayer Antiques, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 2.
96. Gillows' sketches for two chairs, 735/1/7 reproduced from MS 301, box 19, folder 2.
97. Photograph of a Gillows' chair from Constable Burton, the same design as sketch 1 from fig. 96, reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3.
98. Gillows' sketch of a sideboard table with 'termed legs', dated 27<sup>th</sup> February 1799, no. 37593, for the Earl of Eglinton, 344/98/1507, reproduced from f. 96 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
99. A Gothic chair made by Gillows for the Lancaster castle Grand Jury Room reproduced from MS 301, box 17, folder 3, part 1.
100. An advertisement from *Connoisseur*, September 1935, p. xxx, offering the chairs from fig. 99 for sale, reproduced from MS 301, Box 17, folder 3, part 1.
101. Gillows' sketch of a billiard table, not dated, c. January 1788, 344/94/109, reproduced from MS 301, box 27, folder 2.
102. Two Gillows' sketches of a Universal table, one closed [left], containing three playing surfaces, for cards, backgammon and chequers, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1761 for Mr. Thomas Wilson, Kendal, 344/89/64, and one open [right], not dated, c. May 1787, 344/94/4. Reproduced from f. 2 and f. 4 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.

103. An engraving of a Universal table as envisaged by Thomas Sheraton in 1791, reproduced from opposite p. 60, *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing Book* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972).
104. Gillows' sketch showing a Universal table with cabriole legs, made for Mr. Chippendale, attorney, Manchester, undated, c. September 1760, 344/89/26, reproduced from f. 3 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
105. Gillows' sketch for a deception table (with a sham drawer visible on the right side), undated, c. June-July 1787, 344/94/44-5, reproduced from f. 28 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
106. Gillows' sketch for a wardrobe with ogee feet that, unusually, includes a writing-drawer, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1788, 344/94/266, reproduced from f. 135 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
107. Gillows' sketch for a library bookcase with a closed pediment on top, undated, c. May 1787, 344/94/8, for stock, reproduced from f. 166 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
108. Engraving for a wardrobe with a closed pediment on top, Thomas Sheraton, 1793, plate 8, reproduced from *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing Book* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972).
109. Gillows' sketch for a buffet with a 'let-down' shelf and an open pediment, dated 4<sup>th</sup> August 1787, 344/94/70, reproduced from f. 172 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
110. Gillows' sketch of a set of dining tables, not dated, c. May 1771, 344/168/182, reproduced from MS 301, box 51, folder 3.
111. Catalogue cover for the sale of goods from Colne House, Earls Colne, Essex, 1983. Reproduced from MS 301, box 71, folder 1.
112. Photograph and provenance illustrating the 'telescopic dining table' for sale from Colne House, reproduced from MS 301, box 71, folder 1.
113. Page from Gillows' estimate sketch book, 344/98/1549, illustrating the construction of a set of Patent dining tables for Lord Strathmore, no date, c. July/August 1800. Note the box with the extra leaves for extending the table. Reproduced from MS 301, box 51, folder 3.
114. Plan showing all four walls and the 'proper distribution of furniture' for a room according to George Hepplewhite, reproduced from plate 124 of the third edition, 1794, of *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide* (New York: Dover Publications, 1969).
115. Photograph of the interior of Workington Hall, Cumberland, showing chairs, sideboard and pier tables by Gillows. The dining table is also by Gillows but is not an original fixture. Reproduced from MS 301, box 20, folder 5.

116. Gillows' sketches for two chairs, 'No. 9' [left] with 'three upright baluster splats', not dated, c. 1775, 344/67/67, and 'Tablet-back chair' [right], satinwood with a painted top rail, for Robert Peel Esq., 24<sup>th</sup> August 1797, 344/97/1377. Reproduced from f. 248 and f. 286 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
117. Gillows' sketches for two armchairs in the square-backed style favoured by Wyatt, with padded elbows [left], undated, c. 1790-5, 735/1/ f. 39 and with painted ornament [right] also 735/1/ f. 39. Reproduced from f. 284 and f. 285 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
118. Gillows' sketch of a hexagon cabinet to contain a shell-work temple, for Mrs. Quincey, Manchester, dated 26<sup>th</sup> January 1795, no. 31558, painted mahogany made by Thos. Romney, 344/97/1144. Reproduced from f. 128 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.
119. Interior of a desk by Gillows illustrating the use of classical columns and capitals in furniture design, reproduced from MS 301, box 27, folder 2.
120. Gillows' stamp on the edge of a cupboard door, reproduced from MS 301, box 20, folder 6.
121. Gillows' stamp on the edge of a drawer, over-stamped by 'Edwards & Rogers', reproduced from MS 301, box 20, folder 6.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

WCA - Westminster City Archives

The books in the WCA are referred to in the following method: material reference for the Gillows' books, either 344 or 735, followed by the folio number, then the page number, for example: 344/172/215.

CRASSH - Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Studies and Humanities,  
University of Cambridge.

## INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is the way in which the life story of one eighteenth-century furniture-making firm has been constructed and the subsequent effect that this construction has had on how their furniture has been viewed. The thesis follows three lines of investigation, focusing on three bodies of material: history, biography and autobiography, asking of each a question: who were Gillows?

My inquiry stems from a desire to understand the comments made by Dr. Lindsay Boynton in his book on the firm entitled *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.<sup>1</sup>

Boynton wrote that

Gillows of Lancaster and London were one of the great cabinet-making firms the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ... the Lancaster branch counted no fewer than nine dukes on its books in the early nineteenth century. Why, then, is their name not better known? For Gillow is no longer a household word as are Chippendale, Sheraton, and Hepplewhite.<sup>2</sup>

The reasons he gave are the fact that Gillows did not publish a book of furniture designs, that their merger towards the end of the nineteenth-century with the Liverpoolian firm of Waring, the perpetuation of 'Waring & Gillow' in a chain of High Street shops making reproduction furniture, irreparably damaged their reputation and that their furniture has been sold away from its original locations and scattered far and wide.<sup>3</sup> But why should these events have resulted in Gillows' name being no longer known? Boynton elaborates by mentioning the dealers and the historians who have chosen to ignore Gillows' wares because of the Waring connection or because of the lack of a published book of designs. Boynton's death in 1995 meant that he was unable to continue his research into the firm. However his papers became MS 301 in the Hartley Library Archives in Southampton.<sup>4</sup> Boynton had spent forty years locating 'lost' Gillow furniture, photographing it and attempting, not always successfully, to track it back to an entry in Gillows' own books,

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<sup>1</sup> Lindsay Boynton, *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800* (Royston: Bloomfield Press, 1995)

<sup>2</sup> Boynton, p. 15

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

located in the Westminster City Archives,<sup>5</sup> in order to create a provenance for it. His papers present an image of an industrious firm, with an enormous output and their own records of dealings with clients, suppliers and day to day events in Lancaster. Boynton's book suggests that Gillows created a style all of their own, that their furniture was well-made and could be found in the greatest houses in Britain, that they had 'famous' clients and friends.<sup>6</sup> The book is essentially a biography for the firm of Gillows, 1760-1800, seeking to tell us Boynton's version of their life story and through this construction explain their furniture.

In his text Boynton refers to Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton, three eighteenth-century furniture manufacturers. These three cabinet-makers have something in common: they all published a pattern book. Thomas Chippendale produced *The Gentlemen and Cabinet-Maker's Director* in 1754, George Hepplewhite's posthumous text, *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide*, was published by his wife Alice in 1788, and Thomas Sheraton's *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book* appeared between 1791 and 1794. It is these three makers that Boynton sees as 'household words', and he laments Gillows' for not producing their own pattern book; if they had would they too have been a household name? These three makers and their pattern books have been the subject of much writing, their furniture is revered both in books on eighteenth-century style and design and in the auction room where their furniture is costly. An entire history has been produced that concentrates solely upon old English furniture, providing monographs of the different 'known' makers, reproducing their designs, searching for fashionable styles, looking to create design periods and dwelling upon the second half of the eighteenth-century and the pattern books produced at that time. Furniture historians have sought to explain the furniture of these three makers through the stories of their lives. The Gillows that this history of furniture presents to us is different from the one that Boynton offers: gone are the references to 'dukes' and 'greatness'. Gillows' name appears only occasionally and the firm is viewed as provincial and uninventive, and hence as the producers of solid and neat furniture,

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<sup>4</sup> See my appendix II for a full list of the contents of the archive.

<sup>5</sup> See my appendix I for an explanation of these.

<sup>6</sup> Boynton, pp. 16-23

followers and not leaders in the field of eighteenth-century design. The furniture historians provide a place for Gillows within the history of eighteenth-century furniture that they have created and perhaps offer one more reason why Gillows' name is not better known: within it they are hard to find.

Boynton alludes to Gillows' own records, the letters that they sent to their clients, the sketches that they produced, the prices that they charged for items, the people that they employed, the problems that they encountered – a business diary for the firm. As an archive the letters and work books of the firm provide an image of Gillows as highly productive, keen to involve their clients in the design process and thoroughly intent upon keeping the firm going, upon making a profit. It does not explain why their name is not better known, or why they chose not to publish a pattern book. It would be easy to simply accept Gillows' own records for the period 1760-1800 as the clear, unfettered story of their life and their furniture at that time, but these records are a construction. The story they offer is fragmented and one which 'sells' the firm, as the records which tell us the most about them are their letters, which were written in order that they might gain more customers or charge higher prices. At their most complete between 1760 and 1800 these records are another version of the life story of the firm of Gillows and their furniture, but this time the story has been written in their own words, the records are Gillows' autobiography.

Although each of these three bodies of material presents a distinct image of Gillows to us, it is hard to envisage them as telling the story of the *same* Gillows or referring to the *same* furniture. The life stories given to us are very different. Who were Gillows? Were they a provincial firm, making average furniture, as furniture history would have us believe? Were they a great firm of stylish innovators, as Lindsay Boynton suggests? Or were they simply a prolific, business-minded group of people making furniture, as Gillows' own records indicate? Yet, within each story of Gillows' there are areas that overlap, at certain points the three different lines converge, recounting the same fact, discussing the same piece of furniture or using the same quote. Thus themes begin to emerge, all three stories focus upon people, the furniture historians and Boynton look to

the individual, the creator of the designs, the leader of the firm, settling on either Robert or Richard Gillow, or, like Gillows themselves, they look to their clients or to their associates. All three stories concentrate upon how the furniture has been designed, searching for stylistic details. Within each story we have a personal agenda, things that are included and things that are excluded in order to present to us a certain image of Gillows. We have three means of answering the question: furniture history, Boynton's biography and Gillows' autobiography all tell us who Gillows were between 1760 and 1800. But how have the writers of these three stories arrived at their different answers? Each is a construction, and has a different mode of imparting the information to us. It is possible to analyse Gillows in furniture history, in biography and in autobiography, to establish how Gillows' have, over time, been created, and how their furniture has subsequently been viewed.

#### Process:

Chapter one explores furniture history, reviews the literature that makes up that history and discusses how the history has been created and how it has been sustained. The theme of the individual, both the individual historian and the individual furniture-maker, comes to the fore. First I use E. H. Carr's *What is History?*<sup>7</sup> which provides the means to view the construction of history, to look at the historian and his/her 'facts' and the effects of the agenda of the historian upon history. Carr's book prompts an examination of the individuals who have constructed the history of eighteenth-century furniture, the 'facts' that they prioritise and what their texts tell us. In addition, the theoretical ideas of Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System*<sup>8</sup> present a paradigm for the investigation of furniture history. Using the method of semiology Barthes has created a way of discussing the analysis of women's clothing that takes place in fashion magazines. His book presents a step by step 'system of meaning' for 'written Fashion', identifying the words and their denotation and the categories that items of clothing are placed into within what Barthes describes as the 'Fashion system'.<sup>9</sup> Furniture history, with its authors, its own language,

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<sup>7</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961)

<sup>8</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1983)

<sup>9</sup> Barthes, 1983, p. x

its classifications and written descriptions of visible forms, can be seen as having constructed a similar, taxonomic system, reaching from the texts themselves, through journal articles into the auction room and the creation of a provenance for an item of old furniture. The reliance of the furniture historians upon the individual maker and/designer, upon dates and styles, upon assigning old furniture to categories is akin to the work of the fashion journalist. However the system that has been created by the furniture historians, concentrating as it does only upon items that can be easily identified and categorised, excludes as it includes. This method of analysis of furniture history offers a way to establish how the furniture historians have viewed Gillows. It provides a means to uncover the facts written about the firm and their furniture in furniture history, to explore how Gillows have been fitted into what I term as the furniture system.

Chapter two asks what story of Gillows is presented to us in one particular text, Lindsay Boynton's biography, *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*. The point of convergence is the author. Boynton is searching for an author of Gillows' furniture, a focal point for his biography and in turn Boynton himself is the author of the biography. In producing this type of text he is aligning himself with the furniture historians, whose history is predicated on the notion of the individual maker, the author of various designs, the individual's life story and the furniture that can be attributed to him. As Boynton looks for the author within the firm of Gillows he also draws the readers attention to their style, creating within his text a version of a pattern book for the firm. I use theoretical discussions on the subject of the author, 'Death of the author'<sup>10</sup> by Roland Barthes and 'What is an author?'<sup>11</sup> by Michel Foucault, to provide a way of discussing the concept of the work and the creation of a myth, a story. A return to *What is history?* by E. H. Carr, calls into question Lindsay Boynton as an historian and as an author, the creator of an historical myth, the biography of Gillows. *Being and Time* by Martin Heidegger<sup>12</sup> offers a way of looking at the creation of biography, the reliance upon the notion of a 'self' and

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<sup>10</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Death of the Author' in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977) pp. 109-17

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *Essential Works 1954-1984*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000) pp. 205-22

<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962)

why we are so interested in people's lives. These investigations suggest that Boynton is constructing a life story for the firm of Gillows with a particular agenda in mind, and as such he excludes some things from the tale. Boynton's story sits uneasily within furniture history, as he questions the furniture historians' reliance upon the individual and the pattern book, but at the same time is searching for a biographical subject that conforms to its ideals, that can be slotted into the furniture system.

Chapter three utilises Gillows' own words, their letters and records from the Westminster City Archives. The records have been written by the members of the firm about their lives and work and as such constitute a form of autobiography, but not a traditional one. Roland Barthes' own autobiography<sup>13</sup> provides a template that enables us to see these records as an autobiography of the firm. Once again the focus is upon the individual. A series of individuals wrote Gillows' autobiography, and their story differs from those told to us by the furniture historians and by Lindsay Boynton. Carr, Barthes, Foucault and Heidegger come together to offer a way of viewing autobiography as a construction with the same sort of problems as history and biography: exclusions and inclusions, bias on the part of the author and a focus upon the life story. The analysis of how furniture history and Boynton have viewed Gillows has prompted a series of questions that can now be asked of their autobiography. Gillows have been seen as uninventive and provincial then conversely as furniture designers and as innovators, how did Gillows see themselves?

The comment 'a waste of good wood' is one that was made by Gillows to a prospective customer, Robert Dyneley, in a letter of 1778.<sup>14</sup> It refers to the fact that a chair design that Gillows could make for the client would cost more money than regular chairs of that time because the intricacy of the design called for a lot of waste wood and mahogany was expensive. It provides a catalyst for the thesis: have the furniture historians, seeing Gillows' as an uninventive firm, lacking in good design, viewed their furniture as 'a waste of good wood'? Did Lindsay Boynton, searching for the 'style' of Gillows' wares,

<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard, (New York: Binghamton, 1977)

<sup>14</sup> Gillows to Robert Dyneley 29<sup>th</sup> April 1778, the new pattern has a round top rail and a shaped front rail and the price does not include the seat, it is from the firm's London branch. WCA, 344/169/8.

ignore the firm's more caustic comments regarding those designs that were 'a waste of good wood'? Did Gillows themselves care more about the price of wood and their profits than their designs, leading them to make comments like 'a waste of good wood' to their customers? The quote leads back to the original query, as something that is either included or excluded dependent upon the agendas of furniture history, biography and autobiography: who were Gillows?



## CHAPTER 1

### A PART OF THE SYSTEM:

#### GILLOWS AND THEIR FURNITURE IN FURNITURE HISTORY

##### Introduction: What is history?

As the point of origin for a piece of furniture becomes more distant its character is altered. The study of old furniture traditionally prioritises the maker of that object, the style of that object and the subsequent value attached to it. The object is positioned within a hierarchical system of 'styles', assigned a place and a 'story'. The facilitator for these kinds of associations is the history that has been created around old furniture. The history of furniture is one that concentrates upon decorative details, upon eighteenth-century furniture design, its 'heroes'<sup>1</sup> and their pattern books.<sup>2</sup> Eighteenth-century furniture has been given a mythological nature through the work of the historians. The history has aided the evolution of the 'expert' and the subsequent application of a high price tag to items that conform to its rules, but also the expulsion of items that do not. The history of furniture is therefore a history that includes and excludes; it is a history that praises and dismisses and one that is fraught with error and supposition, but as many constructed histories are also like this,<sup>3</sup> the history of furniture is no less valid than any other history. But, what is history?

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<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to his text *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, Christopher Gilbert chastises fellow furniture historian Ralph Edwards for attempting to 'topple Chippendale from the pinnacle of fame by substituting another hero-figure' William Vile, in his place. Christopher Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale* (London: Studio Vista, 1978), p. vi

<sup>2</sup> The 'pattern book' was the published work of a furniture-manufacturer, illustrating their wares through engraved images of the 'newest' designs. An example is Thomas Chippendale's *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* first published in 1754, as the title suggests, the book was aimed at a market of 'gentlemen' who could commission items from it, and others in the furniture-making trade. Gillows did not produce a pattern-book, but there is evidence in their letter books that they did make up items from plates within the *Director*. WCA, 344/165/175, on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1765, Gillows wrote to Sir George Warren that 'if any of Chippendale's designs be more agreeable can execute 'em and adapt them', letter from Gillows to Sir George Warren.

<sup>3</sup> This reading is influenced by E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961)

History, as an empirical science, concerns itself with changes in the form of culture, and aims to discover the real carriers and causes of change in each particular case...<sup>4</sup>

E. H. Carr's definitive work *What is History?* questioned this empirical science and its obsession with the selection of the 'fact'. These 'facts', established on 'an *a priori* decision of the historian'<sup>5</sup> rather than of the history itself, are 'like fish on a fish-mongers slab', available to the historian so that he/she selects what he/she wants and 'cooks' them to his/her taste.<sup>6</sup> Carr quotes Burckhardt: history is 'the record of what one age finds worthy of note in another'<sup>7</sup>; all histories are factual selection processes. No one 'fact' can exist objectively and independently of interpretation; the historian marries the 'fact' with a context and makes it an historical fact.<sup>8</sup> The historian, or at least most historians, use these facts, they analyse them, decide what they mean, organise them into the history being presented, and as long as we, the readers, are aware of how and why the particular history is, history is not a *bad* thing, but it is, by its very nature, problematic. The process of selecting the facts eliminates some occurrences from some histories, even though they did indeed take place, hence different histories produce different depictions of the past. The prioritization of certain facts above others means that along the way various 'facts' get lost, and some 'facts' come to supersede others not due to importance, but to repetition. Histories can be coloured by the views of the historian, by the views of the *Zeitgeist*, by the agenda of the particular history. Carr writes that history is 'an unending dialogue between the present and the past', we can only see the past in the light of the present.<sup>9</sup> It is not always possible to determine the bias of the historian, but their agenda is paramount in order to understand the selection process within that history. With these thoughts in mind any constructed history should be approached with due care and consideration. In order to examine the story of Gillows told to us by the furniture historians we need first to understand how furniture history has been created and how it has been sustained.

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<sup>4</sup> Georg Simmel, *The Conflict of Modern Culture and Other Essays*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), p. 12

<sup>5</sup> Carr, p. 11

<sup>6</sup> Carr, p. 9

<sup>7</sup> Carr, p. 55, quoting: J. Burckhardt, *Judgements on History and on Historians*, 1959, p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> Carr, p. 13

<sup>9</sup> Carr, pp. 30 and 55

### What is Furniture History?

Furniture history is an example of what G. R. Elton describes as a ‘tunnel history’,<sup>10</sup> the placement of certain historical facts into smaller, more closely examined histories. The way in which furniture history has been constructed has led to the reiteration of certain known ‘facts’, given precedence and upheld again and again. These ‘facts’ have altered the way in which antique furniture is assessed and valued. Furniture history suffers from a reliance upon the ‘cult of the individual’, a formula in place since the Renaissance, focusing upon a particular person and attributing historical events to that individual rather than to a series of social causations.<sup>11</sup> This separation of the person from their social context presents a skewed version of that ‘history’, a person is a *part* of their age and their society, and affected directly by it, one person is not representative of the entire era.<sup>12</sup> Furniture history has placed ‘worthy’ candidates Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton, as authors of pattern books, into prime positions as the ‘heroes’ of the furniture-making world, attributing certain styles to them and ignoring the furniture-makers who did not produce pattern books as they do not fit into this schematic. In turn this has led to the ‘experts’ working in the auction rooms assigning a higher monetary value to furniture by the named makers, thus perpetuating the history. Hegel discussed the geographical bias of history, of the historian as well as of the locale and ‘market’ of that particular history.<sup>13</sup> Furniture history contains some of these geographical issues, the focus being very much upon the London furniture-makers, rather than upon their provincial counter-parts. The furniture-makers that were not London-based have been viewed as followers rather than as leaders. Furniture history also displays a lack of concern for the global perspective, as each country is treated separately: American furniture, English furniture, French furniture, German furniture and so on, are given individual histories, but are not brought together. With the focus upon certain facts, upon

<sup>10</sup> The phrase ‘tunnel history’ comes from J. H. Hexter. Elton wishes to persuade us that although these tunnel histories circumscribe our vision, they also focus it, which can, in Elton’s view, be a useful thing. G. R. Elton, *The Practice of History*, (London: Methuen, 1967), p.28.

<sup>11</sup> Carr, p. 46

<sup>12</sup> Carr likens the ‘what comes first – society or the individual’ to the chicken and egg question society and the individual are inseparable, necessary and complementary to one another, Carr, p. 31-3.

<sup>13</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree, (New York: P. F. Collier, 1956) pp. 79-88

London and Chippendale, the history of English furniture is narrow, repetitive and resistant to change. So how has this 'tunnel' history been constructed?

The 'history of furniture' is a fairly recent construction, growing from an interest in old furniture that can be traced back to John Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts movement. Their desire to rebel against modernity in design in the late nineteenth century led to the buying and collecting of pieces from the three previous centuries, when it was felt that furniture, made carefully by hand, was truer to materials and freer from the constraints of mass-production.<sup>14</sup> The emergence also at this time of the 'antique dealer' led to the identification of furniture through peculiarities of construction and surface treatment, and saw the birth of the 'antique expert'.<sup>15</sup> The antique dealer, traditionally regarded as 'reputable and scholarly', as opposed to the second-hand salesman (an unseemly fellow)<sup>16</sup>, sold antique furniture and provided a veneer of class and knowledge. A way of excluding those who did not belong within that world: those who got caught up in the language or those who did not understand the importance of provenance.<sup>17</sup> With the experts and the collector in place, it seemed only natural that an actual 'history' of the pieces that they were selling and buying should emerge; after all, there is nothing nicer than a book with a photograph of one's armoire alongside a history of the 'great' Chippendale himself.

Within the history of furniture there are a number of 'known' historians, usually specialising in a certain period, maker or style. The published texts that constitute the

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<sup>14</sup> Ruskin cautioned against the 'love of change' which led people to find beauty in novelty, newness and modernity, and to search for that quality in the items that they brought for their homes, John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, in two volumes, (Orpington and London: George Allen, 1903), vol. 2, p. 98

<sup>15</sup> Stephan Muthesius, 'Why do we Buy Old English Furniture?', *Art History*, vol. II, no. 2, June 1988, pp. 230-5

<sup>16</sup> Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: the creation and destruction of value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 106. 'Old' or 'second-hand' is associated with things that are simply past their use-by date, or a bit damaged, 'antique' refers to items that have come back into the world of consumption as desirable and revered objects, where an item's age is an asset. For the furniture historians, taking their cue from Ruskin, it is items from the period 1500 to 1800 that are most desirable as 'antique' objects.

<sup>17</sup> A 'provenance' is the mini-history of a particular object: who made it, when, who bought it, when, who is selling it, etc. Provenances are often published in auction catalogues and are usually reliant upon a printed document, such as a proof-of-sale bill, a maker's mark, stamp or label, a design in a pattern book, a signed attribution from an auction house and so on. Without a suitable provenance an item is not authenticated and can, therefore, not be sold for as high a price as a piece which is.

history of furniture have been written by these historians, initial histories were surveys of existing furniture, very much like the eighteenth-century pattern books, with notes on decoration and wood-types, and lots of pictures. Among the original 'furniture historians', a title interchangeable with that of 'antique dealer', or 'antique furniture expert', were Geoffrey Beard, Oliver Brackett, Herbert Cescinsky, John Cornforth, Ralph Edwards, Ralph Fastnedge, Christopher Gilbert, John Gloag, Sir Nicholas Goodison, Christopher Hussey, Margaret Jourdain, Percy Macquoid, Clifford Musgrave, H. Clifford Smith, R. W. Symonds and Peter Ward-Jackson. Between 1900 and 1985 these authors *created* the history of furniture, they dominated the discipline, publishing a series of texts dealing with different aspects of furniture history, from general books on all old furniture to focused monographs on particular furniture-makers. Still today, in auction catalogues and provenance, these historians are quoted authorities, verifying the 'authenticity' of items of furniture. As the history of furniture evolved at the hands of these 'experts', and so concentrated on the 'famous' furniture makers and the, now collectable, furniture that they produced, the historians adopted a taxonomic system categorising furniture by age and style, which I shall refer to as 'the furniture system'. This system may seem to have been a sensible and logical move, as it enables the furniture to be easily identified through asking a series of questions of the piece: does it have a maker? Is it a recognised maker? Is it of a particular style? Does it have a date? These questions can be answered through a comparison with the like objects featured within the furniture historical texts, in theory every item of furniture can be categorised somehow and its 'authenticity' and 'value', keywords for old or antique objects, can be assessed. But this view is simplified, for furniture history is factually and geographically biased, reliant upon pattern books and individuals. Its agenda is clearly dictated by the relation of these particular qualities to monetary value, the history is linked to the auction room, therefore there are items of old furniture, and eighteenth-century furniture-makers, that do not appear in furniture history. Therefore there are 'facts' that have not been selected by the furniture historians, things that have been excluded from the furniture system.

### The furniture system:

The system created by the furniture historians can be better understood if Roland Barthes is used as an interlocutor. In his book *The Fashion System* Barthes discussed the specific language and classificatory groups employed in the fashion magazines in order to analyse what he terms as the 'written garment'.<sup>18</sup> Barthes provides an apparatus for understanding how fashion is created through the magazines, using semiology to unravel the network of meaning that envelops the items of clothing. Barthes' method is to view and separate the photographed garment and the written garment, which in reality are the same, but which 'do not have the same structure' as the first is 'plastic', forms, lines and colours, and the second is 'verbal', composed of words.<sup>19</sup> Some of the words used to describe the garment are particular to fashion magazines. A language has developed that is imparted to the reader by those who understand fashion, those who are writing the garments, the 'experts'.<sup>20</sup> Barthes analyses the way in which the system of fashion has been created *through* this language, with each garment placed within a category, then those garments within the categories forming smaller sub-categories and then a number of variants stemming from those sub-categories. A dress for example, could be categorised as being 'evening wear', it could have a sub-category such as 'taffeta fabric' and then a variant such as 'long' or 'frilled' or 'patterned'. This dress, through the descriptive language of the system, is differentiated from a dress which is 'day wear', 'cotton', 'short' and 'plain'. Barthes then discusses how this system encompasses other areas of fashion: the leaders of Haute Couture, praised in the magazines, have their designs copied by High Street clothing stores so that although different, the same style is still visible, how certain areas are fashionable to shop in or go on holiday to, certain foods are deemed fashionable, and how these are remarked upon within the magazines, subtly linked to the clothing.<sup>21</sup> The history created by the furniture historians is comparable to Barthes' fashion system. The furniture historians have cultivated a field of experts who write about furniture using a language particular to them. They impart their knowledge to the readers of their texts, but only to those who understand the language that they use.

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<sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1983), p. 3

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Barthes, 1983, p. 14

They place each item of furniture within a stylistic category based upon visible decorative forms, with sub-categories provided by the name of the maker and the age of the piece, and variants composed of wood type, shape or size. Thus the furniture historians have constructed a system that classifies and encodes, that creates 'written furniture', of a different structure to the furniture itself, a verbal description of the object adhering to their taxonomic framework. As with the fashion system, the furniture system is far-reaching, and the antique experts, often published furniture historians themselves, who write the provenance for an item at auction, also use the same language and modes of classification as the furniture historians, referring to the historians' texts. Barthes' work forms the basis for an interrogation into the furniture system, viewing the history of furniture as a construction that is not as all encompassing as it first appears.

In *The Fashion System* Barthes writes about the divides in place within the world of fashion, the 'genera' or groups of variants, which make up the categories into which items are placed.<sup>22</sup> These categories can be likened to the stylistic groupings into which old furniture is placed within its history. The categories in fashion provide the means for objects to be both included and excluded; for example the category 'accessories' can include handbags and gloves, but excludes dresses. Within furniture history classes of 'styles' are proposed, founded upon recurring decorative details, that perform a similar function: 'Gothic', for example, includes items which have those properties associated with the Gothic age, spandrels, points and tracery (in figs. 48, 99 and 100), but excludes those items which have 'Classical' motifs, such as pediments and capitals (figs. 107 and 119). The furniture historians identify the decorative details within the furniture and place the piece within a stylistic boundary, place it within the furniture system, so that an item such as the chair in fig. 99, is classed as being 'of the Gothic style' as it has Gothic tracery and points. However the furniture historians' categories, like those of fashion, have sub-groups and variants, whilst the stylistic definitions remain firmly in place, the furniture system also allows for the categorisation of furniture by 'age' and by 'maker'. The Gothic style, for example, was seen in furniture design in the 1750's and 60's, then

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<sup>21</sup> Barthes, 1983, p. 260

<sup>22</sup> Barthes, 1983, p. 100

revived again in the 1820's, so although the style is identifiable from the same sort of motifs the date of production is different and therefore the items are placed in separate sub-groups. The description of a bookcase (fig. 48) from an auction catalogue (fig. 47) refers to "Gothic" style astragal bars', but states that the piece is 'Chippendale period', thus placing it within the stylistic category of Gothic, but the sub-group 'like Chippendale', even though the piece is not by Chippendale. Items of furniture that choose to mix decorative elements from different styles are often ignored altogether or noted in a derogatory fashion because they cannot be easily classified. Barthes analysis can be used to show how the furniture system has created these stylistic boundaries and to examine the furniture historians' reliance upon age and maker.

In 1955 Ralph Fastnedge wrote *English Furniture Styles*, a seminal guide to old English furniture made between 1500 and 1830. The book is a comprehensive survey text and a good example of the furniture system at work. Fastnedge divides pieces from the eighteenth-century into a series of categories that revolve not only around style and age but also around certain furniture makers.<sup>23</sup> Chapter 6 in Fastnedge's text is entitled 'The pre-"Director" period (1740-1754)' and refers to furniture produced before Thomas Chippendale's pattern book, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director*, the first edition of which was published in 1754.<sup>24</sup> Chapter 8 is entitled 'Robert Adam – The Classical Revival', dealing with architect and designer Robert Adam and his 'classical' furniture, and chapters 9 and 10 focus upon, respectively, the published pattern books of Hepplewhite and Sheraton. The furniture historians have come to rely upon the pattern books, published by 'famous' furniture-makers of the eighteenth century. Pattern books became popular from the 1750's onwards, Mathias Darly's *New Book of Chinese, Gothic and Modern Chairs* of 1750-51, Sheraton's *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book*, 1793, and Hepplewhite's *Cabinet-Maker's and Upholsterer's Guide* from

<sup>23</sup> This can be found in other texts within furniture history, for example an article from 1963:

E. T. Joy, 'A Press-bedstead of the Hepplewhite Period', *Connoisseur*, September 1963, CLIV, pp. 30-1  
Or an article from 1953:

R. W. Symonds, 'Thomas Chippendale to George Smith', *Connoisseur Souvenir Edition*, June 1953, pp. 3-7. Both of these articles illustrate using the name of a furniture-maker to define a period. In the latter example the period 1754 to 1826 is denoted by the working lives of cabinet-makers Thomas Chippendale and George Smith, both of whom published pattern books, Smith's *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* was published in 1808.



1788, which included sections on interior decoration,<sup>25</sup> are three such examples. The eighteenth-century pattern books are rather like the fashion magazine as described by Barthes; a series of illustrations of the things that are 'fashionable' with descriptions of them from the 'experts', this time the cabinet-makers, who contrive to make sense of the visible forms.<sup>26</sup> The pattern books provided guidance not only for those who wished to furnish their houses but also for other furniture-makers.<sup>27</sup> The designs in the books had no exclusivity; anyone who could get hold of a copy could produce their own version of any of the illustrations. Therefore the author of one of the pattern books might not necessarily have made an item that looks as if it was based upon a design from that pattern book. The reliance of the furniture historians upon the eighteenth-century pattern books means that often furniture is referred to as being 'in the style of...' or as being produced during the 'period' of, one of the named makers, especially in the provenance for an item that is to be sold at auction, where the 'name' can help to sell the object. For example a writing desk illustrated in figs. 11 and 12, is described as being 'Sheraton period' in the provenance (fig. 13) although it is not by Sheraton, and a bookcase, fig. 48, is described as being 'Chippendale period' (fig. 47) although it is not by Chippendale. Fastnedge's text presents a series of illustrations accompanied by ambiguous descriptions such as 'Probably by Samuel Norman, after a design by Robert Adam dated 1764'<sup>28</sup> and 'China stand ... Probably made by Thomas Chippendale'.<sup>29</sup> These descriptions help to link otherwise nondescript (in the eyes of the furniture historians) or stylistically indeterminate furniture to 'famous' names and pattern books and thus assign them a place in the system.

Fastnedge's text typifies the ability of works of furniture history to simply miss out items of furniture because they do not fit within the stylistic perimeters that have been set. He

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<sup>24</sup> Ralph Fastnedge, *English Furniture Styles* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1962), p.5

<sup>25</sup> George Hepplewhite, *Cabinet-Maker's and Upholsterer's Guide*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), see fig. 114, a fashionable drawing room of Hepplewhite's design.

<sup>26</sup> Barthes, 1983, p. 14

<sup>27</sup> WCA, 344/164, for example Richard Gillow asked for a pattern book in a letter to James Gillow, in London, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1760 'have seen an advertisement in the News Papers mentioning another Book being publish'd Intituled (I think) Household Furniture in Genteel Taste price Bound 7/3 or 7/6 which shou'd be glad you wou'd buy for me and send in the first Box Mr. Worswick may have from Mr. Fleetwood [sic]'.

<sup>28</sup> Fastnedge, p. 239

<sup>29</sup> Fastnedge, p. 180

begins his text by speeding through the ages prior to the publication of the pattern books, using wood type as a means of classification. For example his first chapter deals with 'The Period of Oak' in which he mentions furniture produced between the early sixteenth century and the end of the Commonwealth (the date for which he gives as circa 1650). The chapter is accompanied by a note that it is '*preceded by a brief mention of such furniture as is known to have existed in the Late Middle Ages*'.<sup>30</sup> Fastnedge deals in one clean swoop with the 'difficult', that is not by an easily identified 'maker', mediaeval and Renaissance furniture, 'crudely constructed',<sup>31</sup> very little of which still exists today, and moves swiftly on to the walnut furniture of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Fastnedge can safely place the walnut furniture into sub-categories based upon historical 'periods' revolving around the monarchy: 'Restoration furniture', 'William and Mary furniture', 'Queen Anne furniture' and early 'Georgian furniture'. Less than half of Fastnedge's text, five chapters out of eleven, has been devoted to furniture that was made between 1500 and 1740. The rest of his book deals with the furniture made between 1740 and 1830, so that less than one hundred years of furniture-making receives more chapters and more pages, than two hundred and forty years. This is because post-1740 Fastnedge can legitimately discuss the pattern book. He has for the later eighteenth-century a series of contemporary published designs, not just pieces of furniture:

[t]he earliest pattern books were produced by architects or builders, and contained comparatively few designs for furniture, although suggestions for the improvement and ornamentation of the interiors of houses were included and we find designs for chimney-pieces ... and for such furniture as allowed an architectural treatment.<sup>32</sup>

He can begin to seek out those individuals that will form the sub-categories for the time-period 1754-1830, Chippendale, Adam, Hepplewhite and Sheraton. Although it should be noted that after Sheraton's death in 1806, Fastnedge is faced with the same problem again, and refers to the 'Regency period', a style that despite its name does not 'reflect the personal taste of the Prince Regent'.<sup>33</sup> In his final chapter entitled 'The Regency period', Fastnedge finds Thomas Hope and George Smith as the authors of pattern books,

<sup>30</sup> Fastnedge, p. 5, the words are in italic as they are found with Fastnedge's text.

<sup>31</sup> Fastnedge, p. 17

<sup>32</sup> Fastnedge, p. 140

<sup>33</sup> Fastnedge, p. 260

but their designs are ‘uninspired’ and sink too quickly into ‘the early years of the reign of Queen Victoria’, becoming ‘Victorian’ an overtly eclectic style disliked by the furniture historians.<sup>34</sup>

Fastnedge provides, at the end of his text, a table of the historic periods that he refers to, explaining about the different styles of furniture design taking place within them.<sup>35</sup> The table places the historic periods next to the relevant dates and then gives names of individuals, published works, new pieces and design characteristics that ‘typified’ that particular period. Within Fastnedge’s scheme the time-period 1760-1800 encompasses the Classical and Greek Revival stylistic periods, offering designs influenced by Gothic and Chinese styles, as well as Egyptian and Roman. The important individuals are Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton, the publications are the pattern books of Chippendale, Hepplewhite, Sheraton and Ince and Mayhew, and the decorative design characteristic is the changing shape of the leg: Cabriole (fig. 104) to straight, straight to taper (fig. 11), and taper to slender turned (fig. 1). New pieces evolving out of these design periods, are the Pembroke table (figs. 24 and 25), the tea table (figs. 28 and 29) and the washing or basin stand (figs. 44, 45 and 46).<sup>36</sup> Within his main text Fastnedge explains how the pattern books of each of his chosen ‘heroes’ influenced the age, the evolution of the designs that sprung from them, and the subsequent changes in size, colour, wood and shape. Hepplewhite, for example, is credited within Fastnedge’s text for providing the template for fashionable designs for chair backs and legs, ‘extremely elegant, and lightly but strongly constructed’ mostly from satinwood, to provincial artisans, ‘surviving pieces of furniture in a simplified ‘Hepplewhite’ style ... are often of country origin’.<sup>37</sup> But the information given in Fastnedge’s book about the second half of the eighteenth-century, about the pattern books, the styles and the famous designer/makers, is disproportionately large when compared to the information he offers about furniture that cannot be linked to these criteria. As with Barthes’ *Fashion System*

<sup>34</sup> Fastnedge, p. 280

See also for example comments made by R. W. Symonds, that furniture produced after 1800 was to be avoided because ‘the standard of design had begun to decline’, R. W. Symonds, *The Present State of Old English Furniture*, (London: Duckworth, 1921), p.1

<sup>35</sup> Fastnedge, pp. 310-13

<sup>36</sup> Fastnedge, p.312

there are rules in place that dictate how the furniture is categorised, a hierarchical structure that must be observed. Barthes writes that those who exclude themselves from the fashion system 'suffer a sanction: the stigma of being *unfashionable*'.<sup>38</sup> Antique furniture that does not fit within the furniture system also pays a price; it is ignored, excluded from the histories, it does not do well at auction, it is dismissed as having no claim to authenticity.

Barthes writes that within *The Fashion System* 'what language adds to the image is *knowledge*' as the 'text represents as it were the authoritative voice of someone who knows all there is behind the jumbled or incomplete appearance of the visible forms', the voice of the 'expert'.<sup>39</sup> The furniture historians, writing their histories, verifying provenance, expanding the images with descriptive words, are the authoritative voices within the antique world, following in the footsteps of their 'heroes' the authors of the pattern books. Barthes notes that 'in Fashion, we are dealing with classes of exclusions, whereas language always tends to propose classes of inclusions'.<sup>40</sup> Barthes is referring to the fact that an item of Fashion only contains certain things, for example six buttons, print fabric, pleats, and excludes others, for example eight buttons, plain fabric, panels, it can only be one thing, not the other. The language of 'Fashion' on the other hand, makes way for the things that are excluded, the garment has six buttons rather than eight, print fabric as opposed to plain, pleats instead of panels. The alternative is always present. Furniture can be looked at in a similar way: the signifiers are present within the language of the object through both what is included; fluted legs, shield back, wooden seat (see figs. 70 and 71), and what is excluded; turned legs, lozenge back, stuffed seat (see fig. 93). But the descriptive words of furniture history do not mean anything if *knowledge* is not there to start with. Furniture history is peculiarly exclusive and its exclusivity is closely guarded through the use of this particular 'language', the terminology practised in histories and provenance alike, which only the 'insiders' can fully comprehend. As with Pierre Bourdieu's world of art, antique furniture requires a 'cultural competence', a key

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<sup>37</sup> Fastnedge, p. 198

<sup>38</sup> Barthes, 1983, p. 14

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Barthes, 1983, p.101

to the code, the words that the furniture historians select to describe the items of furniture are intentionally excluding.<sup>41</sup> Bourdieu refers to the 'social function of legitimating social differences' performed by the act of consuming art and culture.<sup>42</sup> A way of controlling through classifying not only the objects, but also people themselves, distancing oneself from others through the objects that one owns and the knowledge that one must have in order to understand those objects. Bourdieu notes that 'a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept' can be reinforced through the ownership and display of certain objects in one's home.<sup>43</sup> Within the antique world there is a presupposition that expensive, old, authentic, furniture is bought by those who conceive of the story behind it, those for whom the descriptive code of the language of furniture history is known and understood. Therefore the furniture historians, like Barthes' fashion journalists, do not need to explain the words that they use, because they believe that those who will be reading the books and provenance will possess the key and be able to decipher the code, if one does not *know* then one should not be buying.

In *English Furniture Designs* Ralph Fastnedge supplies a glossary of the terms of furniture history,<sup>44</sup> perhaps an attempt at educating those who are ignorant of the words that the discipline employs. The cabriole leg (fig. 104) is described as being 'curved outwards at the knee, which is rounded, and reversing and tapering into an inward (concave) curve below',<sup>45</sup> not very helpful unless an illustration is provided. Geoffrey Beard in his book *Craftsmen and Interior Decoration in England, 1660-1820* takes the glossary one step further and gives various pictures of different items of furniture indicating the terms used to describe them.<sup>46</sup> The knowledge that these authors impart is at once including and excluding: offering a little information to those who do not know it already, but not enough to completely open up the world of furniture history to all. These glossaries, alongside the stylistic groupings and a tendency to prioritise furniture by the famous makers, highlight the stagnated view recurring throughout almost all of the

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<sup>41</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, trans. Richard Nice, (London: Routledge Keegan Paul, 1992), p. 2

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Bourdieu, p. 57

<sup>44</sup> Fastnedge, p. 287-94

<sup>45</sup> Fastnedge, p. 288

furniture historical texts: that the important parts of old English furniture are the decorative details and the name of the author. Through an unwillingness to explain old furniture fully, the furniture historians establish themselves as those in the *know*, those who can identify the style, the age, the author and establish the authenticity of the item. The system used to categorise the furniture assesses the details of the furniture and assigns a style and an age accordingly, and if possible a maker, places that item *within* furniture history. The furniture system is perpetuated if the item comes up for auction as the furniture historians have uncovered the design, linked this to the item, and now they are quoted authorities within the provenance, using their language and maintaining their rules, then the furniture achieves its price in the sale room.

Fastnedge's book is one of many by the 'known' furniture historians, and, like those before and after it, a tautological text, reiterating what has already been written. R. W. Symonds' work, *The Present State of Old English Furniture*, published in 1921, begins with an introduction in which he states that he aims the book to act as a guide to those who collect old furniture. The first five lines of the book read as follows:

The sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries saw English domestic furniture attain its highest level of achievement and *artistic development*. It is, therefore, of pieces made during these *three hundred years, from 1500 to 1800*, that the collector should seek to acquire *genuine* and "untouched" examples.<sup>47</sup>

This quote sums up the premise of furniture history: the focus is on style, 'artistic development', age, (aligning himself with Ruskin and the Arts and Crafts movement, Symonds noted that furniture produced after 1800 was to be avoided because 'the standard of design had begun to decline'<sup>48</sup>), and authenticity (the collector should look for 'genuine' pieces). The rules in place within the history of furniture dictate that the best sort of furniture is from the period 1500 to 1800 and that a provenance, proof of age is needed, that reproduction furniture, that which is not truly old, should be avoided. Symonds, illustrating that he is building upon what has gone before, points out that from about 1895 onwards a number of 'historical and chronological surveys', both general and

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<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Beard, *Craftsmen and Interior Decoration in England, 1660-1820*, (Edinburgh: Bartholomew, 1981)

<sup>47</sup> Symonds, p. 1, the words in italic are my emphasis.

specific, that aimed to provide a soupçon of old English furniture, have been published.<sup>49</sup> An example of the survey texts that Symonds refers to is K. Warren Clouston's trigger work of 1897 entitled *The Chippendale Period in English Furniture*.<sup>50</sup> This book set the tone for the furniture historians' eternal fascination with the individual 'maker', in this case the text deals with other makers also working during the eighteenth-century but the author has chosen to name the book after the ubiquitous Thomas Chippendale, stating that this was *his* 'period'. In addition to Chippendale, Clouston's text dealt with his contemporaries Sir William Chambers, the Adam brothers, Thomas Shearer, George Hepplewhite and Thomas Sheraton. These names are the same names found in Fastnedge's 1955 text, and the same names that are still found in the work of Clive Edwards, whose book *Eighteenth Century Furniture* was published in 1996.<sup>51</sup> Furniture history has not really moved on since the work of Clouston despite the fact that *The Chippendale Period in English Furniture* is now over one hundred years old. Works such as Oliver Brackett's *An Encyclopaedia of English Furniture*,<sup>52</sup> W. E. Mallett's *An Introduction to Old English Furniture*<sup>53</sup> and The Victoria and Albert Museum's *A Short History of English Furniture*,<sup>54</sup> brought nothing new to the discipline, dealing chronologically with furniture from the Tudor age to the nineteenth century and categorising furniture according to a style period, date and maker. Even works that chose to narrow the focus, such as Geoffrey Beard's *Georgian Craftsmen and their Work*, retain furniture historical preoccupations: Beard's work contains two sections, 'The age of Orders, 1700-1760', that deals with styles, and 'A Regiment of Artificers, 1760-1800', the artificers being Sheraton, Hepplewhite and, of course, Chippendale.<sup>55</sup> Beard's work post-dated Edwards and Jourdain's *Georgian Cabinet-Makers*, which dealt with each maker biographically,<sup>56</sup> and The Victoria and Albert Museum's work on *Georgian*

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<sup>48</sup> Symonds, p. 1

<sup>49</sup> Symonds, p. 1

<sup>50</sup> K. Warren Clouston, *The Chippendale Period in English Furniture*, (London and New York: Debenham and Feebdy, Edward Arnold, 1897)

<sup>51</sup> Clive D. Edwards, *Eighteenth Century Furniture*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996)

<sup>52</sup> Oliver Brackett, *An Encyclopaedia of English Furniture*, (London: Ernest Benn, 1927)

<sup>53</sup> W. E. Mallett, *An Introduction to Old English Furniture*, (London: George Newnes, 1906)

<sup>54</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, *A Short History of English Furniture*, (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1966)

<sup>55</sup> Geoffrey Beard, *Georgian Craftsmen and their Work*, (London: Country Life, 1966)

<sup>56</sup> Ralph Edwards and Margaret Jourdain, *Georgian Cabinet Makers* (London: Country Life, 1955)

*Furniture*, which stretched the definition to include makers Seddons and Ince and Mayhew.<sup>57</sup> These texts are supplemented by a range of dictionaries on the subject, containing alphabetical rather than chronological entries for makers, styles and furniture types. The authors of these dictionaries are the furniture historians. John Gloag produced his *Short Dictionary of Furniture* in 1969,<sup>58</sup> Geoffrey Beard and Christopher Gilbert published their *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers, 1660-1840*, in 1986<sup>59</sup> and Ralph Edwards and Percy Macquoid published *The Dictionary of English Furniture* in three volumes between 1924 and 1927.<sup>60</sup> This last dictionary has been reprinted every ten years since its publication, most recently in the year 2000. It remains the most encompassing work on the subject of old English furniture, and entries were penned by known furniture historians Oliver Brickett, Margaret Jourdain, H. Clifford Smith and Peter Ward-Jackson, as well as by the two main authors. The contributors illustrate how easily furniture history has been perpetuated, the same people have been writing the same things, including and excluding the same makers and the same facts, again and again.

Has no one sought to question the furniture system, to threaten the constructed history from within? In 1921 R. W. Symonds did in fact demonstrate an awareness of the furniture system 'assigning certain styles or examples to particular craftsmen or designers, whose names are better known than their definite influence and activities'.<sup>61</sup> However Symonds cannot help but work within it. Each of his chapters in *The Present State of Old English Furniture* focuses upon a different period of furniture production, including the history of the period, who was working in the furniture-producing market, the fashion of the time, then referring to colour, patina, design, ornamentation and workmanship. John Gloag also noted the pitfalls of furniture history when he stated in *British Furniture Makers*, that:

The names of Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton dominate the history of English furniture-making; but there were many other craftsmen designers of ability,

<sup>57</sup> Ralph Edwards, (Ed.), *Georgian Furniture* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1947)

<sup>58</sup> John Gloag, *Short Dictionary of Furniture*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969)

<sup>59</sup> Geoffrey Beard and Christopher Gilbert (Eds.), *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers, 1660-1840*, (London: Furniture History Society, 1986)

<sup>60</sup> Ralph Edwards and Percy Macquoid, *The Dictionary of English Furniture*, in three volumes, (London: Country Life, 1954)

<sup>61</sup> Symonds, p.1



who enjoyed equal or perhaps greater eminence in their own day, also scores of lesser known men whose productions are only rarely identified.<sup>62</sup>

But these brief moments of clarity have been undermined by the fact that the furniture historians have continued to produce the sort of biographical monologues that have ensured that these ‘famous’ makers have remained pivotal. In *The Fashion System* Barthes refers to the ‘leaders of Haute Couture’ who set the standard for the ‘fashion’ of a particular time.<sup>63</sup> The leaders are hooks upon which to hang styles, for example Dior’s New Look of 1947. Within the fashion magazine the leaders provide names to associate with designs, they are applauded for selecting skirt lengths, colour combinations or accessories, for providing yet another sub-group within the system. Again the leaders propose classes of inclusions and exclusions, this dress is ‘Dior’ and therefore it is not ‘Chanel’. The style of the Haute Couture leaders is then disseminated through the ranks of the less well-known designers, it moves from being Haute Couture down to Off the Peg or High Street, but can retain some of the initial design qualities chosen by the leader, for example a particular skirt length or colour. The design can then be of the named leader, even if he did not make it, for example a ‘Dior-esque’ full skirt. Christopher Gilbert’s book *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale* (published in 1978) typifies the prioritisation of the individual furniture-maker within furniture history. Gilbert provides a biography of the ‘genius’ designer/maker Thomas Chippendale, the author of the pattern book *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker’s Director*. As the title of his book suggests, Gilbert assigns the furniture that Chippendale produced to Chippendale alone – a falsity as Chippendale had an army of cabinet-makers who made the pieces from his designs, and we cannot know what was made by ‘his’ hands alone.<sup>64</sup> Gilbert subscribes to the process of seeing Chippendale’s designs, recognising similar pieces, and matching the two together. Thus items that may well be ‘Chippendale-esque’ furniture, as due to the available nature of his pattern book the designs could have been

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<sup>62</sup> John Gloag, *British Furniture Makers*, (London: William Collins, 1945), p. 33

<sup>63</sup> Barthes, 1983, p. 298

<sup>64</sup> Abigail Harrison Moore provides a discussion of this in her PhD thesis, *Imagining Egypt: The Regency Furniture Collections at Harewood House, Leeds, and Nineteenth Century Images of Egypt*, Southampton University, 2001, pp. 3 - 6

made up by someone else altogether, for example Gillows,<sup>65</sup> are presented as 'Chippendale' furniture. But it is not only Chippendale who is treated in this way, in the introduction to his text Gilbert chastises fellow furniture historian Ralph Edwards for attempting to 'topple Chippendale from the pinnacle of fame by substituting another hero-figure', William Vile, in his place.<sup>66</sup> Other furniture historical texts have also examined furniture in relation to individuals, Clifford Musgrave's *Adam, Hepplewhite and other Neo-Classical Furniture*,<sup>67</sup> Ralph Fastnedge's *Sheraton Furniture*<sup>68</sup> and Helena Hayward and Pat Kirkham's, *William and John Linnell – Eighteenth Century Furniture Makers*.<sup>69</sup> The latter text did at least attempt to bring a lesser-known maker to the forefront of furniture history, but it followed the furniture historical structure of creating the discourse around the individual. The furniture historians' premise is also repeated in provenance in the auction room sale catalogues:

A beautifully proportioned *Hepplewhite period* satinwood oval Pembroke table, c. 1780. The oval top with its contrasting ebonised moulded edge is veneered in satinwood with a particularly attractive silky figure. In the centre is an oval marquetry panel of exceptional quality.<sup>70</sup>

This table may not have been made by Hepplewhite, or even be of his design, but the association with this famous, known maker, adds the kudos of a 'name' to the piece. This canonisation of the furniture-maker, often not an actual maker but simply the owner of a firm or author of a pattern book, meant that much furniture, and its other makers, was disregarded or mislabelled, writing out of furniture history as much as was written in.

The focus upon the known individual running through furniture history has provided the foundation for many aspects of that history. When researching the records at Buckingham Palace, H. Clifford Smith remarked that 'it is a striking fact that in these Royal Ledgers *not one of hither to accepted leaders among the cabinet-makers* is ever

<sup>65</sup> WCA 344/165/175, in a letter from Gillows to Sir George Warren, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1765, they offered to 'adapt' a design from Chippendale's *Director* if the customer preferred.

<sup>66</sup> Gilbert, 1978, p.vi

<sup>67</sup> Clifford Musgrave, *Adam, Hepplewhite and other Neo-Classical Furniture*, (London: Faber, 1966)

<sup>68</sup> Ralph Fastnedge, *Sheraton Furniture*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1962)

<sup>69</sup> Helena Hayward and Pat Kirkham, *William and John Linnell – Eighteenth Century Furniture Makers*, (London: Studio Vista, 1980)

<sup>70</sup> Norman Adams Catalogue, 'Eighteenth Century English Furniture', 1989, item 16. The words in italic are my emphasis.

mentioned'.<sup>71</sup> Smith cites 'John Bradburn, William Glais and Katherine Naish' as examples of those employed at the Palace, he says 'William Vile is easily the most important of the newcomers' and one of the only 'recognisable' names in furniture history to do cabinet-making work there.<sup>72</sup> Smith's analysis of the furniture at Buckingham Palace is dictated by the fact that Vile, Bradburn, Glais and Naish already had their places in furniture history. The entries for William Vile, Katherine Naish and John Bradburn were already in *The Dictionary of English Furniture*, published between 1924 and 1927. Vile's entry is an entire column long, and written by Ralph Edwards, the furniture historian accused by Christopher Gilbert of trying to use Vile to usurp Chippendale:

Cabinet-maker and upholsterer of 72, St. Martin's Lane, who with his partner John Cobb (*q.v.*) takes the leading place among furniture manufacturers employed by the Crown early in George III's reign ... In the period between 1750 and 1770 pride of place among contemporary cabinet-makers must be assigned to Vile, whose extant work has a distinction without parallel, and is unchallenged by anything known to have been produced by Chippendale while working in the rococo style.<sup>73</sup>

The entry for John Bradburn is three short paragraphs, and describes him as:

A cabinet-maker who supplied a large quantity of furniture to the Royal household between 1773 and 1776... A secretaire cabinet at Buckingham Palace was supplied by Bradburn for the Princess Royal in 1774.<sup>74</sup>

Bradburn's entry actually links him to the firm of Vile and Cobb, for whom he worked before 1764.<sup>75</sup> William Glais has no entry, and 'Katherine' Naish is entered as 'Naish, Catherine... At Buckingham Palace there is a set of twelve mahogany hall chairs "with hollow seats" supplied ... in 1766'.<sup>76</sup> Vile's entry is much longer than the entries of the other two, confirming his 'pride of place' status, but it is not as long as Chippendale's. What is interesting is that despite the work of Smith in 1931, and the fact that he was a contributor to the original *Dictionary* and to the 1954 revised edition, no attempt was

<sup>71</sup> H. Clifford Smith, 'Buckingham Palace', *Apollo*, January – June 1931, 13, p. 246, the words in italic are my emphasis.

<sup>72</sup> H. Clifford Smith, 'Buckingham Palace', pp. 246-7.

<sup>73</sup> Edwards and Macqoid, volume III, p. 364

<sup>74</sup> Edwards and Macqoid, volume I, p. 120

<sup>75</sup> 'He was employed by the firm of Vile and Cobb, and appears to have set up in business on his own account [in] about 1764', Edwards and Macqoid, Volume I, p. 120

made by him to alter the entries, they remain as they did in the 1920's.<sup>77</sup> Today William Vile continues to be 'recognisable', and Bradburn, Glais and Naish remain 'known' only for their work at the palace, little investigation has been undertaken into who they actually were, or anything else that they did. There is a sense that the furniture historians have the 'names' to associate the furniture with, comparable to Barthes' leaders of Haute Couture, and do not wish to accept other furniture makers as categories within the furniture system.

Have any furniture historians moved away from this type of furniture history? Peter Ward-Jackson's *English Furniture Designs of the Eighteenth Century* of 1958 offered a slightly more critical version of furniture history, noting that Hepplewhite was a 'shadowy' figure, eclipsed by his *Guide*, published, posthumously, by his wife, Alice, in 1788.<sup>78</sup> Hepplewhite's designs (see for example fig. 64), according to Ward-Jackson, were 'confined to the usual neo-classical stock of urns, medallions, paterae, swags, pendants and similar devices, which recur with monotonous frequency ... all through his work'.<sup>79</sup> Ward-Jackson paved the way for Pat Kirkham's work on the 'London Furniture Trade, 1700-1870',<sup>80</sup> and the 'Cabinet-Maker's book of prices',<sup>81</sup> and her attempt with Helena Hayward to bring a provincial furniture-making firm, Linnells, to our attention. Clive Edwards' text, *Eighteenth-Century Furniture*, viewed furniture designs within a social context, the world of the consumer, and delved into the way in which furniture-making businesses actually worked noting that the greatest firms still made all sorts of furniture, including, more often than not, coffins.<sup>82</sup> Hugh Honour's *Cabinet-makers and Furniture Designers* dealt unusually with the global perspective, a book that concentrated upon juxtaposing continental furniture designs with those of English makers.<sup>83</sup> But

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<sup>76</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, volume III, p. 1 [see also my appendix V for a copy of the entry, and compare it to the entry for Thomas Chippendale, appendix IV]

<sup>77</sup> The introduction to the 1954 revised edition states that every altered entry will be supplemented by the word 'revised' and by the initials of the person who has revised it. No initials are present after any of these entries. Edwards and Macquoid, volume I.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Ward-Jackson, *English Furniture Designs of the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1958), p. 62

<sup>79</sup> Ward-Jackson, p. 25-6

<sup>80</sup> Pat Kirkham, 'The London Furniture trade, 1700-1870', *Furniture History* XXIV, 1988

<sup>81</sup> Pat Kirkham, 'The Cabinet Makers book of prices', *Furniture History* XVIII, 1982

<sup>82</sup> Edwards, 1996, pp. 17-19

<sup>83</sup> Hugh Honour, *Cabinet-Makers and Furniture Designers*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969)

despite occasional moves away from a total acceptance that furniture history should be series of famous people and the few stylish pieces that can be directly attributed to them, the reliance upon furniture with labels,<sup>84</sup> upon the precise dating and naming of the item remained undiminished. An interest in house decoration, at its height in the 1980's when the heritage boom fuelled visits to country abodes owned or managed by the National Trust or English Heritage, spurned a number of texts that blended furniture history with the history of interior design. Fowler and Cornforth's book on English decoration, for example, focused on the 'concept' of the decorator, style and fashion changes and what various historical houses were like, arrangement, colour, flooring, lighting, heating and so on.<sup>85</sup> But the furniture history prevailed even here, Geoffrey Beard's work *Craftsmen and Interior Decoration in England, 1660-1820* offered the standardised dictionary of craftsmen.<sup>86</sup> Doreen Yarwood's book *The English Home* provided a brief run-down of Adam, Sheraton, Hepplewhite, Chippendale, Shearer, Ince and Mayhew, Vile and Cobb<sup>87</sup> and the styles that they heralded. Ralph Dutton's *The English Interior 1500-1900* suggested, as Symonds did before him, that 'the age of splendour', 1710 – 1820 was followed by 'the decay of taste', 1820-1900.<sup>88</sup> More recently Charles Saumarez-Smith published a work entitled the *Rise of Design*, which used the same pattern books and 'important people' that furniture history has been preserving.<sup>89</sup> Peter Thornton's work *Authentic Décor*<sup>90</sup>, similar to the early survey texts of furniture history, provided a snapshot of each era and contemporary illustrations of interiors. Perhaps the best example of how the furniture system has been sustained within works on interior design, is Gervase Jackson-Stops' work *The English Country House: A Grand Tour* published in 1985. The text and photographs provide a guide to different areas within the country house, the 'approach', the hallway, the staircase, chambers and saloons, galleries, dining rooms and so on. But Jackson-Stops' reliance upon furniture history is clear as he

<sup>84</sup> Epitomised by R. W. Symonds' article: 'Old Labelled Furniture', *Connoisseur*, part I, 1930, LXXXVI, pp. 279-87, part II, 1931, LXXXVIII, pp. 160-9, 405-11

<sup>85</sup> Fowler and Cornforth, *English Decoration in the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1974)

<sup>86</sup> Beard, 1981

<sup>87</sup> Doreen Yarwood, *The English Home*, (London: Batsford, 1979), p. 177

<sup>88</sup> Ralph Dutton, *The English Interior 1500-1900*, (London: B. T. Batsford, 1948), contents page

<sup>89</sup> Charles Saumarez-Smith, *The Rise of Design*, (London: Pimlico, 2000)

<sup>90</sup> Peter Thornton, *Authentic Décor – The Domestic Interior 1620-1920*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1993)

provides the hook upon which to hang an item of furniture: 'the bed may well have been supplied by Chippendale himself', he writes, 'and is close to designs in his famous pattern book *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director*'.<sup>91</sup>

This focus upon the country house in the 1980's is worth further consideration, as furniture history is partly influenced by the instigator of this preoccupation, after all the items of furniture that the historians favour are those made for the rooms of the grandest houses by their 'heroes'. The first half of the twentieth-century saw a number of country houses abandoned or even demolished, their contents sold off to pay for death duties, back-taxes or simply because the familial line had come to an end. Some of the houses were saved by the Government or the National Trust, others survived by taking in paying guests or transforming parts of the houses into display areas for the general public to survey the family's ancient belongings. The era was populated by clearance sales of various country abodes, sparking renewed interest in old English furniture (see for example fig. 111). The description for one item from a clearance sale reads as follows:

A Magnificent mahogany and satinwood bow fronted secretaire bookcase, the upper part surmounted with fret design and Prince of Wales feather cornice and fitted with 3 adjustable shelves enclosed by 2 glazed latticed doors, the lower portion having secretaire with drawers and fitted pigeon holes and with 3 long drawers below, 50 ins x 108 ins high.<sup>92</sup>

Using the complex language of furniture history, terms such as 'cornice', 'fret' and 'secretaire', the description adheres to the rules, not explaining what the 'secretaire', an enclosed writing desk with a bookcase on top (see for example, figs. 49, 50 and 51), could actually be used for. An example of a cornice, a horizontal moulding often placed on the top of a bookcase or wardrobe, appears in fig. 106 at the top of a bookcase, and a fret, an ornamental cut-out pattern, can be seen on the top of a tea table in fig. 28. The piece described is also thought to be 'Hepplewhite', but this is suggested, not confirmed, the sort of supposition that arouses curiosity and attempts to drive up prices. Slowly these clearance sales and demolitions were dissolving the country houses and their

<sup>91</sup> The bed referred to is at Nostell Priory. Gervase Jackson-Stops, *The English Country House: A Grand Tour*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p. 175.

<sup>92</sup> Description for Lot number 2057, Sale Catalogue, Brady & Son, for Abney Hall, Cheadle, Cheshire, 17<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> March 1958

collections. *Country Life* magazine, as well as providing a formidable circulation for images of young debutantes, began publishing a series of articles that dealt with the interiors of the homes of the surviving landed gentry. *Country Life* provided glossy (and in later years coloured) images of these homes, complete with a resume of items of antique furniture and is something that I see as an important factor in the perpetuation of furniture history. Alongside *Apollo*, *The Burlington Magazine* and *Connoisseur*, *Country Life* proved itself as an outlet for the furniture historians, between the 1920's and the 1980's a number of them wrote articles for the magazines.<sup>93</sup> Although the *Country Life* articles were mainly pictorial, the focus on particular rooms or on items of historical worth within them often included a commentary on the family member who had purchased or commissioned the item originally. The articles were not just restricted to country houses, but to any place in Britain that had an interior and some old furniture, the Bank of England, the Lady Lever Art Gallery and the Soane Museum were all featured in articles.<sup>94</sup> *Apollo*, *The Burlington Magazine*, *Country Life* and *Connoisseur*, offered the furniture historians the opportunity to focus entire articles on an item or items of particular interest, especially pieces that were either recently purchased, newly displayed or coming up for auction.<sup>95</sup> The articles preserved the histories set out by the furniture historians in their books, excluding items that lacked provenance, an important owner or maker, and favouring items that could be neatly placed within the stylistic boundaries of the furniture system.

Although the furniture historians who wrote articles for *Country Life* et al. remained entrenched within the system, the magazines could occasionally be a venue for radical thinking. G. Bernard Hughes undertook an investigation into the practical details of old English furniture, producing a series of articles that ignored names in favour of function;

<sup>93</sup> Ralph Edwards, Christopher Hussey, Margaret Jourdain, H. Clifford Smith and R. W. Symonds were amongst the most prolific of the *Country Life*, *Apollo*, *Burlington Magazine* and *Connoisseur* contributors of the 1930's, 40's, 50's and 60's.

<sup>94</sup> M. Jourdain, 'Early Nineteenth Century Furniture at the Bank of England', *Country Life*, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1947, CII, pp.676-7

Tait A. Carlyle, 'Furniture at the Lady Lever Art Gallery', *Apollo*, part 1, September 1947, XLVI, pp. 65-8, part 2, November 1947, XLVI, pp. 106-9 and part 3, February 1948, XLVII, pp. 36-8

R. W. Symonds, 'Furniture at the Soane Museum', *Country Life*, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1950, CVII, pp. 220-3

<sup>95</sup> An article by R. W. Symonds was focused entirely on various claw tables made during the eighteenth century: 'Claw Tables', *Apollo*, June 1933, XVII, p.235. (p.235-236)

‘back-stools were intended for the use of ladies wearing the enormous hoop skirts worn on formal occasions’.<sup>96</sup> The Hall Chair was ‘the wealthy Georgian’s method of meeting a constant problem’, the stranger waiting upon business or the messenger awaiting a reply, ‘as completely practical as it was immensely decorative’.<sup>97</sup> Hughes even published an article on the Barron Castor used in eighteenth-century furniture manufacture, with ‘its sockets fitted with a steel base against which pressed the shoulders of the brass swivel horns’.<sup>98</sup> In 1954 an article by Ralph Edwards appeared in *Country Life*. In it he challenged the presumptions made by the first furniture historians:

... the orthodox view was that if Mahogany furniture of the mid-eighteenth century reached a high standard of excellence it *must* be by Chippendale ... as a result of research and more critical standards, his extravagant, mythical reputation has been drastically reassessed, and he no longer completely over-shadows his contemporaries.<sup>99</sup>

Edwards does not deny the innovative nature of Chippendale, but suggests that this innovation might have had more to do with him ‘enlisting the services of others in the production of the designs for his famous trade catalogue’<sup>100</sup> than with his own gifts as a maker and/or designer. Although Edwards makes some ground in his bid to lessen Chippendale’s impact, he cannot completely deny Chippendale’s importance, something later picked up on by Christopher Gilbert.<sup>101</sup> Intimating that an historical system is in place and positioning Vile within it, Edwards concludes that ‘the names of well-known firms provide convenient labels: in the case of Vile (or, more accurately, Vile and Cobb) such a label is far too freely employed’.<sup>102</sup> Hindsight enables Edwards to view furniture history as whole, a creation, but being embroiled within it does not allow him any kind of

<sup>96</sup> G. Bernard Hughes, ‘The Vogue of the back-stool chair’, *Country Life*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1962, p. 790

<sup>97</sup> G. Bernard Hughes, ‘Chairs for the Georgian Entrance Hall’, *Country Life*, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1960, p. 1500

<sup>98</sup> G. Bernard Hughes, ‘English Furniture castors’, *Country Life*, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1948, pp. 24-5, Hughes also wrote about furniture which could be packed-up and taken away, such as camp beds and shaving kits, ‘Furniture for the Regency Traveller’, *Country Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1967, CXLI, pp. 452-3 and also about furniture which had been patented, such as telescopic dining tables and library steps inside stools ‘Regency Patent Furniture’, *Country Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1958, CXXIII, pp. 10-11

<sup>99</sup> Ralph Edwards, ‘Attributions to William Vile’, *Country Life*, 7<sup>th</sup> October 1954, p. 1154, the word in *italic* is Edwards’ emphasis.

<sup>100</sup> Edwards, ‘Attributions to William Vile’, p. 1154

<sup>101</sup> In the introduction to his text *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, Christopher Gilbert chastises Ralph Edwards’ article for attempting to ‘topple Chippendale from the pinnacle of fame by substituting another hero-figure’ William Vile, in his place, Gilbert, 1978, p.vi

<sup>102</sup> Ralph Edwards, ‘Attributions to William Vile’, p. 1156



distancing from it. Edwards' cautionary words echo the analysis of E. H. Carr, find a 'fact' and stick to it, and draw further attention to the system, like that in Barthes' text, that is indeed at work, the categorising of items by use of a person's 'name'. The three main areas of furniture history – the books themselves, the articles in *Country Life* and the auction room provenances, promote the circulatory motion of that history. The vast numbers of texts and articles on the same people, simply seek to back one another up, eternalising the original thoughts from the early furniture historians. The introspective nature of the antique world has perpetuated these thoughts; a constant reciprocal dialectic ensures that what has been praised by the historians also receives a high price when it is sold in the auction room. Do Gillows, as eighteenth-century furniture makers, have a place within the history of furniture?

### Gillows in Furniture History

In the introduction to *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*, Lindsay Boynton states that 'Gillow is no longer a household word as are Chippendale, Sheraton and Hepplewhite'.<sup>103</sup> Boynton has written the only large published text that deals solely with Gillows.<sup>104</sup> He notes that as 'Gillows never published a book of furniture designs to which their name would have been attached',<sup>105</sup> they have been treated unfavourably by the furniture historians. Boynton's book sits uneasily within the boundaries of furniture history, although common ground is covered by the biographical approach, Boynton's questioning attitude, especially concerning the reliance of furniture history upon the pattern book,<sup>106</sup> is atypical of traditional furniture historical texts. Boynton's work needs to be examined more closely, and will provide the basis for further discussion of Gillows in chapter two. But it highlights the problem that existed for the furniture historians: Gillows were a productive yet provincial furniture-making firm with no published pattern book and an unfortunate alliance with twentieth-century high street stores Waring & Gillow, the manufacturers of reproduction furniture. How is a firm like this to be

<sup>103</sup> Lindsay Boynton, *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*, (Royston: Bloomfield Press, 1995), p. 15

<sup>104</sup> Other small pamphlets and exhibition catalogues dealt with just Gillows, Boynton's text is the only sizeable book on the subject to have been published.

<sup>105</sup> Boynton, p. 15

<sup>106</sup> Boynton, p. 17-18

admitted into a history that praises the authors of the pattern books, the creators of the styles, and dislikes an association with unauthentic furniture?

*The Chippendale Period in English Furniture*, written by K. Warren Clouston in 1897, included a brief mention of Gillows, explaining that they made furniture for Robert Adam, under his guidance, that they held the patent for the extending library table and that they helped to improve brass inlay designs.<sup>107</sup> What Clouston provides is a mixture of fact and fiction that is common within furniture historians' treatment of Gillows. The firm did work with Adam, providing furniture for Harewood House for example, but the details of their work with the architect are not known due to the fact that the items for Harewood came from the London side of the business where no archive exists. It is likely that Clouston included Adam rather than Samuel Wyatt or John Carr, other architects with whom Gillows also worked, because the furniture historians treat Adam as they do Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton, he is a recognisable design force.<sup>108</sup> Gillows are commonly viewed as makers that worked for architect/designers rather than as designers themselves; their association with Adam secures them a place in furniture history, even if it is a very small one. Richard Gillow the younger did hold patent number 2396 for the 'telescopic dining table' in 1800 (see fig. 113),<sup>109</sup> but did not hold a patent for an extending library table. The firm did very little brass inlay work and their records do not mention them making any significant improvements in the field.<sup>110</sup> The furniture historians have created their own version of Gillows, a number of 'facts', as E. H. Carr views them, strung together and simply regurgitated, again and again. An examination of these 'facts' as employed in the early survey texts, in Gillows' entries in furniture dictionaries and even in later books and articles, provides a distorted image of the firm. Carr questions why it is that certain 'facts' are examined and interpreted and turned into 'historical facts', and others are not,<sup>111</sup> surely all 'facts' should be taken into

<sup>107</sup> Clouston, 1897, pp. 131, 140 and 219.

<sup>108</sup> See for example *Adam, Hepplewhite and other Neo-Classical Furniture* by Clifford Musgrave.

<sup>109</sup> Patent entries for London, May 1<sup>st</sup> 1800, Hartley Library, MS 301, box 10, folder 2, part 14.

<sup>110</sup> WCA 344/165/138, Gillows' brass work was carried out by brass founders, for example, on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1766, Gillows wrote to James Hewitt, Brassfounder, Wolverhampton, ordering legs for a billiard table. Gillows' habit of using different makers to produce parts of their goods will be discussed further in chapter three.

<sup>111</sup> Carr, p. 10

consideration? The agenda of the historian is one reason why some facts come to supersede others. The furniture historians had their heroes set in stone within K. Warren Clouston's work, Chippendale featuring not only in the title but throughout the text, the eighteenth century was *his period* after all, he produced the definitive pattern book. The furniture system utilises 'Chippendale' as a means of categorising pieces not only by him, but also those that are *similar* to pieces by him, or pieces that *might* be by him. Without a pattern book to provide the means of establishing this sort of category for them, Gillows cannot be one of the furniture historians' heroes. The 'fact' that they held the patent for a telescopic dining table is repeated twice in Gillows' one column entry within *The Dictionary of English Furniture* [my appendix III], as if, apart from existing within certain dates, having a fight with Mrs. Piozzi and inspiring a quote from a visiting German, this is the only thing that the firm ever did.<sup>112</sup> The 'facts' that have been selected by the furniture historians conform to *their* agenda, allowing Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton to retain their Haute Couture status within the furniture system. The 'facts' provide an overview of Gillows that suggests that the firm was middle class, provincial and uninventive, and by this reasoning could not be a threat to the supremacy of Chippendale.

The first 'fact' to have been used and re-used in furniture history is a quote from a German visitor to England in 1807, 'Die ersten Fabrikanten und Verkäufer in London sind Geo. Und Rich. Gillow'.<sup>113</sup> The visitor, P. A. Nemnich, added that Gillows' 'work is good and solid, if not always of invention and fashion'.<sup>114</sup> The quote has been utilised by Ralph Fastnedge in *Sheraton Furniture*,<sup>115</sup> by Geoffrey Beard in his book on furniture owned by the National Trust<sup>116</sup> and later by Pat Kirkham in an article for the periodical *Furniture History*.<sup>117</sup> The quote has been employed to suggest that although Gillows were highly regarded by their peers, they were followers and not leaders in the field of furniture design. The authors of *The Dictionary of English Furniture* use the Nemnich

<sup>112</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, vol. 2, p. 243.

<sup>113</sup> P. A. Nemnich, *Neueste Reise durch England, Schottland, und Ireland*, (Tübingen, 1807), p.136

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. My translation.

<sup>115</sup> Fastnedge, *Sheraton Furniture*, p. 36

<sup>116</sup> Beard, 1985, p.164

<sup>117</sup> Kirkham, 'The London Furniture trade, 1700-1870', p. 48

quote in their entry for Gillows [my appendix III]. Their translation reads that Gillows were

the first grade salesmen and manufacturers in London; they deal widely in land and foreign trade and maintain employees in different parts of England; their work is good and solid, though not of the first class in inventiveness and style.<sup>118</sup>

They back up the quote with a discussion of items by Gillows that they have seen,

[t]he existing examples fully justify this verdict ... Gillow's were distinctly conservative, continuing to produce certain models some years after they had ceased to be fashionable – e.g., a drawing of an armchair with interlaced heart-shaped back festooned with drapery is dated 1797.<sup>119</sup>

As this is traditional furniture historical ground, no attempt is made to quantify this statement; the authors do not explain how or why an 'interlaced heart-shaped back' is no longer à la mode in 1797, they provide no evidence to support their assertion, they just 'know'. The Nemnich 'fact' is added to by the certain knowledge that Gillows did not produce a pattern book, unlike the 'great' firms and therefore Nemnich, one German man, on one visit to England, had to have been correct. There is an unwritten decree within furniture history that if Gillows are to be a part of it, if their name is to be recognised, then it must be for having done nothing special, for being a regular firm making ordinary furniture. The second 'fact' used by the furniture historians can concur only partly with this decree: that Gillows between 1760 and 1770, 'invented the original form of a billiard table'.<sup>120</sup> This 'fact' is certainly untrue, as billiard tables were in existence from the seventeenth-century, and billiard boards from the fifteen hundreds, so why would furniture historian K. E. Ingram choose to associate Gillows with the invention of something so formidable? Furniture history views billiard tables with disdain, *The Dictionary of English Furniture* notes that they were 'not represented in eighteenth century trade catalogues, and seldom appear to have been designed as decorative pieces of furniture; they are absent, moreover, from the bills of Chippendale

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<sup>118</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, vol. II, p. 243, they cite 'Nemnich', 'a German visitor to London in 1807', and do not give a reference, see my appendix III.

<sup>119</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, vol. II, p. 243, also my appendix III and see my fig. 73 for an illustration of the chair, first made in 1788.

<sup>120</sup> K.E Ingram, 'The West Indian Trade of an English Furniture Firm in the Eighteenth Century', *Jamaican Historical Review*, 1962, p.27

and other famous makers'.<sup>121</sup> The dictionary's view is a good example of furniture history's narrow focus upon the famous makers, their pattern books, and decorative design, and how they can dismiss the makers of billiard tables as 'lesser' makers because 'Chippendale' did not manufacture them. Gillows had employed specialist billiard table makers since about 1769 (see fig. 101), and were proud of the service that they offered.<sup>122</sup> There is some evidence that they did invent a certain sort of collapsible billiard table, which is perhaps how Ingram came to his conclusion. But even as simply 'billiard table makers' Gillows fit uncomfortably into *The Dictionary of English Furniture*, and therefore into furniture history, makers of non-decorative items and, according to Nemnich, also uninventive.

A third and similar 'fact' employed by the furniture historians is that Gillows are said to have made the first 'Davenport', a small portable writing table with drawers, for a Captain Davenport who wished to take it with him to sea.<sup>123</sup> This fact is repeated in the entry for 'Davenport' in *The Dictionary of English Furniture*; Gillows are said to have made the piece in the late eighteenth century, and all subsequent similar pieces were called Davenports.<sup>124</sup> This sort of innovation does not gel with furniture history's view of Gillows and according to Lindsay Boynton the story of Gillows producing the first one is a fallacy as they did not even mention making a Davenport until 1816.<sup>125</sup> It is curious that although the entry for Davenport in the dictionary contains Gillows' input, the entry for the firm itself [my appendix III] does not mention the Davenport, neither is there a cross-reference to take the reader to that entry. Therefore the question is why would the dictionary even think of utilising the 'story' of the Davenport in the first place? As saleable items, Davenports are neat, compact writing desks, and all the more desirable as antique objects with a 'story' to recommend them, having an origin, even if it is only 'Gillow' is better than having no origin at all. The fourth 'fact' is that references occur to

<sup>121</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, vol. III, p. 190

<sup>122</sup> WCA, 344/169/175, Gillows to Richard Selby, Salutation Inn, Harrogate, replying to his inquiry regarding billiard tables on 12 legs. Gillows boasted that they had employed specialist billiard table makers for '10 years now', Gillows felt that 6 legs were quite adequate, and an extra 6 would cost 1 ½ guineas more, July 1779.

<sup>123</sup> Elspeth Moncreif, 'Gillow of Lancaster; A Family Affair', *Antique Collector*, June 1990

<sup>124</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, vol. II, p. 202, the authors do not give a reference for this information, and 'presume' that this where the name comes from.

Gillows in 'Jane Austen, Thackeray, the first Lord Lytton and in Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*'.<sup>126</sup> These references do exist, in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* for example the narrator describes

... how a house may be got for nothing a year (in this case 201 Curzon Street, Mayfair). These mansions are to be had either unfurnished, where, if you have credit with Messrs. Gillows or Bantings, you can get them splendidly montees and decorated entirely according to your own fancy; or they are to be let furnished – a less troublesome and complicated arrangement.<sup>127</sup>

The references are used, by for example Geoffrey Beard and Christopher Gilbert, to suggest that the Gillows name was widely popularised after about 1820. Beard and Gilbert suggest that the references are evidence that Gillows had cornered the middle class market, that they were more suited to this kind of work than to dealing with the upper classes, as Chippendale did.<sup>128</sup> A fifth 'fact' is the pay dispute with a society hostess, 'Mrs. Piozzi employed Gillows soon after her marriage in 1794, to re-furnish Streatham Park "in a modern style, supremely elegant, but not expensive"'.<sup>129</sup> Mrs Piozzi eventually went bankrupt, but not before she had loudly proclaimed that Gillows had over-charged her for her goods. Gillows are said to have backed down and accepted a lower payment, something used by Beard and Gilbert, and by Edwards and Macquoid in *The Dictionary of English Furniture*, to suggest that the firm was 'not beyond reproach'.<sup>130</sup> A sixth 'fact' is that Gillows transported their goods to the West Indies. R. S. Clouston wrote that Robert Gillow was a 'Licensed Dealer in Rum', and therefore made a 'double profit' by 'accepting payment in kind' for the items sent abroad, and then 'selling the goods on himself'.<sup>131</sup> Gillows did indeed send their goods abroad, and did accept payment in kind, usually in the form of lengths of mahogany. The furniture historians' desire to keep the furniture of different countries apart, leads them to look with disdain upon firms that chose to export (and especially import) furniture. The inclusion of Gillows under the heading of 'exporters' can only do their historical

<sup>125</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, box 47, folder 3, part 5.

<sup>126</sup> Ingram, 'The West Indian Trade of an English Furniture Firm in the Eighteenth Century', p.23

<sup>127</sup> William Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (1847) (Ware: Wordsworth, 1992) p.500

<sup>128</sup> Beard and Gilbert, p. 341

<sup>129</sup> Ingram, 'The West Indian Trade of an English Furniture Firm in the Eighteenth Century', p. 24

<sup>130</sup> Beard and Gilbert, p. 341, Edwards and Macquoid, vol. II, p. 243

reputation harm. The final 'fact' is that Gillows were founded in 1695. This is the date that the 1980's high street furniture firm Waring & Gillow adopted as their date of origin, perhaps they took it from John Gloag.<sup>132</sup> Gillows actually began in Lancaster in 1731; a start date of 1695 is impossible as Robert Gillow, the founder of the firm, was not born until 1704.<sup>133</sup>

As with furniture history in general it is simply repetition that assigns Gillows their place within it. The repeated 'facts' perpetuate a mythical ideal of the firm as provincial, middle class and known more for occasional brushes with fame than for their actual wares. Gillows are not only known, however, for these 'facts'. They are also much publicised within furniture history for what they *did not do*. An article published in *Country Life* magazine in 1947 by historian Bertha Shaw, sums up the way that the furniture historians view Gillows,

The name of Gillow has been connected with cabinet-making for over two centuries. Unlike Chippendale and Hepplewhite, the firm produced neither *Director* nor *Guide* and have been criticised for lack of inventiveness on this score.<sup>134</sup>

Shaw took it upon herself to try and revoke this assertion, she reiterates:

certainly their name would have been more generally known to-day if they had published a book of their designs. However, Gillows of Lancaster were content to be craftsmen, and their work, particularly that of 1750-1800, shows a perfection of construction and mastery of detail that entitles them to a place with the Great Georgian Cabinet-Makers.<sup>135</sup>

In making this statement, Shaw is refuting the work of R. S. Clouston whom, some forty years before, had included 'Gillows' in an article under the title of 'minor English furniture makers'.<sup>136</sup> Clouston writes that 'if Richard Gillow had thought it worth his

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<sup>131</sup> R. S. Clouston, *English Furniture and Furniture Makers of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1906) p. 207

<sup>132</sup> Gloag, 1969, p. 176, Gloag writes that the Gillow firm was founded in 1695 by Robert Gillow, a joiner, freeman in 1728, and that it is now 'Waring and Gillow'.

<sup>133</sup> Boynton, pp. 1 and 18 and in WCA 344, the earliest record is dated 1731.

<sup>134</sup> Bertha Shaw, 'Gillows of Lancaster - A Great Georgian Firm of Cabinet - Makers', *Country Life*, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1947, CII, p. 430

<sup>135</sup> Shaw, 'Gillows of Lancaster - A Great Georgian Firm of Cabinet - Makers', p. 430

<sup>136</sup> R. S. Clouston, 'Minor English Furniture-Makers of the Eighteenth Century', *Burlington Magazine*, article VI, 'Robert and Richard Gillow' 1905, 7, p. 41 - 45, this article contains some errors, such as noting

while to publish a book of designs about the same time as Hepplewhite produced the 'Guide', there might well be 2 opinions as to whose name we should now use in describing the style'.<sup>137</sup> An example of the similarity between the designs of Gillows and Hepplewhite can be seen in a Gillows' repeated shell motif in figs. 3-7 which also appears in Hepplewhite's design for a mirror, fig. 8. Clouston's belief is repeated by Herbert Cescinsky, who recorded that Gillow, taking 'him' to be an individual rather than a firm, could have had 'a name second to none... and but for the fact that he did not publish a *Director* or a *System* might have been tracked with Chippendale in the history of English furniture of the mid-eighteenth century'.<sup>138</sup> Clouston and Cescinsky, in the traditional role of the furniture historian, are searching for the individual, naming Richard Gillow, not the firm of Gillows as 'the man' who should have published a pattern book. They condone the furniture system, naming a 'style' after a person, a maker: they are blaming Richard Gillows' lack of foresight for the Gillows' 'name' not being better known. They do not, unsurprisingly, attack the lack of effort on the part of the furniture historian to delve into Gillows' designs and pieces regardless of the existence of a pattern book. Shaw notes that '[u]p to 1811 they [Gillows] were responsible for graceful and artistic furniture, soundly constructed'.<sup>139</sup> She quotes a 1797 advertisement for 'SALES BY AUCTION – Elegant Furniture and Effects of A MAN OF FASHION' at number 24, Piccadilly, including 'very excellent Cabinet Furniture of every description, by that excellent maker MR. GILLOW, of Oxford Street',<sup>140</sup> as an illustration of how Gillows were perceived by their contemporaries. She backs this up with a quote from Lord Lytton's work *Night and Morning*:

Opposite to her was an old-fashioned bureau, one of those quaint, elaborate monuments of Dutch ingenuity, which during the present century the audacious spirit of curiosity vendors has transplanted from their native receptacles, to contrast, with grotesque strangeness, the neat handiwork of Gillow.<sup>141</sup>

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that 'as early at least as 1744 Gillow started a London branch' on p. 41, when it wasn't until 1769 that Gillows opened their London wareroom.

<sup>137</sup> Clouston, 'Minor English Furniture-Makers of the Eighteenth Century', p.45

<sup>138</sup> Herbert Cescinsky, *English Furniture of the Eighteenth Century*, (London: G. Sadler, 1911) p.268

<sup>139</sup> Shaw, 'Gillows of Lancaster - A Great Georgian Firm of Cabinet - Makers', p. 430

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Shaw, 'Gillows of Lancaster - A Great Georgian Firm of Cabinet - Makers', pp. 430-1. Incidentally Lord Lytton's ancestors occupied Hagley Hall and purchased some pieces from Gillows in the eighteenth-century, WCA, 344/93/549.



Shaw continues in this vein, using a quote from Thomas Pennant's *Tour of Scotland* on the quality of cabinet-making in Lancaster,<sup>142</sup> and divulging a 'story' in which a noble Lord complained that a table costing eighty guineas was 'a Devil of a price', to which Richard Gillow, allegedly, replied that it is 'a Devil of a Table', prompting the Lord to buy the piece. She states that these fine commendations could not have been possible without the ingenuity, backed up by a good education, which Richard Gillow brought to his father's firm.<sup>143</sup> The article contains many factual errors, Gillows' furniture was stamped, but the start date that Shaw gives for this process, 1790, is too late,<sup>144</sup> a 'clerk' didn't keep the cost books until the 1760's, Gillows themselves did it,<sup>145</sup> Robert Gillow did not start in 1695, but 1731<sup>146</sup>. Much of what is suggested within the text is indeed supposition, fiction, or pure myth, but the attempt is made by Bertha Shaw to get past the traditional furniture historical view of Gillows as a 'minor' or inconsequential cabinet-making firm simply because they did not produce a pattern book.

The lack of published pattern book continued to cause problems for the furniture historians, despite that fact that Gillows' archive contains enough unpublished documented evidence and detailed sketches to produce a provenance for a piece. Gordon Nares' exposé of furniture at Farnley Hall, focused upon the 'documented Gillows furniture at Farnley', using the surviving bills at the house,<sup>147</sup> my figs. 80-2 show one of the documented designs from Farnley Hall. Nares also made some speculations about furniture for which there were no bills, but that *might* be attributable to Gillows, including a horse-shoe shaped wine-table and a chair with a Greek fret.<sup>148</sup> For Nares the fact that the chair is similar to one produced by Gillows' for Browsholme Hall, the home

<sup>142</sup> The quote from 1776 is also used by Edwards and Macquoid, vol. II, p. 243, see my appendix III

<sup>143</sup> Shaw, 'Gillows of Lancaster - A Great Georgian Firm of Cabinet - Makers', p. 431

<sup>144</sup> It is likely that Gillows' began stamping their wares in the 1770's, but the exact date within this decade is not known, Boynton, pp. 15 and 31

<sup>145</sup> The name of the clerk or clerks is not known, nor is the date that he/they worked for the Firm. There is a change in the level of written English used in the letters after 1764 and letter after letter is written in the same hand. Lindsay Boynton has proposed that the early letters were written by Robert and Richard, and later letters (post 1764) by a clerk. Hartley Library, MS 301, box 46, folder 1, Lindsay Boynton's own notes. Most letters pre-1800 are signed by either Robert the elder or Richard, consistently by Richard after Robert's retirement in 1769, or by 'Gillows'.

<sup>146</sup> Boynton, pp. 1 and 18 and in WCA 344, the earliest record is dated 1731.

<sup>147</sup> Gordon Nares, 'Furniture at Farnley Hall', *Country Life*, part III, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1954, CXV, p. 2099

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

of Thomas Lister Parker, a friend of Walter Fawkes of Farnley, is enough to suggest that it is by Gillows.<sup>149</sup> Nares did not check his assumptions, he was happy to make unfounded statements without consulting Gillows' own books. In Gillows' estimate sketch books 1784-1800 there are 13 entries relating to Clock cases, some were made for clock-makers, such as Messrs. Brison, Sailsbury and Bell, but sometimes Gillows made complete clocks themselves.<sup>150</sup> Susan E. Stuart has published some work on Gillows' clock cases, including an article that asserted that Gillows had made the first white dial clock for a 1772 voyage of *The Salisbury*, costing £3 13s 6d on 22<sup>nd</sup> January of that year.<sup>151</sup> Prior to Stuart's work the first white dial clock was thought to have been made by Thomas Worswick on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1773, Worswick had heralded the new fashion for white enamel clock faces, and it may be, states Stuart, that Gillows' clock is the earliest example known today.<sup>152</sup> In a later article Stuart investigated a 1760 illustration for a clock case from the Gillow books at the Westminster City Archives.<sup>153</sup> Stuart suggests that this early drawing was directly influenced by Chippendale, although she doesn't say where Chippendale's design can be found. Although Stuart does not state it explicitly, there is an implicit notion that if Gillows had published a pattern book the problem of authorship would not be so complex. As a prototype for subsequent Lancastrian longcase clocks, writes Stuart, the Gillow drawing highlights how the provinces were behind the times - as by 1760 longcase clocks were no longer *en vogue* in London.<sup>154</sup> Stuart's notion of a dilution or dissemination of London design ideas in the Midlands and the North is nothing new, neither is her criticism of Gillows as lacking in innovation and originality.<sup>155</sup> Without a published pattern book to reinforce their designs Gillows flounder on the edge of furniture history, they may have made the first white dial clock, but how can we be sure?

<sup>149</sup> Nares, 'Furniture at Farnley Hall', p. 2099

<sup>150</sup> Nicholas Goodison, 'Gillows' Clock Cases', *Antiquarian Horology*, March 1968, (re-printed article in a pamphlet format)

<sup>151</sup> Susan E. Stuart, 'The first white dial Longcase Clocks and their cases, 1772-3', *Antiquarian Horology*, December 1982, vol. 13, no. 6, p. 535

<sup>152</sup> Stuart 'The first white dial Longcase Clocks and their cases, 1772-3', p. 543

<sup>153</sup> Susan E. Stuart, 'A Neat Clockcase, Ornamented', *Antiquarian Horology*, December 1984, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 125-43

<sup>154</sup> Stuart, 'A Neat Clockcase, Ornamented', p. 141

<sup>155</sup> Fastnedge, *Sheraton Furniture*, p. 36, offers an example of this, using, once again, the quote from Nemnich.

The lack of pattern book was tackled obliquely by Pat Kirkham, when in 1988 she introduced the idea that Gillows were generally ‘different’ from other furniture-making firms. Kirkham noted that when Gillows started in London they charged higher apprenticeship fees than other furniture-making firms working in the West End, but that by the 1790’s their rates had in fact become cheaper than those of the other firms.<sup>156</sup> The average firm employed between forty and fifty men with three or four apprentices, and yet between 1771 and 1813 Gillows bound 18 apprentices, with each apprenticeship lasting 7 years, Gillows had ten in employment in 1794 and ten in employment in 1797. After 1798 the numbers fell off and they took on the usual three or four, reflecting, suggests Kirkham, the demise of the apprenticeship system.<sup>157</sup> Kirkham also comments on the fact that Gillows were not ‘typical’ of West End firms because although they employed around a hundred men at one time, much of their cabinet-making was actually done in Lancaster and sent to London.<sup>158</sup> Using the oft-quoted Nemnich, through the work of Ralph Fastnedge,<sup>159</sup> Kirkham suggests that Gillows ‘sometimes attracted comments about their lack of originality in design’,<sup>160</sup> but that they produced ‘a considerable amount of quality goods at reasonable cost’ which could, she submits, be the reason for the comments.<sup>161</sup> But although Kirkham seems keen to look at Gillows with fresh eyes, she is dealing with eighteenth-century furniture manufactory as a whole, and Gillows are only a tiny part of that larger story. Kirkham is also not seeking to refute the work of previous furniture historians, merely to re-establish its perimeters, providing a discussion of furniture-making linked to working practices and the onset of industrialisation.<sup>162</sup> The fact that Gillows seemed to be ‘different’ did not lead Kirkham to undertake further investigation.

<sup>156</sup> Kirkham, ‘The London Furniture trade, 1700-1870’, p. 48

<sup>157</sup> Kirkham, ‘The London Furniture trade, 1700-1870’, p. 49

<sup>158</sup> Kirkham, ‘The London Furniture trade, 1700-1870’, p. 78

<sup>159</sup> Fastnedge, *Sheraton Furniture*, p. 36, Kirkham references Fastnedge and he, in turn, uses Nemnich.

<sup>160</sup> Kirkham, ‘The London Furniture trade, 1700-1870’, p. 48

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Kirkham, ‘The London Furniture trade, 1700-1870’, p. 1

Outside of published furniture history Gillows were the subject of a 1971 exhibition at Abbott Hall Art Gallery in Kendal.<sup>163</sup> The curating team, Mary E. Burkett, Mrs. Edith Tyson and Mrs. Davidson How, produced a monograph about Gillows and their work in and around Lancashire, building upon Burkett's 1969 work on the firm.<sup>164</sup> The monograph contains a description of a scene from Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*, in which Josephine, Captain Corcoran's daughter unfavourably compares her probable future lot, marriage to a common sailor, with her current situation 'papa's luxurious home' where 'everything that isn't old is from Gillows'.<sup>165</sup> The authors highlight the contemporary view of the firm with a quote from 1807:

the town [Lancaster] has been long famous for the great quantities of mahogany furniture, which have been made in it for home-use and exportation ... MR. Gillow's extensive ware-rooms, stored with every article of useful and ornamental mahogany furniture, are well worth the attention of the strange[r], as they are said to be the best stocked of any in this line, out of the metropolis.<sup>166</sup>

Although Mary E. Burkett's work is akin to that of Shaw and other furniture historians, she also speculates on the nature of the Gillows stamp, suggesting that between 1780 and 1790 GILLOW was written above LANCASTER in capital letters, less than 2 millimetres in height, see for example fig. 82. Then from 1790 to 1800 GILLOWS.LANCASTER, see for example figs. 40 and 120, then from 1800 to c. 1850 GILLOW, 2 and a half millimetres high, and finally 'GILLOW&Co.' on a brass plate from c. 1850 to c. 1890. The Gillows' stamp has become a subject for discussion, analysed by, for example, Lindsay Boynton,<sup>167</sup> it is surrounded by questions as it offers a statement of 'authenticity', the sort of 'label' liked by the furniture historians. But there is evidence that some antique dealers 'removed' or wrote over Gillows stamp, as for example a Gillows' stamp stamped over with the name 'Edwards and Rogers' in fig. 121, in order to market the piece as Sheraton, Hepplewhite or Adam.<sup>168</sup> This is proof that pieces by named makers were thought be more desirable and therefore to achieve higher prices, and also suggests that

<sup>163</sup> M. E. Burkett (Ed.), *The Furniture of Gillow of Lancaster*, exhibition at Abbott Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, Westmorland, 1971.

<sup>164</sup> Burkett, M. E. *The furniture of Gillows of Lancaster*, Lancaster City Art Gallery, Lancaster, 1969

<sup>165</sup> Burkett, 1969, p. 4, *HMS Pinafore* was written in 1878.

<sup>166</sup> Burkett, 1971, p. 2, quoting Clark, *Historical and Descriptive Account of Lancaster*, Lancaster, 1807

<sup>167</sup> Boynton, pp. 15 and 31

<sup>168</sup> Boynton, p. 15

the furniture historians' reluctance to admit a clear and truthful account of Gillows into their history was highly effective.

Other work on the firm of Gillows includes a Masters thesis on the Lancastrian side of their business practices by Sarah Nichols at the University of Delaware. Nichols readily aligns her business history with the beliefs of furniture history, writing that Gillows 'did not produce top class furniture' but that they successfully cornered the middle class market.<sup>169</sup> She notes that Gillows produced mainly designs which were a simplification of 'Adamesque neo-classicism',<sup>170</sup> and even uses the Mrs. Piozzi example. But her view is that with the shift from Lancaster to London Gillows became 'a metropolitan firm with one of its factories in the provinces',<sup>171</sup> no longer a provincial firm with aspirations of moving to the Capital. She praises Gillows' proficiency, productivity and organisation and gives a detailed account of their working practices, including their repair and clearing work and their exports and second-hand dealings.<sup>172</sup> Her text contains some errors, such as confusion over Thomas Gillow, Gillows' cousin and later business partner, stating that 'Thomas left in 1779', when that was actually the year that he died.<sup>173</sup> Working with a microfilm copy of the Westminster City Archive's Gillow Books at the Winterthur Museum Library, Sarah Nichols continued her investigation into the firm. She discovered that 2 armchairs from a set of 12 chairs sold at Sotheby's in New York, 13<sup>th</sup> April 1985 (fig. 76) and attributed to Ince and Mayhew, were actually made by Gillows, Lancaster, in July 1789.<sup>174</sup> Nichols writes that 'the minor differences that occurred between the chairs and the client sketch, such as the carving on the arms and the shape of the paterae at the top of the front legs were corrected in this working sketch'.<sup>175</sup> The client was John Trafford of Trafford House, Manchester, who was charged £25 17s 6d for a delivery of items including '6 very elegant mahogany arm'd chairs', design number 10344, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1789 (fig. 75). Nichols does not find another 6 chairs, and so she

<sup>169</sup> S. Nichols, *Gillow and Co. of Lancaster, England, An Eighteenth Century Business History*, unpublished MA Thesis, University of Delaware, 1982, p. x

<sup>170</sup> Nichols, 1982, p. 15

<sup>171</sup> Nichols, 1982, p. 51

<sup>172</sup> Nichols, 1982, pp. 84-9

<sup>173</sup> Nichols, 1982, pp. 32-3, for confirmation of this see Boynton, p. 19.

<sup>174</sup> S. Nichols, 'A Journey through the Gillow Records', *Antique Collecting*, February 1986, vol. 20, no. 9, p. 36. The design features on page 514 of Gillows' estimate sketch book, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1789.

presumes that the 12 chairs in the Sotherby's sale must not be of the original design. In a reference to Trafford in the Gillow Letter books, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1789, she found a letter to Trafford that indicated that he had ordered 'a pattern chair of the same sort', suggesting that Gillows had made the 'Trafford' chair before. Going back to the original chairs Nichols discovered that they had a design number, 10827 WL, which post-dated the Trafford chairs that she had originally located the design for in the Gillow ESB. 'WL' are the journeyman's initials, in this case Will Lupton, whose name appears on the petty ledger as making 6 mahogany chairs, number 10827 on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1790 for an 'M. Parker' of Halifax.<sup>176</sup> Nichols finds two letters in the letter books about the delays in sending the customer the chairs and concludes that these chairs are in fact 'Parker' chairs and that they represent a fascinating insight into what business records can yield. Nichols uncovered what other furniture historians did not bother to: that it is possible to locate a provenance for an item using the Gillows' books. However, she also works within the furniture system created by the furniture historians, looking for decorative details, names, dates and owners, classifying the piece, searching out the story that envelops the antique object, marks its authenticity, and corrects the existing provenance.

The firm of Gillows appears briefly in some other furniture historical texts, but for the most part the furniture historians have simply chosen to repeat the 'tales' that have sprung up around the firm. However Hugh Honour noted that 'the best of firms of a similar type in Europe – Gillows in England and Jacob-Desmaller in France' could be likened to the New York furniture-making firm of Duncan Phyfe.<sup>177</sup> Ralph Fastnedge used the Nemnich quote, but he also mentioned in *English Furniture Styles* that George Hepplewhite was an apprentice of Gillows of Lancaster in 1760,<sup>178</sup> a 'fact' not borne out by Gillows' books.<sup>179</sup> Fowler and Cornforth mentioned Gillows twice, denouncing their curtain designs thus: 'display could easily degenerate into sheer vulgarity as can be seen

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<sup>175</sup> Nichols, 'A Journey through the Gillow Records', 1986, p. 36

<sup>176</sup> Nichols, 'A Journey through the Gillow Records', 1986, p. 37

<sup>177</sup> Honour, p. 208

<sup>178</sup> Fastnedge, p. 196

<sup>179</sup> Hepplewhite's name does not appear in the list of journeymen and workmen in the ledgers, WCA 344, and my appendix I.

in some of the Gillow designs',<sup>180</sup> and stating that the firm made a tent-bed in 1820.<sup>181</sup> Various articles have been published on the firm in *Country Life*, such as R. W. Symonds' work on the Workington Hall dining suite: the uncomfortable dining chairs that are now known to have originally been designed by Gillows as hall chairs, something Symonds could have found out for himself had he looked hard enough.<sup>182</sup> And Sir Nicholas Goodison and John Hardy have explored the Gillow pieces at Tatton Park, producing an article for *Furniture History*, and providing information for the display within, and the guide-book for, the house.<sup>183</sup> When Gillows' items come up for sale at auction they are enclosed within the furniture system, but Gillows own 'name' does not have enough credence by itself and is therefore supplemented in provenance by other 'names', as it was in K. W. Clouston's early work when he looked to Adam as a recognisable designer/maker.<sup>184</sup> An entry in a Christie's Sale catalogue, for example, for a side table formerly of Kinmel Park, offers a description that focuses on placing the piece firmly within the furniture system. The table is 'Regency' and it is 'attributed to Gillows and... to Samuel Wyatt'.<sup>185</sup> The table is related to as many 'known' names as possible, the architect Samuel Wyatt is noted as the designer of the piece, and two pattern books are mentioned as possible source material for the ornament 'Charles Heathcote Tatham's *Etchings of Ancient Ornamental Architecture* and George Smith's *Collection of Designs* (1803)'.<sup>186</sup> Even a Gillows' patent table, an item with its own provenance in the form of a plaque, is envisioned as an item desirable for its 'other' historical links:

*A Gillows Patent* telescopic dining table, standing on eight turned, reeded and tapering legs with brass casters. The top with an inset brass plaque  
*Gillows Patent – No. 50, circa. 1800* ... The table was owned by Loftus

<sup>180</sup> Fowler and Cornforth, p. 118, the authors are referring to an 1825 design by Gillows for a window 'dressing'.

<sup>181</sup> Fowler and Cornforth, p. 145

<sup>182</sup> The Workington Hall suite 'dining chairs' as described by R. W. Symonds, were in fact fine draped back Hall chairs, excruciatingly uncomfortable, unlike actual Gillow dining chairs.

R. W. Symonds, 'A Suite of Dining Room Furniture, Workington Hall', *Antique Collector*, November/December 1946. Revoked by S. Nichols, 'Furniture made by Gillow and Company for Workington Hall' in *Antiques*, CXXVII, no. 6, June 1985

<sup>183</sup> N. Goodison and J. Hardy, 'Gillows at Tatton Park', *Furniture VI*, 1970 and *Tatton Park – The Mansion*, The National Trust, 1972, 1982, 1987, 1992.

<sup>184</sup> Clouston, 1897, p. 131

<sup>185</sup> Christie's 'Furniture Sale Catalogue', 8<sup>th</sup> July 1993, item 61, Kinmel Park side-table, p. 73

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

Joseph Wigram Arkwright landlord of Mark Hall, Great, Great Grandson of Sir Richard Arkwright of 'Spinning Jenny' fame.<sup>187</sup>

Perhaps 'Sir Richard Arkwright' carries more historical weight than Gillows. The table and its provenance are illustrated in figs. 111 and 112, and a sketch of a telescopic dining table by Gillows is in fig. 113.

The slip-jacket to *The Dictionary of English Furniture* records that in 1924-27 the volumes were 'instantly recognised as the primary reference on the evolution of English furniture from the Middle Ages to the late Georgian period'.<sup>188</sup> After the second revised, enlarged and many times reprinted edition of 1954, the volumes were 'a comprehensive survey of the whole wide field of English domestic furniture. Later research has added details but the basic body of knowledge remains unchallenged'.<sup>189</sup> Sadly this is still the case, fifty years on. The history of furniture, reliant upon placing furniture within a system of categories and sub-groups of 'style' and 'name', upon pattern books, upon decorative details, upon 'stories' of the great cabinet-makers, upon authentic, proven objects, has excluded much information from its annals. The snippets, tokens of information and tunnelled investigations of pieces at certain houses, contained within the texts by the furniture historians can be gathered together to offer a fractured image of the firm of Gillows, a mixture of fact and fiction, jostling for position in a discipline dominated by Chippendale and his cohorts. Lindsay Boynton has since sought to question Gillows position in this history of furniture, to provide a complete biography of the firm that would challenge the furniture historians' preoccupation with those who published the pattern books. The next question, to be asked and answered in chapter two, is has he been successful?

<sup>187</sup> Auction Catalogue, Mr. and Mrs. Long, Colne House, Earls Colne, Essex, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1983, Lot 187.

<sup>188</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, slip jacket, vol. I

<sup>189</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, slip jacket, vol. I



## CHAPTER 2

### SEARCHING FOR THE AUTHOR:

#### A BIOGRAPHY OF GILLOWS AND THEIR FURNITURE DESIGNS, 1760-1800

##### Introduction: Lindsay Boynton's work as Biography:

In 1995 Dr. Lindsay Boynton, an historian, published *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*.<sup>1</sup> It has become the culmination of Boynton's work into the firm, as he sadly died just after its publication, having researched Gillows and their furniture since 1966. The book contains a series of sketches from the Gillows' archive at the WCA, alongside a short monograph about the firm and their accomplishments. Although the volume is more pictorial than written, Boynton's text does tackle the question of why Gillows, as a name, is not as well known as that of other furniture-making firms. Echoing the wishes of Bertha Shaw, Boynton has attempted through his book to raise the name of 'Gillows' to the standard of the 'Great Georgian Cabinet-Makers',<sup>2</sup> those that form separate sub-groups within the furniture system. These cabinet-makers were, as we have seen, famous individuals, heroes, dominating the discipline of furniture history not only in terms of the pattern books and furniture that they produced but also with the stories of their own lives. Furniture history has provided a series of biographies; large works such as Christopher Gilbert's *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*<sup>3</sup> and smaller entries in dictionaries on the subject.<sup>4</sup> As such furniture history has evolved along the lines of what E. H. Carr referred to as the 'cult of the individual'<sup>5</sup> attributing the 'history of furniture' to a few 'known' makers. The individuals within furniture history provide a catalyst for that 'history', a number of sub-groups within the furniture system, making it easier to pigeonhole items as being by a named 'maker' or even as being in the 'style' of that maker. In *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*, Boynton provides the reader with just

<sup>1</sup> Lindsay Boynton, *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*, (Royston: Bloomfield Press, 1995)

<sup>2</sup> Bertha Shaw, 'Gillows of Lancaster - A Great Georgian Firm of Cabinet - Makers', *Country Life*, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1947, CII, p. 430

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, (London: Studio Vista: 1978)

<sup>4</sup> See for example my appendices III, IV and V for the respective entries for Gillows, Thomas Chippendale and Catherine Naish, from Ralph Edwards and Percy Macquoid, *The Dictionary of English Furniture*, in three volumes, (London: Country Life, 1954)

such a catalyst. Rather than giving us simply a series of designs, or historical occurrences, Boynton devises a persona within his text, a ‘creator’ of the designs, an ‘author’, ‘The Firm of Gillow’.

Since its publication Boynton’s text has become *the* definitive work on Gillows, consulted by the ‘experts’ when they uncover a piece that they think might have been made by the firm. Lindsay Boynton himself is considered an ‘expert’ in the field, and is hence quoted in provenance and in auction catalogue descriptions.<sup>6</sup> His book was sponsored by, subscribed to and purchased by the auction houses, museums and historians<sup>7</sup> that have contributed to the perpetuation of furniture history. *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800* is welcomed into the discipline, suggesting that is a work that conforms to the ideals of furniture history, and in some ways it is. The book can be read as a life story of the firm, told in order to make sense of the furniture that they made. Boynton, like any good furniture historian, searches for that all-important ‘style’ that the name ‘Gillow’ can be applied to, looking to create a category for them within furniture history. Akin to ‘Chippendale’ or ‘Linnells’, as presented by Christopher Gilbert or Helena Hayward and Pat Kirkham, ‘Gillow’ becomes a ‘name’ with a meaning and a ‘story’ all of its own. The style of Boynton’s publication, a brief introductory essay and then a large number of illustrations, evokes that of the eighteenth-century pattern books, or the early survey texts of furniture history. However Boynton does declare his intentions not to simply accept the way in which furniture history prioritises the individual makers and dislikes unfavourable associations. He notes the reliance of the furniture historians upon the pattern book<sup>8</sup> and derides the reluctance of dealers, to sell furniture made by a firm that retains the stigma of having been assimilated into the High

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<sup>5</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 46

<sup>6</sup> For example, Mallet Auction House, 2 Davies Street, London, referred to Boynton’s book in its furniture sale catalogue, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Lindsay Boynton’s text was published by sponsorship and subscription, the sponsors and subscribers are listed in the front of book, they include Christie’s, Sotheby’s, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and furniture historians Helena Hayward and Sir Nicholas Goodison, Boynton, pp. 11-14

<sup>8</sup> ‘... why have Chippendale, Sheraton, and Hepplewhite lent their names to major furniture styles – but not Gillows? The fundamental reason is that Gillows did not see fit to publish a pattern-book’, Boynton, p. 16

Streets of many towns in the 1970's.<sup>9</sup> But the book is still a construction, produced by one person, Boynton's view of Gillows' life, and as such raises the question of whether or not it contains the same inclusions and exclusions, the reoccurring 'facts', that have built up the image of Gillows within furniture history. However, if we are to read this work as a biography, are we faced with a set of problems?

When dealing with a biography similar problems arise as when dealing with a history. Similarities exist between the two, and suggest that biography, like history, should be read with caution. Both forms of writing have 'authors', they both present a 'story' of a particular thing, they both deal with events that have occurred before they were written, and the focus of a biography is upon a 'person',<sup>10</sup> something that history is accused of doing from time to time.<sup>11</sup> E. H. Carr's analysis warns us that as a construction the written history has a person behind it and therefore the first question to be asked is who is writing? In a biography, as with a history, the author is the one who selects the 'facts', places them in a certain order and presents them to us. Roland Barthes' theories can once again join those of Carr, this time Barthes provides the means of analysing the person behind the writing. In his essay 'The Death of the Author' Barthes refers to the 'author' as we most commonly know 'him' as the writer of a book or a play: a 'narrator' who puts forward a story or 'narrative' to a 'receiver' or reader, and is thus a key player in the game of communication.<sup>12</sup> However, Barthes' 'author' like Carr's historian, is incapable of presenting an unbiased narrative to the reader. The 'author', when creating a character, puts as much of himself into the story as he does of the fictional persona, and therefore an 'endless exchange between the "personality" and the "art" ' occurs.<sup>13</sup> Barthes writes that we must be aware of this; '*who speaks* (in the narrative) is not *who*

<sup>9</sup> '... its name was unfortunately perpetuated in a chain of 'Waring & Gillow' shops ... Dealers in fine English furniture were faced with a dilemma: ... Gillows was redolent of 'Waring &' ... The solution ... to market the piece as 'Sheraton', 'Hepplewhite', or even 'Adam', Boynton, p. 15

<sup>10</sup> This reading is influenced by Professor Dana Arnold's paper, 'Biography and Architectural History' at the *Biographical Knowledge* Conference, 31<sup>st</sup> March – 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2003, Cambridge University, CRASSH Centre.

<sup>11</sup> Carr, p. 46

<sup>12</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Death of the Author' in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p.109

<sup>13</sup> Barthes, 1977, p.110

writes (in real life) and *who writes* is not *who is*',<sup>14</sup> the characters are fictional, the writer is real and therefore the latter is the true author; his name being on the cover. Whether it be for telling a fictional story or for relaying 'facts' in a narrative form, the author is the one who presents his/her perception of what has taken place (or what they imagine could take place) to the 'receiver' in the form of their (the author's) choice. In this way 'the "author" is not the person who invents the finest stories but the person who best masters the code which is practiced equally by his listeners'.<sup>15</sup> The author of a text, especially a historical or biographical text, provides the information that the reader receives, the material presented is what the author has already read and interpreted and decided to present. The author has an agenda and knowing that agenda can help the reader to understand the text. So, with this thought in mind, who was Dr. Lindsay Boynton?

Unfortunately no biography of Boynton exists, but a picture of him and what he did academically can be drawn from the papers that he left behind from his research into Gillows, which now constitute MS 301, the Lindsay Boynton Archive in the Hartley Library at the University of Southampton [appendix], and from the rest of his published work. A copy of Boynton's curriculum vitae tells us that he was a student at Oxford University, where he gained a degree in modern history in 1955. It tells us that he stayed at Oxford and gained a PhD in 1962 and that he worked as a lecturer at the University of Leeds and at the University of London.<sup>16</sup> It also tells us that he was a prolific writer, publishing work not only on furniture history, articles for example on Ince and Mayhew and the furniture at Appuldurcombe Park,<sup>17</sup> but also on other and varied historical subjects, such as the Georgian villas on the Isle of Wight<sup>18</sup> and *The Elizabethan Militia*.<sup>19</sup> Written essays in the archive suggest further topics for publication, for example the Moravian Church settlements<sup>20</sup> and Sir Richard Worsley.<sup>21</sup> Lindsay Boynton is recorded

<sup>14</sup> Barthes, 1977, p.112, comparable to Jacques Lacan: 'Is the subject I speak of when I speak the same as the subject who speaks?'

<sup>15</sup> Barthes, p. 114

<sup>16</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, box 65, part 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Furniture History*, 1965, pp. 39-58 and 1966, pp. 21-36

<sup>18</sup> Lindsay Boynton, 'The Marine Villa', in *The Georgian Villa*, ed. Dana Arnold, (Stroud: Sutton, 1996) pp. 118-29

<sup>19</sup> Lindsay Boynton, *The Elizabethan Militia 1558-1638*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967)

<sup>20</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, box 50, part 4, folder 1

<sup>21</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, box 52, part 4, folder 4

as being a founder member of the Furniture History Society,<sup>22</sup> and as the instigator of the acceptance of the Gillow Archive into the Westminster City Archives, preventing it from being sent abroad.<sup>23</sup> The large number of photographs in the Hartley Library archive of furniture either in situ or at auctions, suggests that Boynton was always looking out for possible Gillow furniture, that he was an avid reader of trade magazines and sale catalogues.<sup>24</sup> Also, by accident rather than by design, we know that Lindsay Boynton enjoyed gardening and buying postcards.<sup>25</sup> This picture of Boynton's 'life' is a distorted one, the 'facts' presented in the archive at the Hartley Library are those that are pertinent to Boynton's work on Gillows, as this is the function of the archive. The auxiliary information, such as the curriculum vitae, postcards and notes on gardening and other research build up only a slightly fuller image of the man behind the book, as does his other published work. I did not have the opportunity to meet Lindsay Boynton before he died, I did not know him and therefore my knowledge of him comes solely from what I have read. From the scant information about him we can interpret Boynton in a number of different ways, giving him different agendas for writing *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*. We can see him as an eclectic historian with no specialism, looking to analyse the impact of one small firm upon the larger 'history' of the second half of the eighteenth-century. Or, conversely, we can see him as a specialist, as a furniture historian, having helped to found the Furniture History Society, producing a text that conforms to the ideals of his fellow furniture historians. Or we can see him as an outright fan of Gillows, saving their archive, championing their cause, writing a biography of a 'great' but ignored firm. Or we can see him as an amateur gardener who liked buying postcards, reading sale catalogues and also wrote some books, including one about Gillows. If we were selecting the 'facts' to promote the work of Lindsay Boynton, it would be prudent to view him as an academic, whose book is suitably affirmed by his qualifications, his teaching experience and his other published work. It is true that Boynton has the necessary qualifications to recommend him as an authority on Gillows at

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<sup>22</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, box 32, part 8, folders 1-7

<sup>23</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, Box 10, part 3, folder 1, the appeal was successful in 1966.

<sup>24</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, see appendix II for the number of boxes that contained photographs of furniture or trade or sale catalogues.

<sup>25</sup> A number articles can be found in the archive relating to gardening, and there is a large number of postcards from places that Lindsay Boynton has visited during his lifetime.

least, having studied their books for thirty years and searched for and photographed their furniture all over the country, but his 'biography' reveals some conflicting information. Boynton was at the same time a general and specialised historian; he was both a champion of Gillows' cause and also a furniture historian. This leads us to the question of whether or not Boynton's contentious past is visible through his work on Gillows. Does understanding Lindsay Boynton help us to understand his book and in turn the image of Gillows that he presents to his readers?

Although the 'story' told to us by Lindsay Boynton has its basis in fact rather than being fictional, the creation of it involves a process comparable with that of both history and fiction. As Barthes analysis suggests, the 'author', in all of these cases is, to a certain extent, the 'creator' of the 'myth'.<sup>26</sup> A 'story' in this sense is merely a list of signs encoded in a correct time-old format: 'once upon a time...happily ever after'. As with Carr's historian, Barthes' author is the one who selects the mode of telling the story. Barthes suggests that the writer is only able to create the 'myth' if the reader buys into it, the 'story' needs to be relayed in a believable manner. To this end there are many different ways of telling the story. The 'story' of Gillows, for example, could be one that focuses upon the object, the evolution for example of the Gillow chair.<sup>27</sup> It could be a story that focuses upon the economic factors, the lack of ready timber, Gillows' import and export issues, payment being taken in kind rather than in cash.<sup>28</sup> The story could be centred upon Gillows' clientele, or upon their Catholic connection, upon their role in Lancastrian society or even upon their warehouse space or general working practices. Boynton's choice of biography as his medium is indicative, as he states in his book, of his desire to change the way that furniture history has perceived Gillows so far.<sup>29</sup> The 'myth' that has already been created about the firm, with incorrect start dates, the stigma of being provincial and middle class, the occasional and usually inaccurate brushes with fame, is one that Boynton felt needed to be revoked. His work goes some way to refuting

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<sup>26</sup> Barthes, 1977, pp. 110-17

<sup>27</sup> This type of story-telling has been attempted by, for example, Nicholas Goodison. Nicholas Goodison, 'Gillows' Clock Cases', *Antiquarian Horology*, March 1968.

<sup>28</sup> This has been attempted by, for example, Sarah Nichols. S. Nichols, *Gillow and Co. of Lancaster, England, An Eighteenth Century Business History*, unpublished MA Thesis, University of Delaware, 1982

<sup>29</sup> Boynton, p. 15

the errors contained within the shorter biographical texts of furniture history, placing his, corrected, version in its place, offering his reader *the*, definitive, 'Gillow'. But the biographer, like the historian, is filling in the gaps, there are things that he cannot know and conclusions and assumptions that he must make.<sup>30</sup> The mode of representation, the dates and the format that Boynton has chosen, cause him further problems than simply a lack of complete information. In order to present the definitive Gillow to the reader, Boynton must blend the individuals that made up the firm into a cohesive whole. In doing so he will have a single 'author' and if he can uncover for that author a particular 'style', he can produce the things that are needed to provide Gillows with their own subgroup in the furniture system. The concept of the 'author' is thus doubly important in the biography of Gillows, as we have, in effect, two authors at work: Boynton himself and 'The Firm of Gillow'. Boynton offers us a biography that, like many biographies before it and probably many to come after it, deals with the life of an 'author', but in this case the author is a construction: 'The Firm of Gillow'. As Boynton is the author of the biography, Gillows are indeed the authors of the designs and items that are referred to within the text. But within Boynton's biography there is actually more than one 'Gillow' whose life story is being recorded for he is faced with a series of 'characters', separate authors, who, between 1760 and 1800 designed and made the furniture which Boynton wishes to label as indicative of the 'Gillow style'. Boynton solves this problem by bringing these characters together under the encompassing title of 'The Firm of Gillow'. But his desire to present several authors to us as one synchronous whole, means that Boynton is constructing his own version of the life story of the firm. There are different versions of the of the life of Gillows within furniture history, and Boynton offers his readers yet another one.

Barthes resents the focus of literary criticism upon the 'author', the sender of the narrative, he writes that 'the unity of a text is not in its *origin* but in its *destination*'.<sup>31</sup> All the things that influence that text and influence in turn the writer of that text; history,

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<sup>30</sup> Influenced by Hermione Lee's paper 'Shelley's Heart, Pepys's Lobsters, and the Problems of Literary Biography', *Biographical Knowledge* Conference, 31<sup>st</sup> March – 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2003, Cambridge University, CRASSH Centre.

<sup>31</sup> Barthes, 1977, p. 111, the words in italic are my emphasis.

culture, knowledge and so on, come together in the text only when it is 'received' by the reader. Michel Foucault also notes the peculiarity of the 'man-and-his-work' form of criticism that prioritizes this life of the 'author' over that of the 'hero'.<sup>32</sup> Foucault does not think that simply 'losing' or dismissing the author is the way to a higher understanding of the 'work', as the idea of 'work' itself designates a unity of form which is as problematic as the 'author' himself.<sup>33</sup> Neither does he believe that we, as readers, can simply accept that the author has 'gone', because of the empty space that he leaves behind.<sup>34</sup> The author's name provides a 'classificatory function', establishing a 'relationship of homogeneity, filiation, [and] authentication' between texts by the same author<sup>35</sup>, a 'person' umbrella under which the texts can be placed. Foucault writes that even in modern literary criticism 'the author provides the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications'.<sup>36</sup> Boynton provides us with an author in the form of 'The Firm of Gillow' because this is what furniture history requires. In furniture history, as discussed in the previous chapter, the furniture is explained through biography, through the 'life' of the maker, the 'author' of the piece, Chippendale's name is used to create stylistic boundaries,<sup>37</sup> as if we can only make sense of the furniture of the period through the named maker. The 'author' in furniture history is assigned various items that can be proved, or at least assumed, to be by him. In this way furniture history conforms to the Foucauldian and Barthian belief that the focus is, too often, upon the individual author. But with biography as a chosen medium we can not get away from 'people': a biography is a person's interpretation of another person. But the theorists prompt us to question the furniture historians' reliance upon biography.

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<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *Essential Works 1954-1984*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. 205, it is worth noting again that furniture history raises the standard of the 'author' of the pattern books to that of the 'hero' within its texts, but criticizes neither to any great extent.

<sup>33</sup> Foucault, p. 208

<sup>34</sup> Foucault, p. 209

<sup>35</sup> Foucault, p. 210-11

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, p. 214

<sup>37</sup> This can be seen for instance in the work of Ralph Fastnedge, Chapter 6 in his book *English Furniture Styles* was entitled 'The pre-"Director" period', referring to Chippendale's pattern book, (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1962), p.5. See also the title of an article by E. T. Joy, 'A Press-bedstead of the Hepplewhite Period', *Connoisseur*, September 1963, CLIV, pp. 30-1.



Furniture history, unlike art and, to a lesser extent, architectural history, has not been challenged for retaining the type of biographical reliance that was favoured when Renaissance critic Giorgio Vasari published his *Lives of the Artists*.<sup>38</sup> The criticism, often coming from a feminist background, that has sought to remove the preoccupation with the 'genius' figure, the 'artist' and 'author' of the paintings or sculpture, from art history, has not entered the furniture historical domain. The notion that a person's work can be 'understood' through their biography, through the other things that they made or wrote, is still an acceptable form of analysis for the furniture historians. The entry for Thomas Chippendale in *The Dictionary of English Furniture* for example [appendix IV], depicts him as one 'supreme' man, as 'enterprising and energetic'.<sup>39</sup> The revised edition lists a work that has tried to muddy Chippendale's saintly reputation, but finds it wanting,<sup>40</sup> after all he is the 'hero' of furniture history. Because of Chippendale's fine personal qualities and his published pattern book, we can accept that 'the quantity and superlative excellence of his furniture ... establishes his pre-eminence beyond dispute'.<sup>41</sup>

Commenting upon Vasari's book, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock noted that this 'lengthy study of artists of the Renaissance was a forerunner of the most common genre of modern art history, the monograph, a study of the life and work of an individual artist'.<sup>42</sup> Parker and Pollock analyse the way that the few women artists contained within *Lives of the Artists* were described. Sculptress Properzia de' Rossi was 'accomplished in household management, beautiful in body, a better singer than any woman in her city and, finally, a skilled carver'.<sup>43</sup> The female artists are first and foremost women, and as such, must be able to perform their womanly duties, their domestic role in society, *before* their art. They are artists in a secondary capacity to being 'women', unlike the men who are simply defined as 'artists' without quantification. If the work of the female artist was simply a series of pictures or objects not accompanied by a life story, not asking whether a woman had painted them or carved them, it would not matter that she was woman, she

<sup>38</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

<sup>39</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, vol. II, pp. 76-7

<sup>40</sup> Kimball and Donnell 'The Creators of the Chippendale Style', *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, vol. I, part II, May and November 1929 asserted that a large part of the plates in the *Director* were in fact the invention of other cabinet-makers, but the Dictionary decides that although this true, Chippendale's own furniture is still proof of his supremacy, [see my appendix IV] Edwards and Macquoid, vol. II, pp. 74 -7

<sup>41</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, vol. II, p. 77

<sup>42</sup> R. Parker and G. Pollock, *Old Mistresses, women art and ideology*, (London: Pandora, 1981), p. 3

could just be an 'artist'. Thus the evolution of the monograph in art history has diminished the power of the female artist, depicted them as 'women' who because of this biological handicap cannot be taken seriously as artists, and eventually removed the female artists from the history altogether. 'Twentieth-century art historians have sources enough to show that women artists have existed, yet they ignore them', women artists are absent from survey works such as E. H. Gombrich's *The Story of Art* or H. W. Janson's *History of Art*.<sup>44</sup> In a similar manner furniture history has removed the furniture-makers that it cannot find life stories for, those that were not the author of an easily identifiable pattern book. But furniture history, unlike art history, has not had its reliance upon the life of the man challenged, consequently the biography continues to dominate and so does Chippendale.

We have established that within the medium of biography, relied upon by furniture history, we have 'a history of individuals, by individuals'.<sup>45</sup> But why this interest in people? The biographer Jenny Uglow suggests that it is because people can relate more easily to other people: we like individuals. Biography deals with a person through the medium of hindsight, they have been selected because of what they have done, there is no ambiguity, we already know *of* them though their deed; we want to know *about* them.<sup>46</sup> Life is given meaning through biography, as with Carr's 'facts' becoming 'historical facts', lives are only granted true memorability if they are recorded. Martin Heidegger, in his work *Being and Time*,<sup>47</sup> asserted that we are self-interpreting, that we find ourselves fixed within a material, social and historical context, constrained only by our own morality. A person can define the individual that they wish to become through the selection of properties from an infinite realm of possibility, or a person can allow others to choose for them. Who a person becomes is decreed by how they act in any given

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<sup>43</sup> Parker and Pollock, p. 9

<sup>44</sup> Parker and Pollock, p. 6

<sup>45</sup> Charles Harrison's paper: 'Partial Accounting', *Biographical Knowledge* Conference, 31<sup>st</sup> March – 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2003, Cambridge University, CRASSH Centre.

<sup>46</sup> Jenny Uglow's paper: 'The Lunar Men', *Biographical Knowledge* Conference, 31<sup>st</sup> March – 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2003, Cambridge University, CRASSH Centre,

<sup>47</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962)

situation; we are limited in these choices by the fact that death waits for us.<sup>48</sup> We are immersed in the world: our understanding of being is based upon the world and the things that we engage with while we are in it. A person can be symptomatic of their age, or they can come, effectively, to symbolise their age. Meaning can be applied to a person, they did something or took part in something and can be defined by it, or it can be derived from them, if that person changed the general course in some way, made a mark.<sup>49</sup> Heidegger suggests that there exists a 'special hermeneutic of empathy ... the possibility of understanding the stranger',<sup>50</sup> and this is why 'Being' is constantly reinterpreted through the medium of 'poetry, biography, and the writing of history'.<sup>51</sup> As people we need these reinterpretations of ourselves in order to get a better understanding of who we are and where we stand within the world around us. Diarmuid Costello's essay on the relation between people, art and the museum in *Art and Thought*<sup>52</sup> utilises the example of depictions of Christ dying on the cross to further explain Heidegger's point of view. Christ appeared as a 'suffering *human being* such images "opened a world" in which it became possible to conceive of human existence as a life of self-sacrifice and humility in the image of Christ – thereby transforming the Christian way of life'.<sup>53</sup> We are people and we can understand things through people.

In *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*, we have a biography of the Firm, of the author of various pieces of furniture. Biography is not an entirely adequate way of dealing with a 'story', the importance placed upon the individual deflects from the real issues that we should be asking of the historical archive,<sup>54</sup> in the way that the 'author' deflects for Foucault from the real issues presented by the discourse. Like history biography is selective; there are inclusions and exclusions, things that are known, and things that are

<sup>48</sup> Heidegger, pp. 188 - 95

<sup>49</sup> This reading was influenced by Adrian Rifkin's paper on Paris and biography, *Biographies and Space*, Conference, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2003, Paul Mellon Centre, Bedford Square, London.

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, p. 163

<sup>51</sup> Heidegger, p. 37

<sup>52</sup> Diarmuid Costello, 'Museum as Work in the Age of Technological Display', in Eds. M Iversen and D. Arnold, *Art and Thought*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 179-196

<sup>53</sup> Costello, 'Museum as Work in the Age of Technological Display', p. 182, the use of quotation marks and italics are Costello's emphasis.

<sup>54</sup> From Andrew Ballantyne's paper, ' "Soul of all my moral being": the Romantic landscape after Guattari', *Biographies and Space*, Conference, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2003, Paul Mellon Centre, Bedford Square, London.

not. There are things that come within biography to supersede other things, such as links to other famous lives. There are things that must be hidden away, things that might undermine the way that the individual has been presented to us. There are gaps within biography, the relation, for example, between the public persona and the private individual.<sup>55</sup> In a Barthes-inspired reading of biography the author places his own view on top of that of the person he is writing about: the two personalities are then brought together by the reader. Within a biography of those that came together to make up Gillows, Boynton leaves out pieces of information in his quest to offer the reader 'The Firm of Gillows', to add their name to the list of furniture history 'greats'. Boynton does not provide us with an illustration of any of the Gillow family members, although images of Richard can be found in the Hartley Library archive,<sup>56</sup> and yet the biography does touch upon their private lives away from the firm, as well as on their 'public' lives within it, briefly exposing a tension between the two. There is a sense that this tension is mirrored in the author of the biography; Boynton is trying to right the wrongs done to Gillows by furniture history and at the same time creating a furniture historical text. Boynton is partly reiterating the furniture historical notion of the 'hero', the 'author' of the pattern book, challenging us to accept the firm of Gillows as a single entity, as yet another 'hero' figure. This biography is the translation of a group of people's lives into a more accessible format in order to make sense of the things that they are associated with, in order to uncover the all-important style; it is Boynton's creation of the persona of the Firm, his version of the story of Gillows.

*Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800:*

Dr. Lindsay Boynton's book begins with '[a]n introductory essay surveying the firm's history and assessing its significance'.<sup>57</sup> The first sentence of this essay sets the tone for the rest of the text and provides us with its *raison d'être*: 'Gillows of Lancaster and London were one of the great cabinet-making firms of the late eighteenth and nineteenth

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<sup>55</sup> From Frances Spalding's paper 'Matisse's Armchair and Mondrian's Grocer: Modernism, Art History and Biography' *Biographical Knowledge* Conference, 31<sup>st</sup> March – 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2003, Cambridge University, CRASSH Centre.

<sup>56</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301 box 37, part 4, folder 10, portraits of Richard Gillow and his wife by 'Dashwood'.

<sup>57</sup> Boynton, slip jacket

centuries'.<sup>58</sup> It is made clear to the reader that this text is a preliminary to Boynton's 'forthcoming monograph on *Gillow Furniture*', which will 'thoroughly document' his assessment of the firm, and therefore this book is not to be taken as the final word on the subject.<sup>59</sup> Then Boynton provides us with the lynch-pin of his work, a question, why, he asks when they had no fewer than nine Dukes as their customer-base in Lancaster, is Gillows' 'name not better known?'.<sup>60</sup> This search for the reasons why 'Gillow is no longer a household word as are Chippendale, Sheraton and Hepplewhite'<sup>61</sup> dominates the rest of the text, the author aims not only to supply the answer to his question, but also to rectify the situation in which Gillows' find themselves. Within the first page of his work Boynton has offered his readers famous names, placed Gillows within a time-frame and provided the biographical focus of the text: 'Gillows of Lancaster and London' a 'great cabinet-making firm'. Not the 'people' necessarily, but the 'Firm', the author. Boynton explains to the reader how and why Gillows' pieces have been thus far ignored. The reasons he gives are that Gillows were seen as a provincial firm; that the indicating mark on their furniture has been removed or over-stamped (see fig. 121) and therefore much of it has gone unrecognised; that Gillows' pieces have been sold as 'Sheraton' or 'Hepplewhite'; that the disposal of items from country houses and their subsequent demolition has scattered Gillows' furniture and made it difficult to trace; that the merger with Waring turned furniture historians and buyers against the firm; and that the lack of a published pattern book has meant that Gillows have been able to slip through furniture history virtually unnoticed.<sup>62</sup> With these reasons Boynton demonstrates a keen awareness of the way in which furniture history has been constructed, its hatred of provincial firms, its reliance upon labels and names, its close association with the auction houses and its love of the pattern book. Boynton then seeks to refute the common misconception of the firm with a string of 'successes'. Gillows were regarded favourably by their

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<sup>58</sup> Boynton, p. 15

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. The words in italics are Boynton's emphasis, as they function as title of his proposed work. It is interesting to note that Boynton's follow-up was also to be in the form of a 'monograph', thus assuring its place within furniture history.

<sup>60</sup> Boynton, p. 15

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Boynton, p. 15

contemporaries,<sup>63</sup> their wares can be found in leading museums around the world,<sup>64</sup> the correction of existing errors which have harmed the firm, such as the Workington Hall 'Dining' suite (see fig. 115),<sup>65</sup> Gillows reasons for keeping their designs 'exclusive', and ergo a lack of publication,<sup>66</sup> the size of the archive, the collaboration with Wyatt and finally their Catholic connection.<sup>67</sup> He explains how the Gillow Archive at the Westminster City Archives can be used. First of all as a factual record of Gillows' working practices, then as a means of tracing, theoretically, any item that they made, and finally as a means of demonstrating the exclusivity of the Gillow designs, of illustrating how the 'Gillow style' was safeguarded. He places Gillows' unpublished designs in direct opposition to those of Chippendale, which composed in Boynton's words, part of 'a lake in which anyone might fish'.<sup>68</sup> This is a bold move considering the furniture historians' love of Chippendale and the precarious relationship between the furniture historians and Gillows. Boynton reasserts his position as a rogue furniture historian with his wish to defy 'Dealers in fine English furniture' who had been known to 'excise the mark' of the firm of Gillow.<sup>69</sup> The means for doing so, is the re-establishment of the Firm as the 'author' as a true 'designer-maker' in the furniture historical sense. 'Gillow', a firm whose furniture should receive the same attention as that of the 'known' firms already does.

From modest beginnings in provincial Lancaster the Gillow family forged ahead: by the third quarter of the century their London shop and manufactory, established in 1769, was prominent among the capital's cabinet-making firms.<sup>70</sup>

This key phrase proffers the reader the two main threads running constantly through this Gillow biography: family and success. Lindsay Boynton provides a veritable family tree

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<sup>63</sup> Boynton, p. 16 and p. 31, note 7, here Boynton uses the same Nemnich quote favoured by the furniture historians, see my appendix III, and 'that excellent maker Mr. GILLOW', from Shaw, 'Gillows of Lancaster - A Great Georgian Firm of Cabinet - Makers', p. 431.

<sup>64</sup> Boynton, p. 16

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. The Workington Hall suite 'dining chairs' as described by R. W. Symonds, were in fact fine draped back hall chairs, excruciatingly uncomfortable, unlike actual Gillow dining chairs. R. W. Symonds, 'A Suite of Dining Room Furniture, Workington Hall', *Antique Collector*, November-December 1946.

<sup>66</sup> Boynton, p. 18

<sup>67</sup> Boynton, p. 20

<sup>68</sup> Boynton, p. 22

<sup>69</sup> Boynton, p. 15

<sup>70</sup> Boynton, p. 18

of those members of the Gillow clan that fall within the time constraints, that is 1760-1800. He lists the family members that made up the Firm as if they are characters in a play. Robert Gillow the elder, (1704-1772), the lead, who had served an apprenticeship in Lancaster and had taken out his freedom between 1727-28, and who founded the firm in 1730<sup>71</sup> comes first. He had two 'heroic' sons, Richard (1733-1811) who had 'some architectural training in London with William Jones',<sup>72</sup> but stayed in Lancaster for the most part and was in partnership with his father from 1757 until the latter's retirement in 1769, and Robert the younger (1747-1795).<sup>73</sup> In 1769 the Gillow London branch was opened by the fourth addition to the cast, Thomas Gillow, a cousin, and the fifth, William Taylor, a cabinet-maker from Lancaster. Taylor's death in 1775 meant that Robert the younger moved to London and took over that side of the business, Thomas Gillow died in 1779 leaving Robert Gillow the younger as the mainstay there until Richard's three sons were old enough to be partners.<sup>74</sup> In a dramatic fashion, Boynton sets the scene, telling the reader that Robert Gillow was availed of the qualities that made up

an ideal specification for an ambitious young businessman in the early eighteenth century: he had the incentive to make money in a period of expansion during Walpole's long and stable regime, the drive to make his mark quickly in Lancaster and beyond at a time when the town was beginning to experience exceptional prosperity, and the additional spur of being a member of the Catholic minority.<sup>75</sup>

In addition Robert Gillow was 'intent on building up capital by living modestly and ploughing back profits into the business', and to add yet further cause for celebration, the Gillow family was endowed with 'high intelligence'.<sup>76</sup> Buoyed by his heritage Richard Gillow 'devoted a good deal of time to supervising its [the London branch's] management in the vital early stages, and he left no stone unturned to direct potential customers, especially influential ones, toward the new enterprise'.<sup>77</sup> As a 'friend' of Samuel Wyatt, Richard was able to continue the good reputation of the Lancaster firm, utilising his Catholic and architectural contacts to boost the new business. His influence

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<sup>71</sup> Boynton, p. 18

<sup>72</sup> 'The focal point of the quay, is the Custom House, built in 1764 to a design by Richard Gillow, the furniture maker', Geoffrey Boulton, *Lancaster, A Concise Guide*, (Lancaster: Lancashire County Council, 1972), p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> Boynton, p. 19

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Boynton, p. 19

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

on the style of Gillows' wares was also evident, according to Boynton the closed pediments on their furniture, an example of which can be seen on top of the bookcase in fig. 107, 'presumably exemplify Richard Gillow's architectural knowledge acquired during the years when Palladianism ruled supreme'.<sup>78</sup> The image that we are given is of sensible, hardworking, skilled cabinet-makers, whose hardship as members of a 'minority' group were overcome by sound education and good business acumen, leading them to make the best of their lot, pull together and become a successful Firm. Boynton is preoccupied with providing the life story of the founders of the Firm and how those who were part of it aimed to perfect the Firm and secure its prosperity. *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800* is not a cold, factual account, there is an underlying message of emotion, Boynton is truly the defender of Gillows' honour. What do the personal attributes of the members of the Firm have to do with their furniture? This work is, after all, about Gillows' furniture designs, 1760-1800. Would the connection between closed pediments, common in eighteenth century neo-classical furniture visible for example in fig. 108 on top of a wardrobe by Sheraton, and Richard Gillow's design skills be made if we were not told of his architectural training? Would the Firm be so interesting if we did not know that they were Catholics? We are directed by Boynton to feel sympathy and praise for this personified 'Firm', endowed with human characters, that rose from humble provincial beginnings, found its own style and opened a shop in London.

Boynton adds a string of cameo appearances to his cast list, a number of 'famous' names with whom a game of dot to dot can be played, using Gillows as the starting point. The names given are the Wyatt architects, especially Samuel, the Egertons of Tatton Park and the Tempest family of Broughton Hall.<sup>79</sup> Boynton tells us that the Firm had a thriving export business with the Caribbean and titled clientele: churchmen, gentry, baronets, Lords, Barons, Viscounts, Earls and Dukes.<sup>80</sup> He places the Firm of Gillow within this particular social context, linking their lives to other 'famous' lives in a bid to create an image of the firm as popular, patronised by the wealthy country house owners who also

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<sup>77</sup> Boynton, p. 20

<sup>78</sup> Boynton, p. 26

<sup>79</sup> Boynton, pp. 22-3, on page 24 Boynton lists all the Catholic families that patronized the firm, and on page 25 all of the titled customers.



favoured the 'known' firms of Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton. We experience the same style of myth creation as found in the annals of furniture history. A desire on the part of the author to give to us, the readers, a 'person' worthy of the focus of an entire biography, a person with a networked connection to other people that we may have heard of and that we can relate our knowledge of to the tale. An insertion of a fragment of familiarity that makes the idea of biography so appealing; after all, we, the readers are people too, plus the bonus thrill of fame, or at the very least a cursory brush with it. Boynton then undermines his placement of Gillows with the famous and the rich by pointing out that those that bought Gillow furniture were from both ends of the 'wide spectrum' of society.<sup>81</sup> The estimate sketch books record sales to various tradesmen, 'chandler, cooper, druggist, farrier, grocer, ironmonger, limner...', merchants, 'Clavert, Harrison and Chippindale', industrialists, 'Robert Peel... Henry Sudell',<sup>82</sup> individual bankers, lawyers, clergymen, doctors, majors and colonels. Perhaps this is a bid to give the Firm a generous nature; it was happy to make furniture for all types of people. Boynton writes that 'the gentry and aristocracy inevitably spent more than tradesmen and the minor professional men'<sup>83</sup> simply because they had more money to spend and also their records are more likely to survive. Boynton gives a long list of the names and places of residence of Gillow clients in the upper section of the social hierarchy. Their patronage he notes, 'was, like that of the Catholics ... fundamental to the firm's rise to greatness'.<sup>84</sup> The Firm of Gillow however were not fussy when it came to making things, for example 'the never-fail money-spinner – coffins', doors and pillars, a weaving loom, a dog stool and gun cases.<sup>85</sup> Boynton offers us a Firm who straddled the divide between the classes, respected enough to have Dukes and Earls on their books, but not so high and mighty as to deny the little man his items of furniture. But there is also an undercurrent of recognition: the 'great' Gillow deigned to make all types of furniture for all manner of people, much like the 'great' Chippendale.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Boynton, pp. 24-5

<sup>81</sup> Boynton, p. 23

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Boynton, p. 24

<sup>84</sup> Boynton, p. 25

<sup>85</sup> Boynton, p. 22

<sup>86</sup> Many companies, including Chippendale, made all sorts of large and small things, Edwards, writing after Boynton, refers to such a company as an 'integrated manufacturing firm' and places Gillow inside this

Boynton has thus established a Firm, full of characters, but functioning as a whole, embracing the talents of those that constructed it and supported by a large cross-section of late eighteenth-century society. Boynton, as the 'author' of his book, has constructed 'The Firm of Gillows' the 'author' of the furniture designs, but, like a true furniture historian, he has ignored those who did all of the work. Boynton does provide a list of Gillows' employees at the back of his book, along with a list of clientele. However despite the fact that he lists virtually all of the impressive customers in the main body of the text, his only allusion to the employees within the written section of the book is to note that Thomas Romney and William Beckett were employed as designers alongside Richard Gillow at Lancaster.<sup>87</sup> There are many authors involved in making furniture, from the cabinet-maker to the carver to the upholsterer, even the man who makes the brass castors, or cuts the veneers for the inlay.<sup>88</sup> It impossible to decree that any one 'being' is the author of the pieces produced under the name of 'Gillow', and therefore what the Firm provides is a unifying author. Boynton is keen to point out that 'Sheraton was recently described as a plagiarising author', that Hepplewhite's 'authorship and standing have been judged and found wanting', and that the pattern books were simply 'a pool of ideas'.<sup>89</sup> But he still expresses a desire to supplant these individuals with 'Gillow'. To this end he concentrates upon the claims of 'authenticity'. To better explain the concept of authenticity we can turn to the work of Jean Baudrillard. He described authenticity as 'an obsession with certainty... as to the origin, date, author and signature of a work'.<sup>90</sup> My first chapter examined the taxonomic system created by the

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bracket alongside Vile and Cobb, Seddons and Chippendale, Clive, D. Edwards, *Eighteenth Century Furniture*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), see also a much earlier work that set the tone for this sort of title by G. Bernard Hughes, 'Thomas Chippendale's Workshops', *Country Life*, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1956, pp. 1290-1

<sup>87</sup> Boynton, p. 18

<sup>88</sup> Robert Campbell, *The London Tradesmen* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1969) pp. 108 and 169-75, first published in 1747, this text listed all of the professions that could be found in a cabinet-making firm, including the Upholder, or upholsterer, the cabinet-maker himself, the carver, the joiner, the gilder, the glass-cutter, sometimes a marble-cutter, brass founders and then the general odd-jobbers, those that dried the feathers or mixed the glue or moved the fabric rolls or packed up the goods.

<sup>89</sup> Boynton, pp. 17-18, Boynton's sources are for Sheraton, Clive Wainwright, *Pugin. A Gothic Passion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994) p. 127 and for Hepplewhite, Peter Ward-Jackson, *English Furniture Designs of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1958) pp. 25-6, 61-6

<sup>90</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. by James Benedict, (London: Verso, 1996) p. 76

furniture historians that categorises these items of old furniture by identifying the marks of authenticity, the style, the age, the maker and a design that the object could be likened to. Baudrillard, looking first at the art world, questions that with industry making reproductions of paintings so simple to produce what makes a 'true' work of art today? His answer is that only the unique gesture and signature of the absent (dead) artist can offer us that, and even then there are forgeries.<sup>91</sup> The furniture historians experience the same problem. For them authentication is a guard against reproduction furniture, furniture that purports to be old by adopting a past style or copying an old design, but is actually of recent manufacture. Baudrillard suggests that we therefore search for other things when looking at an antique object, we look for the markings that denote its age, the patination, the antique object is regarded as 'warm', as opposed to the modern 'cold' item, its presence is 'soft' its feel is 'worn'.<sup>92</sup> A concern for the myth of the origin leads the furniture historian to search for the author of a piece that has the correct patina and identify the piece as authentic on this basis. Baudrillard writes that the 'characteristic of antiques is, of course, precisely what is lacking in functional objects...the functional object is efficient; the mythological object is fully realized [sic]'<sup>93</sup> it has not only a use but also a story. The furniture historians provide this story and thus establish authenticity. Their reliance on the pattern books as the means of providing an author often leads them to categorise items as 'in the style of' because they do not have another way of authenticating the object, of fitting it into the furniture system. When the item comes up for sale in the auction room the furniture historians can divulge the story behind it and declare the piece to be authentic.

Boynton is convinced that we are blessed twofold when it comes to authenticating 'Gillow' pieces, not only do we have the archive, but also the stamp. He notes how unusual the stamp is,<sup>94</sup> but does not question why it is there, perhaps he would have done so in a later work, but Boynton knows that the stamp is a sign which indicates that the item is a product of the Firm. In mentioning the dealers who got rid of the mark in order

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<sup>91</sup> Baudrillard, p. 74

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Baudrillard, p.75

<sup>94</sup> Boynton, p. 16

to market 'Gillow' wares as those of other makers, Boynton shows that he understands the significance of the stamp from an authorial standpoint.<sup>95</sup> Boynton is aware that when the stamp is removed its original meaning as a sign is not simply misunderstood, but lost altogether. He writes that the slow process of re-discovering 'lost' pieces is underway, that so far we have 'exposed the tip of an enormous iceberg' that constitutes the 'Gillow' output, but that we can never fully reclaim what has been destroyed.<sup>96</sup> He wishes to regain the respectful aura that the stamp once signified, if it is universally seen, noted and understood then the 'Firm of Gillow' is the rightful author, the 'person' to whom the furniture can be attributed authentically. But in reestablishing the stamp as the 'author' Boynton negates those who worked for the Firm, there can be no room for those who *also* designed or *also* made the furniture. If the life story of the Firm is to adhere to furniture historical norms then the stamp as the indicator of the Firm, *is* the Firm, and effectively usurps the workers. Boynton could have referred to the other designers and makers within his text, he could have added them to his cast list as he added the clientele. Instead he places the names of those that made the furniture into the small descriptions that follow the illustrations. For example we know that a 'Gillow' sketch of a vase and pedestal (figs. 64 and 65 illustrate how these were used), not dated, circa May/June 1787, made for Sir James Ibbetson of Denton Hall, Yorkshire, design number 1983 (my figs. 62 and 63), was inlaid and engraved by John Dowbiggin.<sup>97</sup> Yet, John Dowbiggin who appears consistently in the list of 'Gillow' employees, is not mentioned in the main text. Perhaps if Boynton had written his follow-up book he may have included these workers more comprehensively. However he did not and it is *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800* that has become the definitive work on the Firm, and in calling for an association with authenticity, for the uncovering of 'lost' pieces, this book directs the reader to the 'Firm of Gillow' and its famous clients, but not to its workers.

Writing about Gillows as authors, Boynton the author of this biography, is only too aware of his readers. Published partly by sponsorship and subscription, because as, the author

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<sup>95</sup> Boynton, p. 15

<sup>96</sup> Boynton, p. 16

<sup>97</sup> Boynton, item 189, p. 173

tells us, it ‘fell victim to the recession’,<sup>98</sup> Boynton’s audience is already partly decided. The subscribers that helped to get the book published are listed in a separate section at the beginning of the text. The list includes Christie’s the auction house, Gervase Jackson-Stops author of a number of National Trust guide books, Helena Hayward, author of *William and John Linnell*, Simon Jervis, *Burlington Magazine* contributor, Lucy Wood, author of *The Lady Lever Art Gallery Catalogue of Commodes*, Susan Stuart, who wrote the articles about Gillow clock cases, The Victoria and Albert Museum and The Duke of Norfolk.<sup>99</sup> In his forward Boynton thanks furniture historian grandees Christopher Gilbert, for helping to organize the appeal fund, and Sir Nicholas Goodison, for providing the pictures of clocks. There are a large number of antique-selling firms, auctioneers, dealers and galleries in the list of sponsors for the book including Sotheby’s, Apter Fredericks Ltd, Lawrence Fine Art Auctioneers and The British Antique Dealers Association,<sup>100</sup> illustrating the intended market for the text. Boynton has actively sought help from furniture history insiders because he knows that many of the sponsors and subscribers have a genuine interest in the book, either from a research standpoint or from a desire to locate a reference for Gillows’ items.<sup>101</sup> Also Boynton has a history with these people, as a founder member of the Furniture History Society and published furniture historian he was also in constant contact with auction houses, checking for possible Gillow pieces. The Gillow archive, Boynton tells his readers, is ‘incomparable’<sup>102</sup> and the Firm of Gillow is the author of many more items than we currently know of,<sup>103</sup> he writes about the archive, and even encourages the readers to contact him if they have any information that they think he might be interested in. In inviting his readers to actively participate in trying to locate more ‘Gillow’ furniture, Boynton is asking them to take part in a furniture historical treasure hunt, to look at the designs in his book and search out pieces that they think *might* be like them. This involves the traditional preoccupation of the furniture historians: the finding of things that seem to fit with the designs and can therefore be marked as ‘of the Gillow style’ or ‘of the Gillow period’. But with ‘Gillow’

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<sup>98</sup> Boynton, p. 7

<sup>99</sup> Boynton, pp. 11-14

<sup>100</sup> Boynton, p. 9

<sup>101</sup> In the Hartley Library Archive are bundles of congratulatory letters on the publication and its usefulness to them from furniture historians and auctioneers alike. MS 301, box 52, part 4, folder 5

<sup>102</sup> Boynton, p. 20

it is not that simple. As Boynton explains at the beginning of his text, the removal of the stamp from some pieces, the vast and varied output, the removal of so many pieces from their place of origin, makes actually finding a piece which can be directly attributed to 'Gillow' under the strict regulations of furniture history and provenance a difficult task.<sup>104</sup> Of course there is another problem, as the furniture historians tell us the Firm of Gillow did not produce a pattern book. Boynton gives his readers the essential components of the 'Gillow style' in order to make finding items that are by them less complex, to make it possible for Boynton's readers to go out and (as he himself did) search for 'Gillow' pieces. But this leads us to question whether or not the style recorded in Boynton's text is simply just another construction. Does furniture history's fear have some foundation in fact: did the Firm of Gillow not produce a pattern book because they did not actually have their own particular style?

#### The Pattern Book Problem:

While Foucault asks 'What is an Author?' and Barthes calls for 'The Death of the Author', the furniture historians continue their search for the most perfect authors of eighteenth-century furniture. And although Lindsay Boynton is aware of this,<sup>105</sup> he still challenges furniture history to accept the Firm of Gillow as one of those perfect authors, a furniture-maker supreme. Boynton provides under a sub-heading 'The Gillow Designs', a run-down of the evolution of the 'Gillow look'. It is my contention that, having established, through biography, the 'firm' as an 'author' figure, this written section, along with the illustrations of the 'Gillow' sketches, are Lindsay Boynton's attempt at offering us the missing link: a published Pattern Book for the Firm of Gillow. Boynton volunteers a discussion of the changes in the 'Gillow style', the names that they gave to their items, their favourite methods of ornamentation, their selection of wood-types. This form of writing is akin to essays that start the eighteenth-century pattern books of Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton.<sup>106</sup> As within the pattern books the text is followed by a series

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<sup>103</sup> Boynton, p. 16

<sup>104</sup> Boynton, p. 15

<sup>105</sup> He challenges furniture history's preoccupation with Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton. Boynton, p. 17

<sup>106</sup> An example can be taken from Hepplewhite's *Guide* of 1794, it begins with a preface that talks of fashion and taste, then descriptions of the printed items explain how they are made and the styles that they

of designs. Most of the sketches that Boynton reproduces are from the estimate sketch books, 1784-1800 (344/ 89-98), 'augmented by some earlier sketches'.<sup>107</sup> Boynton writes that these sketched designs, no matter how small or rough, see for example my fig. 52, are 'an important clue towards tracking down *actual Gillow furniture*'.<sup>108</sup> Boynton goes on to note that '[m]uch ink has been wasted on attempts to link extant furniture that corresponds with his [Chippendale's] designs to his [Chippendale's] firm, but in vain, for once published, the designs were anyone's'.<sup>109</sup> This was not, he tells his readers, the case with 'Gillow', 'the assessment of Gillow furniture depends *not only on the style* but also on the quality of wood and workmanship: when all three are satisfactorily present the judgement is usually not in doubt'.<sup>110</sup> Despite his criticism of those who have spent their time trying to match up Chippendale pieces, Boynton invites us, the readers, to spend our time looking at the designs he reproduces in his text, and comparing them to pieces of real furniture that we see. There is again the seemingly obligatory call for authenticity; Boynton uses 'pieces which are documented in the Estimate Sketch Books and/or the Waste Books', looking for 'an unshakable base' on which to found his assumptions, a 'family provenance ... a proven family connection with Gillows'.<sup>111</sup> My fig. 78, for example, shows a Gillows' sketch of a cabriole armchair made for John Christian Esq. of Workington Hall. The Christian family also owned Belle Isle in Windermere and here Boynton was able to find and photograph the chair originally from Workington Hall, my fig. 79. At Belle Isle Boynton also photographed an oval firescreen, fig. 69, the sketch for which he found back in the archive, fig. 68. In his book Boynton gives a brief description of each item that has been sketched, with a customer reference and date, in order to facilitate the process. I have included some of the photographs that Lindsay Boynton took of items that he found at auctions that could be directly attributed to the Firm in order to illustrate the process of sketch – item – provenance. For example a sketch of a Gillows' kidney-shaped writing table, fig. 19, can be seen in a photograph, fig. 20, and in a provenance, fig. 21. This particular provenance, from auction house

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are made in, George Hepplewhite, *The Cabinet-Makers and Upholsterer's Guide*, (New York: Dover Publication, 1969)

<sup>107</sup> Boynton, p. 20

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. The words in italics are my emphasis.

<sup>109</sup> Boynton, p. 22

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. The words in italic are my emphasis.

Norman Adams, also features Boynton's notes that correct the provenance and link the piece back to the Gillows' archive. This process reinforces Boynton's entrenchment in furniture history. It highlights a recurring issue for Boynton: how is 'Gillow' furniture to be discussed in a manner acceptable to the furniture historians, thereby assuring the Firm's place in furniture history, if the basics (the pattern book, the published designs) are not there? Boynton has created the 'author' now he must look at the decoration and supply the 'style'.

For Boynton the task is clear, he asks himself and his readers a question: 'How distinctive was Gillows' style?'.<sup>112</sup> By looking at the sketches that he reproduces, recording the decorative features that are common within them, Boynton creates an analysis of the 'Gillow style'. The repeated features include cabriole legs (my fig. 104) located on a Universal table and on a settee, and 'Rococo motifs', such as 'carved claws, and fretted galleries in tea tables'<sup>113</sup> (my figs. 104 and 28). This search for the detail is rooted in furniture history: a style can be established by looking at the external decoration. Boynton uses the language of furniture history, the names given to items and their decorative parts, to describe Gillows' furniture, thus placing their 'style' within the system. Boynton does not explain to his readers the function of the 'Universal' table, but he does supply references to his illustrations that allow the reader to see sketches of the items, and also to get a rough idea of what the motifs looked like. The descriptions of items, provided after the illustrations, come sometimes from Gillows' themselves, and do give some indication of what the function of the item was intended to be. Boynton's description accompanying the first Gillow sketch of a Universal table explains it as follows: 'i.e. card, backgammon and chequer table with three tops'.<sup>114</sup> The sketch presented shows the front elevation of a universal table with three tops that appear to be stacked upon one another (my fig. 102, left). This sketch is followed by two more Universal tables, one of which is a perspective drawing that illustrates how the top lifts up and over to create a marked playing surface (my fig. 102, right). Boynton's

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<sup>111</sup> Boynton, p. 22

<sup>112</sup> Boynton, p. 29

<sup>113</sup> Boynton, p. 25

<sup>114</sup> Boynton, p. 161



description for this second example includes only a date, May 1787, a measurement for the top, 2'8" x 2' 7" and a reference to the Gillow ESB, '94/4'.<sup>115</sup> This type of description echoes the provenance of the furniture system in that the information imparted is of use only to those who have some prior knowledge of old English furniture. However, even knowledge of furniture history does not prepare the reader for the vagaries of the Universal table, described by Sheraton as:

both to answer the use purpose of a breakfast and dining table. When both the leaves are flipped under the bed, it will accommodate five persons as a dining table; and if both are out, it will admit of eight, being near seven feet long, and three feet six inches in width. The drawer is divided into six boxes at each side, as in the plan, and are found useful for different sorts of tea and sugar, and sometimes for notes, or the like. In this drawer is a slider lined with green cloth to write on.<sup>116</sup>

Sheraton's sketch can be seen in my fig. 103. Boynton notes that there was a certain economy on the part of Gillows to call items whatever they felt like, and suggests that discrepancies occurred between the family members, the employees and the clerk as to what items really were named as.<sup>117</sup> For example in a letter to an unknown client, *Gillows* Gillows referred to 'the dinner tray or butlers tray as we called 'em by either name here [sic]'.<sup>118</sup> But, surely, with the capriciousness of nomenclature to contend with, an accurate description of function of the item is all the more desirable? And yet Boynton continues to discuss the design features, explaining only in the very brief descriptions that accompany the sketches what the items were intended to be used for. Thanks to Gillows' employees' sketching abilities, what a 'cabriole' leg is can be seen clearly from the illustrations without the need to describe or explain it (my fig. 104). But leaving the reader to fend for him or herself in this way, reminiscent of traditional furniture historical texts, reiterates the exclusive nature of the antique world and also reflects upon Boynton's expected readership, the subscribers to his text, who know their way around different types of table legs.

<sup>115</sup> Boynton, p. 161

<sup>116</sup> Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), p. 356

<sup>117</sup> Boynton, p. 28

<sup>118</sup> WCA 344/166/181v-182v, letter to 'Gentlemen', 21<sup>st</sup> August 1770, see a copy of this letter, item five in my appendix VIII.

In a brief sojourn away from a preoccupation with the decorative details that make up the Gillow style, Boynton looks at the functional side of furniture manufactory noting that there was a lack of available timber in the 1790's. This led to a rising cost of mahogany, which in turn instigated a 'vogue for painted and japanned furniture constructed of cheap timber, especially beech',<sup>119</sup> for example my figs. 1 and 2, a sketch and photograph of a Gillows' painted table. This cheap timber offered an array of furniture that employed 'slender lines and lightness of construction', and the introduction of French and toupie feet visible respectively on a commode, fig. 6, top, and on a secretaire, figs. 49, 50 and 51, again these accoutrements, provided in the language of furniture history are noted, but not explained.<sup>120</sup> But, Boynton writes, 'Gillows, ever conscious of practical considerations, refused to go to extremes that equated with flimsiness. In this connection their frequent use of cross-rails or stretchers should be noted',<sup>121</sup> see for example two worktables, my figs. 32 and 33. Once again Boynton expects that his readers will understand this and not require further descriptions. Gillows' lax attitude in policing the quality of their sketches was 'matched by an economy of function: that is, a given piece could serve as well for one purpose as for another purpose'.<sup>122</sup> Boynton gives the example of a sideboard made for a Rev. Mr. Hudson in 1787 that appears in the same year as a dressing table for another client,<sup>123</sup> see for example my figs. 38, 39 and 40. A writing table could also be a dressing table or a library table, 'since it combined the same basic geometrical forms: a concave top on a rectangular base'.<sup>124</sup> In the same way a design for a commode can also be a pier table, a sheveret or a cupboard. This type of reusing of designs causes few problems from the point of view of locating Gillow pieces, but it can lead to incorrect categorisation in the auction catalogues. A dressing-table for example, fig. 94, is labeled as a side table in a provenance by Ayers Antiques, fig. 95. Also one is led to query whether what Gillows call something and what Chippendale or some other furniture-maker calls that very same thing, for example Sheraton's Universal Table, are not different in the first instance, which causes further complication. This

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<sup>119</sup> Boynton, p. 28

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Boynton, p. 28

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Boynton, p. 28

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

ambiguity is ironic considering the rigid strata in place to tabulate furniture, it would be far simpler to classify these items by means of what they were used for without the need for names that may or may not have been correctly applied throughout the centuries.

Boynton provides us with a snapshot of the style of the period, 1760-1800, referring to the 'known' design periods of neo-classicism, rococo and Gothic.<sup>125</sup> But, formulating a plan for items that do not appear to fit within these furniture historical periods, he suggests that 'individual client tastes' are indicated by designs that appear after their life as an item of 'fashion' has expired. An example given is a Chinese style tea table made by Gillows for a customer in Hamburg in 1786<sup>126</sup>, my fig. 28, a photograph of a similar table is in fig. 29. The style is akin to a table designed by Chippendale, fig. 30, and produced around 1760 when it was fashionable, fig. 31. Boynton notes that '[a] serpentine commode chest of drawers of 1789 was destined for a London shop, and at that date it can only mean that enough conservative customers in the capital liked the design: it is a caution against supposing that everyone followed the latest trend'.<sup>127</sup> The carved friezes, frets, spandrels, brackets and splats used by Gillows were all 'normal' for the time and items that were 'exceptional for their date' were supplied either for export or to fulfil individual tastes.<sup>128</sup> This type of comment suggests that Boynton has been fitting Gillows' items in with the general style manuals produced by, among others, Ralph Fastnedge and Oliver Brackett.<sup>129</sup> A paradox emerges: is Boynton's search for a *distinctive* 'Gillow look' or for things that place Gillows' designs with those of other eighteenth-century furniture-makers making fashionable furniture? Because if the latter is true, then there may not be anything in Gillows' furniture which makes it distinctive. Perhaps it is part of a move to separate Gillows from the nametag of being an 'average' firm, a theme that emerges through the book as Boynton, like Bertha Shaw did before him, attempts to find reasons to include Gillows more fully in furniture history, that leads

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<sup>125</sup> Boynton, p. 26

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Boynton, p. 25

<sup>128</sup> Boynton, p. 26, Friezes run along an item of furniture, frets are cut-out sections of decoration, spandrels are curled decoration, usually found in the corner of an item, brackets are usually found in a joint between a leg and the main carcase, they are decorative but add stability, and splats are the wooden stays on a chair back.

him to suggest that Gillows made things at the whim of their customers rather than at the behest of fashion. Or possibly it is the complete opposite and Boynton is trying to suggest that Gillows' only rarely moved away from the accepted style of the time and were therefore genuinely 'up there' with those 'great cabinet-makers'. Whatever the reason, Boynton continues to focus upon the style features that appeared within Gillows' pieces, 'the swelled ogee foot long remained' (visible in my figs. 106 and 109) and closed pediments (my fig. 107) were 'quite typical'.<sup>130</sup> But there is a tension here between what Lindsay Boynton wants the Firm of Gillows to be: a great cabinet-making firm with a distinctive style of their own, worthy of lengthier mentions in furniture history, and his need to prove that the firm were not 'odd' that their furniture can be placed within the furniture system, despite the absence of a Gillows' pattern book.

Boynton describes in detail the various phases of Gillows' designs to the readers. The stylistic period of neo-classicism occurring during the 1770's, 80's and 90's, Boynton writes, was pre-empted by Gillows in the 1760's using carved festoons and slender cabinet legs, visible in my figs. 34 and 35.<sup>131</sup> He notes that the arabesques, drapery, festoons, flowers and foliage (my figs. 36 and 37), palmette and anthemion, cornucopias, lion's heads (my figs. 53 and 54), ram's heads, paterae, plumes of feathers (my figs. 73 and 74), tripods (my figs. 59, 60 and 61), vases and water leaves, (this last ornamentation often looking like feathers within the designs<sup>132</sup>, my figs. 62 and 63), fluting, on the legs of tables (fig. 102, right), sideboards and 'too common to note on the legs of seat furniture' were all regular features within Gillows' furniture.<sup>133</sup> Pieces were inlaid with vases, fans and shells, often not clearly visible on the sketches.<sup>134</sup> These details can be seen on the photographs though, the inlaid commode featured in my figs. 88, 89, 90 and

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<sup>129</sup> Ralph Fastnedge, *English Furniture Styles*, (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1962) and Oliver Brckett, *An Encyclopaedia of English Furniture*, (London: Ernest Benn, 1927)

<sup>130</sup> Boynton, p. 26, the 'ogee' foot is like a leg turned outwards and bent at the knee in a squat position, it is sometimes called a bracket foot. A 'closed pediment' on an item of furniture is a section that appears across the top of an item like a sort of false roof, sometimes a gap is left in the centre and a bust or shield placed within it, the closed version has no gap.

<sup>131</sup> Boynton, p. 26

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Boynton, p. 27

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. These details can be seen on the photographs though, the inlaid commode is an especially good example of a detailed sketch which exactly matches the actual piece.

91, is an especially good example. The Gothic period, existing during a similar time-scale though its popularity declined sooner, ending in the late 1780's, was employed by Gillows 'in their habitually restrained manner' visible in figs. 99 and 100, and described by Boynton as 'modified Strawberry Hill'.<sup>135</sup> Items that appear to have Gothic-style tracery 'juxtaposed with classical pediments' for example fig. 107, evoked the 'world of Northanger Abbey', and were typical of the era.<sup>136</sup> Boynton is again intimating that Gillows were 'normal' in their choice of design repertoire, fitting them in with the standardised furniture historical periods, and listing a vast array of decorative details that were the 'standard motif on transitional or neo-classical furniture'.<sup>137</sup> But his statement that Gillows had pre-empted the neo-classical movement with some early designs and chosen a form of less ornate Gothic, allows room for a doubt to creep in. Although Gillows' style was 'average' for the age, they were, perhaps the leaders rather than merely the followers of the style, were Gillows an innovative firm? Boynton writes that the neo-classical style manifested itself in a second form for Gillows, close to the architectural developments of the period when the 'stern' furniture of the 1780's was inspired by the architecture of Henry Holland and Sir John Soane.<sup>138</sup> Canted bays had their 'counterparts' in the octagonal forms that the firm produced (my fig. 118), and the bowed and elliptical architectural designs of Samuel Wyatt appeared in a night table, commode drawers and a wash stand (my fig. 44). Oval chair backs (my fig. 77, right) were also in Boynton's opinion a reflection of the work with Wyatt, repeated again in inlaid oval panels in various pieces for example in my figs 55, 56, 88, 89, 90 and 91.<sup>139</sup> In the earlier part of his text, as a link to another famous life within Gillows' biography, Boynton refers to the profitable alliance with the Catholic architect Samuel Wyatt [see my appendix VI] that had sprung up after 1775 and was key for the development of Gillows' style. Boynton juxtaposes the 'fine but not wildly luxurious' designs of Wyatt with those of Adam 'encrusted with ornament and gilding to the detriment of its line'.<sup>140</sup> In doing so he also places Gillows' furniture, once again, in opposition to that of

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<sup>135</sup> Boynton, p. 26

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Boynton, p. 26, Lindsay Boynton defines astragal moldings on p. 28 as 'glazing bars'.

<sup>138</sup> Boynton, pp. 27 - 28

<sup>139</sup> Boynton, p. 27

<sup>140</sup> Boynton, p. 20

Chippendale, who worked with Adam, 'the magnificent carved and gilded pieces of the Chippendale period, were beginning to seem costly, outmoded, and ponderous', and Gillows' 'severe geometrical line and form' helped to broaden their appeal, see for example my figs. 83 and 84.<sup>141</sup> Wyatt had an influence upon Gillows that was, according to Boynton, of the 'greatest importance during the late eighteenth-century', and the last 25 years of the 1700's were undoubtedly Gillows' best period.<sup>142</sup> The collaboration with Wyatt at Heaton House (now Hall), for example, produced the sort of 'austere' furniture, with pieces 'using a minimum of ornament, gilding, and inlay and maximising the beauty of fine woods', that became the 'hallmark' of 'Gillows' style'.<sup>143</sup> He has therefore been set up by Boynton as a genius figure, akin to those favoured by the furniture historians. 'The Dining Room [at Heaton]... probably had pea-green walls since the seat furniture delivered by Gillows for this room in 1775 (18 chairs) costing £52.12.0d, was covered in pea green devant'<sup>144</sup>. Six of the chairs supplied by Gillows to Heaton had 'neat fire screens to drop upon the backs of chairs... upon frames covered with strong paper'<sup>145</sup>. The chairs were of the popular square-backed and straight-legged style made by Gillows at this time, and which exemplify the collaboration with Wyatt, see for example my fig. 117. It is this process of working with Wyatt to improve their 'style', to find something slightly different, that leads Boynton to confirm that 'Gillows developed one style, among others, that was quite remarkably 'modern' in its austerity and, I believe, particularly their own'.<sup>146</sup> But in his bid to reinforce the Gillows' style with the new, modern innovation of Wyatt, something distinct from what the rest of the eighteenth-century furniture-making firms were producing, Boynton's argument falters, with Wyatt at the helm, the Gillows' 'hallmark' was in fact not theirs at all, but his. Boynton does not question Wyatt or his design abilities, the reader must take Boynton's words to be true: Gillows' style was modified for the better by the architect. Boynton does not refer

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<sup>141</sup> Boynton, p. 20

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Boynton, p. 20, there are no records for the Heaton House furniture made through the London branch of the firm, so it was originally thought to have been made by Linnells.

<sup>144</sup> James Lomax, *Heaton House, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Earls of Wilton*, (Lancaster, 1983), p. 75

The chairs can be found recorded in the Gillows' waste book, WCA, 344/4/298.

<sup>145</sup> Clifford and Hall, *Heaton: Bicentenary Exhibition Catalogue*, (London: Country Life, 1972), p. 105 WCA, 344/4/298.

<sup>146</sup> Boynton, p. 28

to Gillows' work with Robert Adam, unlike the furniture historians,<sup>147</sup> because there are no references to him in the Gillow books for the period 1760-1800. This does not mean that Gillows did not work with Adam at all, as the books for the London side of the firm no longer exist and we cannot therefore know all of those with whom Gillows collaborated. But is Adam's absence, other than as a leader of heavily ornate pieces unlike those of Gillow, significant? Had Boynton wished to place Gillows firmly within furniture history even the briefest mention of a 'possible' collaboration would have served to add kudos to their name. But Boynton has chosen to align Adam with Chippendale, and must therefore search for a different source, he selected Samuel Wyatt, the 'Adam' to his 'Chippendale' (Gillows).

So was Gillows' style distinctive? Boynton warns us to be careful when deciding upon the answer to the question that he has posed. Features that were used again and again by Gillows were also features that were in general use: termed legs, visible on a sideboard table in my fig. 98, 'sunk panels' on gardevines visible on the legs of my figs. 55 and 56 and on the front and sides of my figs. 57 and 58, and 'Tower corners' or pillars, visible on a table in my fig. 94.<sup>148</sup> It is the same with the pieces of furniture, the Gillow 'buffet' for example, was made widely throughout northern England and Scotland<sup>149</sup>. But '[t]hat said, the combination of pediment and shield, swelled ogee (or bracket) feet, and the let-down shelf does add up to a Gillow look'.<sup>150</sup> The reader can guess, although it is not made clear, that this description is of the 'buffet' reproduced as figure 172 in *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800* (my fig. 109). On this particular design a darker, shaped area is visible at the back of the cupboard, inside the open door. This is, as far as I can tell, the 'let-down shelf' that is being referred to; it provides a similar function to the flap on a Pembroke table (see my figs. 24 and 25), extending the surface so that things can be served from it. Boynton proceeds with a list of 'quintessential' Gillow pieces, including distinctive chair backs, with drapery and feathers (my figs. 73 and 74, interlaced hoops and wheat-ear carving (my figs. 96 and 97), three upright balustrades (my fig. 116, left),

<sup>147</sup> K. Warren Clouston, *The Chippendale Period in English Furniture*, (London and New York: Debenham and Feebdy, Edward Arnold, 1897), p. 131

<sup>148</sup> Boynton, p. 29

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. A 'buffet' is a type of cabinet, Boynton does not tell us how it was used, or what it was for.

lozenge design (my figs. 92 and 93) and with a tablet in the top-rail (my fig. 116, right).<sup>151</sup> He writes that these 'comments are made on the strength of my detailed study of the Waste Books which list almost all Lancaster transactions from 1771 to 1797'.<sup>152</sup> Some characteristics were employed by Gillows in an unusual way, such as placing writing drawers in items of furniture that were not expressly designed for that purpose, such as in a wardrobe my fig. 106.<sup>153</sup> But, as we have seen from Sheraton's description of the Universal table,<sup>154</sup> the placement of a writing surface in an item that did not have that direct function was not uncommon. The placement of a 'sliding prospect' or pull-out box especially with lettered compartments (my fig. 16 and visible in figs. 14 and 15), was 'a Gillow specialty', according to Boynton, as was the 'sham drawer' (my fig. 105) which Gillows 'adopted ... with such enthusiasm as to have it made their own'.<sup>155</sup> Lindsay Boynton ends by describing his volume thus: 'the essential features of the Gillow style as practiced at Lancaster during the period from 1760 to 1800'.<sup>156</sup> Like the author of an eighteenth-century pattern book he appeals to his readers to enjoy the volume. Here it is Boynton who is the voice of authority, having done the research and drawn his conclusions he dutifully provides an 'expert' image of the Firm of Gillow: The Pattern Book that they never had.

The archive at the Hartley Library offers a glimpse into the second book that Lindsay Boynton wanted to write on the firm, a more comprehensive look at Gillows who they were and what they did, going past the dates of 1760-1800. Photographs of actual pieces of Gillow furniture, further sketches and analysis of the Gillows' books at the Westminster City Archives, provide a clearer image of the firm. Boynton's notes try to reach more conclusions about the Gillows' style. Maybe if this work had been published it would have been the ultimate Gillow Pattern Book, bettered only by one that Gillows themselves could have produced. However the notes within the archive suggest a similar

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<sup>150</sup> Boynton, p. 29

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Boynton, p. 29

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Sheraton, p. 356, see my fig. 103

<sup>155</sup> Boynton, p. 30, the 'sham drawer' was a false drawer placed in an item, it could hide the entrance to a pull-down flap, or exist simply for the sake of symmetry, such as in a pair of pedestals.

<sup>156</sup> Boynton, p. 30



focus upon the individuals, Richard Gillow is still referred to as the dominant force behind the evolution of the Lancaster designs, 1760-1796, marrying familiar sources with 'a powerful injection of innovative material from the London end'.<sup>157</sup> In a note on some sketches for room schemes for Sizergh Castle, Boynton writes that: 'it may be taken as axiomatic (the proof being in the plates) that there was a distinctive 'Gillow Look''.<sup>158</sup> There are more attempts to link the Firm to famous individuals, for example Vincent Lunardi, who undertook the first airborne balloon voyage in England, on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1784 in Lancaster. Boynton questions whether or not the struts, which are shown in the engravings of Lunardi's balloon, are the same as the splats shown in Gillows' designs for a 'balloon' chair my fig. 72.<sup>159</sup> He asks if the shift in manufacturing from Lancaster to London can be said to coincide with Richard's withdrawal from the business in 1800, noting that previously Gillows were making London orders in Lancaster because it was cheaper to do so.<sup>160</sup> On some of these new queries Boynton struggles to draw conclusions, he finds that Gillows' biography is constantly incomplete.<sup>161</sup> But the desire to construct a persona for the 'firm', an 'author', a 'style' and a 'look' directed Boynton to biography, a medium used and trusted by the furniture historians, trying to explain the designs through the person, creating a pattern book with an author 'The Firm of Gillows'. The question of authorship prevails, does there have to be a person's name on something for it to be authentic, for it to be accepted into the furniture system?<sup>162</sup> The focus of biography upon the individual is narrow: there are several senders of the Gillow narrative, not just the designers, but the makers, the workers and there are also more reasons than design for making furniture, such as function.

Boynton explains to the readers of his work, *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*, that the Firm of Gillow are worthy of more consideration, that their work was stylish at least

<sup>157</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, box 7, part 2

<sup>158</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, box 7, part 2

<sup>159</sup> Boynton reaches the conclusion that they are not, Hartley Library, MS 301, box 6, folder 1, part 2

<sup>160</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, Box 56.

<sup>161</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, Box 40, Folder 1, pages 143-144, paraphrased from LB's notes on Lancaster and London.

<sup>162</sup> From Simon Groom's paper: 'Face-off – getting away from self-portrait', *Biographical Knowledge* Conference, 31<sup>st</sup> March – 3<sup>rd</sup> April, Cambridge University, CRASSH Centre.

sometimes, and that they are comparable to the 'Great Georgian Cabinet-Makers', noting that recently 'the status of Gillows has risen considerably. Not only do leading auctioneers highlight Gillow items but also 'in the manner of Gillows' has become commonplace'.<sup>163</sup> But it has been a constant struggle, Boynton writing as he does, in and out of furniture history, cannot break Gillows' furniture away from the furniture system, but, conversely, cannot make it fit neatly within it either. It is a double-edged sword for Boynton, in order to overcome the furniture historians' image of Gillows he must work within their established norms, he must address the furniture historians' hatred of provincial firms, its reliance upon labels and names, its close association with the auction houses and its love of the pattern book. The Gillows Boynton must provide is an individual maker of fashionable furniture, easily identified, popular at auction, and the author of a published pattern book. Boynton cannot successfully accomplish this task, because the eighteenth-century Gillow pattern book does not exist. So why does he even attempt it? Boynton's own past as a furniture historian and a champion of Gillows cause, is visible within this biography: he wants Gillows' items to be part of the furniture system, he wants Gillows to be a recognisable name, like those of Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton. But is there another way to explore Gillows? Gillows' own autobiography, their letters to their clients, their bills and orders, tell us about their furniture, whether or not they thought they had a 'style'. The question to be asked in chapter three is can we depart from furniture history, from the furniture system and look at Gillows differently?

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<sup>163</sup> Boynton, p. 16

## CHAPTER 3

### A WASTE OF GOOD WOOD?

#### GILLOWS' RECORDS AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

##### Introduction: Reading the Gillow Archive:

In his book *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800* Lindsay Boynton refers to an archive containing extensive records kept by the firm.<sup>1</sup> His text is supplemented by a number of sketches reproduced from the archive's estimate sketch books, providing pictorial proof of the 'Gillow style' that Boynton was searching for. But the archive is much more than just a series of working sketches, the records offer an insight into what Gillows thought about their goods, their work and their clients. Gillows' letter books provide copies of the letters, at first written by Robert or Richard Gillow, and later by a clerk,<sup>2</sup> that they sent to suppliers and to clients. They are detailed in nature, containing facts about making the furniture, clients' particular requests, how items were sent to customers<sup>3</sup> and problems arising from a lack of good timber or good employees.<sup>4</sup> From an economic perspective they serve as an excellent business record for an eighteenth-century furniture-making firm, containing information about suppliers, customers' complaints, 'necessary'

<sup>1</sup> Lindsay Boynton, *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*, (Royston: Bloomfield Press, 1995), pp. 16-23

<sup>2</sup> The name of the clerk or clerks is not known, nor is the date that he/they worked for the Firm. There is a change for the better in the standard of written English used in the letters after 1764 and letter after letter is written in the same hand. Most letters pre-1800 are signed by either Robert the elder or Richard, consistently by Richard after Robert's retirement in 1769, or by 'Gillows'. Lindsay Boynton has proposed that the early letters were written by Robert and Richard, and later letters (post 1764) by a clerk. Boynton's analysis led him to state that 'profit was obviously a principal factor in Gillows' successful operation over three generations', that 'overheads were not a factor' the men were self-sufficient, bringing their own tools and being paid per piece rather than receiving wages. The customer paid for all the freight and packing charges on top of the cost of their item, so Gillows did not have these expenses. To an unknown customer in 1764 Gillows wrote '[you are] charged for not returning box and mats to pack tea tray', the charge was 3s 6d. The 'only costs to Gillow remaining were the maintenance or rent of their buildings and the non-productive staff, i.e. their clerks'. Hartley Library, MS 301, box 46, folder 1, Lindsay Boynton's own notes. My appendix VIII contains some copies of the letters written by Gillows, see for example item four, four short letters written in November 1789.

<sup>3</sup> WCA 344/165/13, Gillows, for example, wrote to a client, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1766, regarding the delivery of a marble chimney piece which was to be sent by Captain John Wright of the 'Unity'.

<sup>4</sup> WCA 344/170/404, Gillows wrote to Joseph Monde, Kendal, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1784, that 'as no inconvenience, advise putting off dining tables for a year – as we expect there will then be better choice, and cheaper, mahogany'.

price rises and so on.<sup>5</sup> As Sarah Nichols explained in her article, 'A journey through the Gillow Records',<sup>6</sup> it is theoretically possible, although much more complicated in practice, to trace an item throughout the archive, from the letter books, through the estimate sketch books, via the pattern books, on to the waste books, and finally to its record in the ledger, providing a mini history of that particular object.<sup>7</sup> Even *The Dictionary of English Furniture* cannot ignore the wealth of information provided by the Gillows' books, describing them as dating 'back to 1731', and using them to explain the different points in Gillows' career, such as exporting to the West Indies and opening a shop in London.<sup>8</sup> Like Boynton, other furniture historians have attempted to match Gillows' designs to items in existence using the archive. For example when working at Tatton Park Nicholas Goodison and John Hardy used the archive in order to build up a picture of sketch – item – provenance for Gillows' furniture there.<sup>9</sup> The authors used the Gillows' letter books to give precise dates for the order and delivery, the estimate and pattern book sketches to provide a connection between the item itself and the design process, and the ledger to provide costing and payment details, alongside the Egerton family's own records. Through an analysis of how furniture history and how Boynton have read the Gillows' archive thus far, it has become clear that this process conforms to the emphasis placed upon the individual and upon the design. From the denial by the furniture historians that Gillows 'fit' the 'hero' mould,<sup>10</sup> to the creation of the 'author', the designer-maker, the Firm of Gillow, eclipsing the individual family members, offered

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<sup>5</sup> WCA 344/170/384, Gillows, for example, wrote to Geoffrey Hornby, Preston, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1784, that an 'elegant inlaid octagon tea chest, lined with crimson velvet, solid silver furniture and canisters – £21.10.2' which was sent to a customer in 1784. Gillows added that their estimate had been a little short and that as the item's elegance and cost had exceeded their expectations, they were charging only the prime cost, 'we do not get one/anything by it unless you think Proper to allow us something'.

<sup>6</sup> S. Nichols, 'A Journey through the Gillow Records', *Antique Collecting*, February 1986, vol. 20, no. 9, pp. 36-39, see also my appendix I.

<sup>7</sup> Although this is *theoretically* possible the records are neither complete nor systematic [see appendix I], and some items are entered in only one of the books, or maybe two, and some only appear in sketch form, in *practice* it is far more difficult.

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Edwards and Percy Macquoid, *The Dictionary of English Furniture*, in three volumes, (London: Country Life, 1954), vol. II, p. 243, it is worth noting that although the Dictionary refers to the 'Gillow books' no less than five times, the authors do not tell the readers what the books are like or where the books can be found, they do, however, have the correct date, see my appendix III.

<sup>9</sup> N. Goodison and J. Hardy, 'Gillows at Tatton Park', *Furniture History VI*, 1970

<sup>10</sup> For example furniture historian Herbert Cescinsky wrote that 'Gillow', the individual, could have had 'a name second to none...and but for the fact that he did not publish a *Director* or a *System* might have been tracked with Chippendale in the history of English furniture of the mid-eighteenth century', Herbert Cescinsky, *English Furniture of the Eighteenth Century*, (London: G. Sadler, 1911), p.268

to his readers by Boynton in order to reposition them within the system, those that have looked at the archive have done so with the aim of finding a ‘designer’, a date and a style, a provenance for an item. The focus has been upon the eighteenth-century pattern book: relied upon by the furniture historians to provide links between existing furniture and its makers, and the fact that Gillows produced, ‘problematically’, no such book. The furniture historians have discussed Gillows’ furniture by means of its style, its date and its buyer or owner. Eighteenth-century Gillows’ furniture, up for sale in the auction room, has been viewed through these furniture historical preoccupations as an ‘attractive’ object, produced for a middle-class market, well made but not exceptional. In short, the discussion has been about finding the style of the furniture and about making Gillows’ wares fit into the furniture system. Can the Gillows’ archive be read and interpreted in another way?

We are aware that the views of furniture history and of Lindsay Boynton are constructions, that the history of Gillows and their wares is the result of individual’s analysis of archival ‘facts’ (or in the case of some parts of furniture history, of non-archival, dubious ‘facts’) their way of seeing Gillows’ furniture. The work of E. H. Carr and Roland Barthes<sup>11</sup> suggested to us in chapter two that there are various ways of creating a ‘history’, that authors and historians are the creators of a ‘myth’. That these histories and stories contain exclusions and inclusions, with emphasis, focus and discussion being upon the things that are important to that construction, allowing the rest to fall by the wayside. As Lindsay Boynton and Sarah Nichols<sup>12</sup> have suggested the Gillow books back one another up, enabling the researcher to focus upon something of particular interest and view it from a variety of standpoints. To *read* the Gillow archive in a different way from the furniture historians, from Boynton, not relying upon the notion of sketch – item – provenance, not placing Gillows’ pieces into the furniture system, suggests *creating* a different type of history. The focus no longer upon the author or the authenticity of the item, upon what it looks like and how it fits into presupposed stylistic boundaries. Thus the analysis of Gillows’ archive that has already

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<sup>11</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961) and Roland Barthes, ‘Death of the Author’, in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Boynton, p. 21 and Nichols, ‘A Journey through the Gillow Records’, p. 37.

taken place leaves many unanswered questions. To take a lead from Lindsay Boynton, the eighteenth-century pattern books were 'a lake in which anyone might fish',<sup>13</sup> and one in which Gillows did just that.<sup>14</sup> This raises the question of if Gillows' themselves really regarded these notions of 'design' and 'authorship' as important. Moreover, the issue of authenticity, a central part of the notion of authorship, comes under scrutiny in the context of Gillows. Leading on from this it is important to consider if Gillows were more preoccupied with beauty than with function when they made their furniture. We have looked at the way in which Gillows have been seen by others, now we can peel back the Foucauldian layers, and approach Gillows' own interpretation of their wares from the archive that they produced. We have Gillows' own words, their autobiography, the way in which they saw themselves.

#### Gillows' Books as Autobiography:

What is autobiography? Autobiography is a text about the life of a person written by that person, usually after the events that are recorded have occurred, '[t]he mark of autobiography, then, is the discursive signature of the subject and signifies agency in self-representation'.<sup>15</sup> As Heidegger asserted, we like to read about people, we understand things through people, we empathise with them, within the medium of autobiography both the reader and the author has a chance to learn about people.<sup>16</sup> In his work *Being in the Text* Paul Jay noted that historically people have found it hard to resist the temptation to indulge in this form of self-representation.<sup>17</sup> Jay contends that 'all writing is a form of self-analysis' and that 'autobiographical writing is probably the most *explicitly* self-analytical'.<sup>18</sup> A journey of self-discovery, autobiography gives the author a chance to read him or her self and in turn to then 'create' the self on paper for others to read. In undertaking this process of self-analysis the individual is in control and holds his/her life in his/her hands, metaphorically speaking, and throws away all of the things that he/she is

<sup>13</sup> Boynton, p. 22

<sup>14</sup> WCA 344/165/175, Gillows wrote to customer Sir George Warren on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1765, that 'if any of Chippendale's designs be more agreeable can execute 'em and adapt them to the places they are for [sic]'.

<sup>15</sup> From the introduction by Leigh Gilmore to Kathleen Ashley, et al. (Ed.), *Autobiography and Postmodernism*, (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 14

<sup>16</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 163

<sup>17</sup> Paul Jay, *Being in the Text*, (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 23

<sup>18</sup> Jay, p. 22, the word in italic is Jay's emphasis.

not proud of, would rather the readers not know. An autobiography is like a history: a constructed version of the past, and like biography, it deals with a specific person, an 'individual', but instead of the historian or biographer deciding what stays and goes in the story of the 'life', the person who has lived that 'life' decides. The person in the autobiography, like Carr's historian, or Barthes' author, can never give an unbiased opinion. The elements of self-analysis and self-representation contained within it make autobiography difficult: can we, as people, accurately recall and relay our lives? Paul Eakin writes that 'the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination ... Autobiography ... is increasingly understood as both an art of memory and an art of imagination'.<sup>19</sup> He quotes William Maxwell's autobiography *So Long, See You Tomorrow*: 'in talking about the past we lie with every breath we draw'.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, if we are to approach Gillows' archive as autobiography, it must be with care, we must be aware of the partiality that the author, or authors, had. But, Gillows' archive is not a book. Neither is it a life-story of an individual. And it was written at the same time that the events were occurring. Can we really read Gillows' archive as an autobiography?

James Olney proposed that if we are left the 'work', whether it is a book written as an autobiography or something else entirely, essays, collections, paintings, memories, diaries and so forth, it can become 'metaphors for our selves'. 'Any autobiography', writes Olney, 'the image of a life, is ... a symbol perfected in death', as once a person is dead what is left behind can come to *be* them, symbolically.<sup>21</sup> We see this happening again and again, the 'lives' of artists or patrons for example, written in what they leave behind as their legacy. Foucault, when critiquing the focus upon the author, noted that simply dismissing him or her would not do, as the idea of 'work' itself designates a unity of form which is as problematic as the 'author' themselves.<sup>22</sup> In our bid to understand the work we make links between the disparate parts, we search for the common factor that is present, the person behind things, we immediately look for the 'author' through the work.

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<sup>19</sup> Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 5, see also James Olney, *Metaphors of Self – the meaning of autobiography*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 37

<sup>20</sup> Eakin, pp. 5-6

<sup>21</sup> Olney, p. 50

In his autobiography entitled simply *Roland Barthes*,<sup>23</sup> Barthes intersperses imagery and fragmented thoughts that have been, or remain, parts of the 'life' of the author, rather than supplying a direct narrative or a complete story; it is not an autobiography in the traditional sense. There is no order in the things that are presented the life has been deconstructed, then laid out and formed into a book, the things recalled are only brought together in the mind of the reader, the life is constructed all over again when the text reaches its destination. Jay, discussing Barthes' autobiography, writes that within it '*biography* has been displaced as the ostensible subject by an insistent focus on epistemological, psychological, and representational problems'.<sup>24</sup> Yet, we still search for 'Roland Barthes', the author, the person, when we read it, we still accept it as autobiography. 'Gillows' wrote about their 'lives' *within* the Firm not about their lives *outside* of it, and this is now the Gillows' archive, but, like Barthes work, it is not a conventional form of autobiography, it was not purposefully constructed to be so. But just because it did not have autobiography as its purpose, does not mean that since the death of those that wrote it that the Gillows' archive cannot be interpreted as such.

The archive reads as a day to day business diary, written in Lancaster by either Robert or Richard Gillow, and then recorded by the clerk that they employed.<sup>25</sup> It was written at the time that the instances were occurring, there is no hindsight element. The letter books especially are a work of self-representation, Gillows are selling themselves and their goods through the letters, which is partly why they lend themselves to being examined as autobiography and they offer explanations for disruptions or discontinuities in the lives which they chronicle.<sup>26</sup> However, they are a business record foremost and therefore focus upon the 'business', the Firm of Gillow, the references to family or personal matters within the archive are strictly limited, and placed within it for a reason. Richard Gillow, for example, wrote to his sales partner in the West Indies in 1784 '...[y]ou may perhaps have heard of the awful change in my family as my poor wife departed this life

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<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *Essential Works 1954-1984*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. 208

<sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. by Richard Howard, (New York: Binghamton, 1977).

<sup>24</sup> Jay, p. 162, the word in italic is Jay's emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> See note two.



(about a week ago) I hope for better',<sup>27</sup> and noted that 'one of the senior partners of this house died in Sepr. last [sic]' in a letter of 1796.<sup>28</sup> The letter of 1784 employed the family's loss as an excuse to put off buying mahogany and the letter of 1796 reported the death in order to gain sympathy and collect monies due. Gillows appear to have had certain excuses that they used on a regular basis over the years; these ranged from sick workmen to the seemingly constantly contested local elections, from a lack of wood to a death in the family.<sup>29</sup> Boynton amassed information on the Gillows' family since 1584, and his notes on their lives include those from a visit to the graves of the family in Lancaster, providing the names of those that died and are not mentioned in the archive.<sup>30</sup> Without this extra information very little can be gleaned from the archive about the family lives of those who made up the Firm of Gillow, apart from their duties within the firm and nothing at all about the daily lives outside of the firm of the people that they employed. The various authors writing the archive come together when the archive is read, but they do not make the picture whole. Rather like Barthes' autobiography the things that feature within the Gillows' archive give a sense of what occurred between 1760 and 1800, without offering a direct narrative. None of the parts of the archive are much use without the others, for they only give a fraction of the tale, but when they are read as one what we do have is the 'life story' of an eighteenth-century business, told by those that made up that business. What we do not have is a single person. Do we need one?

Betty Bergland, analysing the 'other' asked if 'we read at the center of the autobiography a self, an essential individual, imagined to be coherent and unified [sic]', or if we are

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<sup>26</sup> The introduction, by Leigh Gilmore, to Ashley, (Ed.), p. 8, records that autobiography accounts for those things that shift or alter within a life.

<sup>27</sup> WCA, 344/170/383, Gillows to Beetham about the loss of Richard's wife, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1784

<sup>28</sup> WCA, 344/173/2, Gillows writing to collect monies due, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1796, confirming the date of the death of Robert Gillows senior as in fact 'September 1795'.

<sup>29</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301, Box 56, there is a list of the excuses made by Gillows and collected by Lindsay Boynton from the WCA 344.

<sup>30</sup> 'Robert of London, Son of Richard Gillow of Lancaster who with other relatives here interred died 22 September 1793 [1795] Aged 48; Near this Stone lie the remains of Richard Gillow died 14 August 1811 ... They lived respected and be loved may our end be like unto them [theirs]', words on the graves of the Gillow family, from Kenneth, H. Docton, *The Tombstones and Memorials in the Churchyard of St. Mary's Priory Church, Lancaster*. (Lancaster: Lancaster Council, 1972), p.18 (no. 625). The words in brackets are changes made by Lindsay Boynton in his copy of the text after he visited the graveyard, Hartley Library MS 301, Box 48, folder 2

instead searching for something less easily defined 'a dynamic subject that changes over time, is situated historically in the world and positioned in multiple discourses?'.<sup>31</sup>

Boynton has already begun the search for the 'essential individual', looking within the archive for the constructed author, 'the Firm of Gillow'. Boynton has taken Gillows' archival papers and offered us his biography: *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*. This biography is not entitled 'the possible designs of Robert the elder and Richard Gillow and their employees, and some other people, 1760-1800', 'Gillow' is recorded as a single coherent and unified entity, the centre of the 'work'. Despite his research into the Gillow family Boynton has removed the 'other people', effectively distancing them from the 'firm' in order to present his biography which, fitting into the system of furniture history, is of the single 'author'. Within the archive we have several authors all writing under the same name, rather than one, brought together by Gillows for the purposes of record. We can never know everything that happened to Robert the elder, Richard, Robert the younger, Thomas, Taylor and the clerks during their lives. But this does not mean that we need to look for a single person, a dominant individual or a 'hero'. Instead of attempting to construct a biography of the 'author' from the autobiography of the firm, a series of pertinent questions can be asked of what has been recorded. Even if the individual faces remain hidden behind the façade of the Firm, we can get an idea of how the firm functioned, which things were important to those who were writing, because we have the life-story of that firm.

If we wish to ask questions of the Gillows' archive we must take into account that as an autobiography it is only one point of view on the written past. The view presented by autobiography is 'unique to the individual', as with a biography or a history that 'unique' point of view contains all the partiality of the author, and more, considering the subject matter.<sup>32</sup> Gillows are the producers of this discourse ergo the bias is in their favour. Arguments with customers for example, tend to represent Gillows as sensible, level-headed and usually in the right. In 1796 Mrs. Assheton complained that her chairs with 'red morocco' seats were 42 shillings each when she had expected to pay 40, Gillows told

<sup>31</sup> From Betty Bergland's essay 'Postmodernism and the Autobiographical subject: Reconstructing the *Other*', in Ashley, (Ed.), p. 134

<sup>32</sup> Olney, p. 42

her that ‘with the present price of mahogany’ taken into account 42 shillings was in fact very cheap.<sup>33</sup> After this platitude failed to appease Mrs. Assheton, a second, more flattering, letter told her that ‘yoursel is first we ever made in this county of that pattern – price in London is 46/- and 48/- for single chairs ... [a]fter making find even 42/- is not enough and would not undertake another set at 42 [sic]’.<sup>34</sup> This type of good business acumen is common within the archive, but we have only half of the story. We do not know if the chairs really were the first to be made in Lancaster, or if 42 shillings really was a cheap price. Perhaps Gillows were simply using these as things as excuses for charging a higher price for Mrs. Assheton’s chairs. Gillows also had an intriguing tendency to blame their men. They apologised for example, for the delay with the pier glass for the Reverend John Gaskanth’s dining room, stating that ‘one of our men broke the glass’ and it had to be re-ordered.<sup>35</sup> Their upholsterers, their carriers or even the brass-founders that they used could all find themselves featured as scapegoats in the archive.<sup>36</sup> Gillows’ fears for the safety of their goods sent by sea can be seen in a letter to Mr. Udale, estate manager for John Christian at Workington Hall, item one in my appendix VIII.<sup>37</sup> But we cannot know whether Gillows were telling the truth, as we do not know what really happened on any of these occasions. A selective process is again at work, the letters by their very nature are only to suppliers or clients, they contain only the information relevant to the recipients, they in themselves are *not* a life-story. We can search within the records and find information that can help to collaborate the letters, comments made to other customers and suppliers in 1796 for example, concur with Gillows’ claims that mahogany was indeed expensive when Mrs. Assheton ordered her

<sup>33</sup> WCA 344/173/123, Gillows in a letter to Wm. Assheton [and his wife] in Warrington, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1796.

<sup>34</sup> WCA 344/173/127, Gillows in a letter to Wm. Assheton, Mill Bank, near Warrington, with apologies for any misunderstanding over the price of the chairs, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1796.

<sup>35</sup> WCA, 344/172/43v, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1789, Gillows to Reverend John Gaskanth, Penrith thanking him for having received £220.15.6d in payment of his account.

<sup>36</sup> WCA, 344/170/413, Gillows to Moses Benson, Liverpool, a follow-up letter regarding his parlour chairs, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1784, told Moses Benson that ‘Your Parlour Chairs [have] been kept back by the cold Frosty Weather, as our Carvers cou’d not stick to their Work [sic]’

WCA, 344/165/100-101, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1768, Gillows to unnamed client, ‘according to request have paid Gray the Wigan Carrier 11/- for the Carriage of your Goods but cou’d not prevail upon him to allow any thing towards repairing the Chair he said it was broke betwixt Wigan and Haigh by being plac’d upon Some Canal but we think the Carriage Moderate [sic]’.

<sup>37</sup> WCA, 344/172/202, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1790.

chairs.<sup>38</sup> But we cannot ignore the fact that the people involved directly in it constructed the story that we are reading. We have a ‘process of storytelling ... [a] drive toward [the] narration of the self’,<sup>39</sup> if the truth of the tale has no corroborators and is therefore dependent only upon the autobiographer, who is to say what is true? A person is hardly likely to present themselves in a bad light within something that they have written, thus we return to the inclusions and exclusions of history and biography.

The information that we have about Gillows from their own autobiography is still incomplete, fragmented with missing links, and there is an agenda at work, plus the element of self-interpretation, so it is unlikely to reveal the ‘true’ Gillows. As with history and biography, within the Gillows’ archive as autobiography we have a story and fractured or biased or otherwise, it is as worthy as the stories presented to us by Lindsay Boynton or Sarah Nichols or Bertha Shaw, stories that also contain the personal agendas of the authors. The Gillow autobiography has already been placed within the wider spectrum of eighteenth-century furniture-making by furniture history, therefore our reading of the Gillow archive has changed over time, has been viewed through a shifting perspective, has been interrogated using different theories and embellished by divergent sources. The archive as autobiography is open to a wide range of interpretation, Gillows, the Firm, a coherent whole, is dissected by the histories of economy, Lancaster, the eighteenth-century, industrialisation, furniture and so on. In writing this chapter I choose which parts of the archive to include, what story can be derived from them, and thus I add to the process of inclusion and exclusion, of elevation and subversion. The ‘true’ Gillows will always evade us, as we view their autobiography, aware of the fact that in itself it is also a construction, through the eyes of the present and the past, this story is clouded by the stories that have already been written about the firm by others. But we can seek to re-address the claims of furniture history and Boynton, to ask what Gillows, those who made up the firm, saw as its role.

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<sup>38</sup> WCA, 344/173/153, for example Gillows to Lord Elcoe, Ashton Hall, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1796, a ‘very great advance in wood’ caused a price rise of two guineas onto a billiard table.

<sup>39</sup> Eakin, p. 6

### Gillows: Furniture Designers?

Emerging from my first two chapters is a preoccupation held by both the furniture historians and by Lindsay Boynton as a biographer with the notions of 'style', 'fashion' and 'design'. The over-use, and sometimes misquoting, of the statement made by Nemnich, the German visitor to London in 1807, that Gillows' were 'first grade salesmen and manufacturers in London ... their work is good and solid, if not always of invention and fashion',<sup>40</sup> has led to the creation of an important myth: Gillows can never be as good as either Chippendale or Hepplewhite or Sheraton, because Gillows were regarded by their contemporaries as being neither innovators nor designers.<sup>41</sup> Boynton himself places the first half of this quote in a footnote, using it to explain that 'the observation about their [Gillows] being the most eminent in the capital was not wide of the mark'.<sup>42</sup> But Boynton misses the point; he uses Nemnich's quote to give himself ammunition against the furniture historians, he asks why Gillows have been thus far ignored by furniture history when they were regarded so highly by their peers? However the second part of the quote, disregarded by Boynton, has been employed within furniture historical texts to suggest that Gillows *could not* be on a par with the great makers *because* their work is 'not always of invention and fashion'.<sup>43</sup> Gillows, after all, did not produce a pattern book, how could they have been designing and making furniture of a high stylistic standard?<sup>44</sup> Boynton tried, as we have seen, to refute the furniture historians' harsh words, and to suggest that Gillows did have the all-important 'style' of their own. He notes how Hepplewhite and Sheraton have both been undermined within furniture history<sup>45</sup> and how Chippendale's designs were inclusive and widely copied,<sup>46</sup> as if

<sup>40</sup> P.A. Nemnich, *Neuste Reise durch England, Schottland, und Ireland*, (Tubingen, 1807), p. 136, my translation.

<sup>41</sup> As mentioned in my chapter one, the Nemnich quote is often translated from the original German by the authors of the text, which leads, inevitably, to varied wording, the emphasis shifting with each translation, note especially the use of this quote by Edwards and Macquoid, vol. 2, p. 243, my appendix III.

<sup>42</sup> Boynton, p. 16 and p. 31, note 7

<sup>43</sup> Nemnich, p. 136, my translation.

<sup>44</sup> 'The name of Gillow has been connected with cabinet-making for over two centuries. Unlike Chippendale and Hepplewhite, the firm produced neither *Director* nor *Guide* and have been criticised for lack of inventiveness on this score', Bertha Shaw, 'Gillows of Lancaster - A Great Georgian Firm of Cabinet - Makers', *Country Life*, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1947, CII, p. 430

<sup>45</sup> Boynton, pp. 17-18, Boynton's sources are for Sheraton, Clive Wainwright, *Pugin. A Gothic Passion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994) p. 127 and for Hepplewhite, Peter Ward-Jackson, *English Furniture Designs of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1958) pp. 25-6, 61-6

removing these designer/makers from the equation will help to promote Gillows to the top of the list of great furniture designer/makers. But Boynton's endeavours, attacking the system from within, producing the biography and the 'author', have not succeeded entirely. Boynton tried to fit Gillows into a mould that prioritises the 'name' and the 'design'. But if we read the Gillows' archive as autobiography it might or might not tell us that they held, despite the lack of pattern book, with the other ideals of furniture history, that they were in fact preoccupied with style and fashion, with how their furniture looked. Moreover this autobiography could tell us if Gillows saw themselves as leading lights in the world of eighteenth-century furniture design, carefully guarding their designs against prying eyes. In other words did Gillows see themselves as furniture designers, engaged in the creative process that links function and beauty, or has this idea of authorship and genius been projected back onto the firm through the lens of the furniture system?

Boynton asserted his belief that Gillows went to great lengths to protect the exclusivity of their designs thus 'proving' that the designs were absolutely Gillows' own. Boynton writes that

[t]he sketches and drawings were unpublished and confidential: in the case of finished designs sent out to clients the recipient was almost always enjoined to take care that the drawings were not shown to others and especially not to rival cabinet-makers. They were, in effect, trade secrets and the implication is clear enough: these were individual designs, of which Gillows were both proud and jealous.<sup>47</sup>

The source for Boynton's theory was a number of letters from Gillows to customers and suppliers alike, cautioning against showing their designs to anyone else. For example, Gillows wrote to Urmson and Gregson, an upholstery firm, concerning the designs for two arm chairs, 'if this pattern should take with you, of which we have no doubt, we rely upon your honour that you will not put it into any other Chair Maker's hands, as we would rather have been without this order than give a new pattern away'.<sup>48</sup> Boynton refers to another example in his notes in the Hartley Library archive, Gillows writing to a

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<sup>46</sup> Chippendale's books of designs were 'a lake in which anyone might fish', Boynton, p. 22

<sup>47</sup> Boynton, p. 22

fellow cabinet-maker, John Orme, based in Liverpool, that 'we beg none of our drawings may be copied by any one, or shown to any one of our Business'.<sup>49</sup> Orme also wished to know about a writing table that Gillows made for Thos. Stanley, Gillows agreed to send him the design, explaining that it was 'of a new construction and plan of our invention'.<sup>50</sup> Writing to E. Greaves in 1788, Gillows 'shou'd be obliged to you [Greaves] not to let our drawings be seen by any person of the same trade'.<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that three of these examples are from Gillows *giving* designs to people within their line of business, one to Urmson and Gregson and two to John Orme.<sup>52</sup> Although they are safeguarding the designs with a warning, they are actually encouraging them to be made up by other makers: 'if this pattern should take with you',<sup>53</sup> they seem to have been happy to share their designs with other firms. There was also a reciprocal trade in these sketches. In 1764 Gillows wrote to another firm of cabinet-makers, Wilson and Brown, as they were 'informed that there are very neat Chairs now made in London with Ribs fix'd Level from Back to Back & not upright, also the seats made Hollow before upholster'd. Shou'd be much obliged to [you] for a Sketch of one [sic]'.<sup>54</sup> Were Gillows preparing to use someone else's design and pass it off as their own? Sketches sent out to the Reverend Mr. Withnell included design number 30 'a mahogany chair which is not likely to be out of fashion', for dining or sitting, costing 16/6 – 17/6, number 33 'do. carved back, 19/- - 20/6', number 40 'do. tea room, dwg or dressg room, 18/6' and number 41 'do. carved back, a little'.<sup>55</sup> The Reverend later ordered: '6 mahogany chairs, moulded, carved backs, t.l.f - £5.14.0, stuffing and covering - £3.6.0, 2 arm'd suitable - £2.13.0, bottoms - £1.3.0

<sup>48</sup> WCA, 344/169/312, Gillows to Urmson and Gregson, Upholsterer, Liverpool. 6 neat Mahogany chairs, with arched tops, rails and upright splats, c. 17/6 each, a total of £5.5.0d, were sent to Urmson and Gregson, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1780.

<sup>49</sup> Gillows writing to John Orme, no date, c. August 1783, Lindsay Boynton's notes, Hartley Library, MS 301, Box 56.

<sup>50</sup> WCA, 344/170/325, Gillows to John Orme, cabinet-maker, Liverpool, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1783.

<sup>51</sup> WCA, 344/171/310, Gillows letter accompanying drawings of chairs and a sideboard to E. Greaves, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1788.

<sup>52</sup> Of course I am selecting these particular examples, but they are representative of a number of letters written from Gillows to other cabinet makers, upholsterers and brass founders about their designs. Although the proviso mentioned by Boynton is there, the designs were freely given.

<sup>53</sup> WCA, 344/169/312, Gillows to Urmson and Gregson, Upholsterer, Liverpool, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1780.

<sup>54</sup> WCA, 344/165, Gillows Lancaster to Wilson and Brown, Cabinet-Makers, corner of Wych Street and St. Mary Le Strand, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1764.

<sup>55</sup> WCA, 344/170/389, Gillows to Rev. Mr. Withnell, Skipton, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1784.



[sic]'.<sup>56</sup> However, Reverend Withnell was not satisfied, he later wrote to Gillows to complain about the cost of his chairs. They replied that the upholsterer 'gave directions about seats, which are done in best and most fashionable manner [sic]'.<sup>57</sup> Although the fact that this is a complaint and Gillows, as the authors of their autobiography, may be merely shifting the blame onto someone else must be considered, the possibility that Gillows' used someone else's design and not their own is there. We have no way of knowing how many of Gillows' sketches were actually their own ideas as the information that we have about them comes directly from Gillows themselves. That some designs came from other makers is only known because Gillows' letters tell us so and there may well be many more designs that Gillows simply copied without the consent or knowledge of the other maker, or, conversely, that other makers copied from Gillows. It is not clear if they received the sketches from for example Wilson and Brown, or if they did indeed receive them, if Gillows actually used them. But Gillows do appear to have been keen to offer the customer exactly what he or she wanted, even if this meant making up someone else's designs. Sketches of a library bookcase for recesses at the home of Sir George Warren were sent accompanied by a letter which stated 'if any of Chippendale's designs be more agreeable can execute 'em and adapt them to the places they are for'.<sup>58</sup> The bookcases were sent to Sir George Warren at Painton in Cheshire in July 1765. Gillows wrote 'presumes you've Workmen about the House that will easily fix and secure the different parts together. Have not sent any Busts for the Centres of the Pediment as we thot you might suit your own Taste in them better [than] we cou'd [sic]'.<sup>59</sup> But items put together by someone else and topped off with a bust of another person's design, making and choosing, challenge our notion of the authentic object as produced by the 'author', or the genius designer/maker.

Boynton does admit that 'it was impossible to prevent a visitor to the [Gillows'] showroom from sketching an item and commissioning a cheaper version elsewhere'.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>56</sup> WCA, 344/170/415, Gillows to Reverend Mr. Withnell, Skipton, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1784, items have been sent, 't.l.f' refers to 'termed legs fluted' and is an abbreviation that Gillows use frequently.

<sup>57</sup> WCA, 344/170/425, Gillows to Reverend Mr. Withnell, Skipton, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1784.

<sup>58</sup> WCA, 344/165/175, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1765, letter from Gillows to Sir George Warren.

<sup>59</sup> WCA, 344/165/171, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1765, letter from Gillows to Sir George Warren, Painton, Cheshire.

<sup>60</sup> Boynton, p. 22



But he suspects that '[i]t may be doubted that this happened in practice, at least to any significant degree', and thus the 'unshakeable base' of authenticity within Gillows' designs can be built upon.<sup>61</sup> And yet Boynton's assertion is undermined by examples of customers sending sketches to Gillows, either of their own volition or at the request from the Firm. For example Gillows wrote to Thomas Tarlton, Liverpool, to say that they had at last procured a sketch of 'a dressing chair from London – nearest Robert G. could get to fit your description...but if you want one exactly like that you saw, send a sketch of it [sic]'.<sup>62</sup> Here, we have a customer, seeing a chair in London, and *being asked by Gillows* to send a sketch of it to them. Gillows asked a customer in 1779 if they

might procure a Rough draft at full size (Particularly of the Back) or a scetch, in Miniature, with the dimensions wrote upon it, either of which wou'd be quite Sufficient for us and perhaps full as well for you, as we flatter ourselves that we can make 'em better and neater than they Generally do at Manchester [sic].<sup>63</sup>

The client, it seems, was to supply this particular design, sketched perhaps from the work of another cabinet-maker, or from a chair in someone else's home. As Boynton has suggested there was nothing to deter a customer from sketching one of Gillows' designs and having a different cabinet-maker make it up, ergo there was nothing to stop someone copying another cabinet-maker's design and taking it to Gillows to make up. Therefore Boynton's search for the 'unshakeable base' of authenticity within Gillows' designs and items may well be a futile exercise.

Within Gillows' autobiography the authors are not ashamed to tell us that it is, more often than not, the client who dictates the design. To a customer in 1785 Gillows wrote about the design of some chairs that they had made:

as to the green chairs they are made to the particular dimensions you ordered as near as we could but we can alter them to any size you may please...you are pleased to advise they are not long enough in the seats by 6 inches, pray Sir, do you mean they should be 6 inches deeper from front to back, or that the front rail should be so much longer?<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Boynton, p. 22

<sup>62</sup> WCA, 344/169/505, Gillows to Thomas Tarlton, Liverpool, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1781.

<sup>63</sup> WCA, 344/169/123, Letter to Josiah Birch regarding a chair design that he is interested in having Gillows make up, Lancaster, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1779.

<sup>64</sup> WCA, 344/170/620, Gillows to an unnamed client, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1785.

It is clear that Gillows were closely involved in the details of their designs, but that the client had the last word. As with Sir George Warren's bookcase, it is the client who makes the final decision vis-à-vis the design. A pattern for a 'stained chair from London shop' to have made a customers' by, was held back, Gillows told the client, 'as you seem to be very particular about the form of 'em and the manner of staining 'em, we dare not undertake to make them until you have seen this pattern and approve of it [sic]'.<sup>65</sup> Some customers were adamant about every single detail of the item. Sir James Ibbetson for example, received a letter from Gillows concerning his library table, which was

put in hand upon the plan you fixed upon here and also with the alterations you pointed out to my brother in London... Right Hand drawer next the Top to be fitted as a writing drawer; - only drawer in centre to pass through middle, to pull out either side. Please say whether top to be black leather, green cloth or mahogany [sic].<sup>66</sup>

It was not only the male customers who exerted this kind of design control. Gillows wrote to Miss J. H. Leigh, telling her that they thought that her plans for a screen were fine and that they would be pleased to make it up for her.<sup>67</sup> William Turner ordered some card tables from Gillows, but returned them. Gillows letter to him confirms that the lady of the house was behind this decision, they wrote that they were 'sorry Mrs. Turner disapproves of your choice of card tables... as they are the most genteel and fashionable pattern we ever made'.<sup>68</sup> The client could be involved in every part of the design process, in 1765, for example Gillows wrote to Sir Charles Strickland ofSizergh Castle that they were sending the table as ordered, and including three sketches of chairs as they 'did not know whether you meant to have the armed chairs with stuff backs and seats or Mahogany backs'.<sup>69</sup> The chairs were listed as being design numbers ten, at 28s 6d, a new pattern with a mahogany back and carved arms and front feet, eleven, at 17s 6d, with a stuffed back and seat, ornament on the elbows and moulded front feet, and twelve, at 13s

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<sup>65</sup> WCA, 344/169/38, Gillows to R. Pickering, Giggleswick, ordering a carved gilt and burnished picture frame at £2.2.0 and a small oval seeing glass at £0.5.6, as well as the stained chair, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1778. WCA, 344/169/49, Gillows sent Mr. Pickering the chair pattern on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 1778, to allow him, presumably, to make up his own mind.

<sup>66</sup> WCA, 344/169/85, Gillows, Lancaster, to Sir James Ibbetson, Denton Hall, Yorkshire, 13<sup>th</sup> October 1778.

<sup>67</sup> WCA, 344/173/140, Gillows to Miss J. H. Leigh, Whalley, near Wigan, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1796.

<sup>68</sup> WCA, 344/169/528, Gillows to Wm. Turner, attorney, Warrington, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1781.

<sup>69</sup> WCA, 344/165/179, 21<sup>st</sup> February 1765, Gillows to Charles Strickland at Sizergh Castle.

6d, a plainer version of eleven.<sup>70</sup> Gillows requested that Strickland ‘please return the drawings as soon as convenient’ adding that they ‘hope you may point out something agreeable from ‘em, as a part of each may be wrot in one chair [sic]’<sup>71</sup>. Allowing the client to ‘pick and mix’ like this, meant that even a chair of the same basic design could look quite different according to the client’s fancy. This oscillation of designs for alterations suggests that for Gillows’ bespoke items<sup>72</sup> at least, there was no one, clear *designer*. The client’s input was not always wanted, and Gillows seemed unwilling to make up designs that they felt would not look right. Jacob Nelson, a merchant, ordered from Gillows a chest on chest five and a half feet long. Gillows reply to him was that they ‘seldom make any such about 4’ Long. And don’t think it advisable – won’t stand well, drawers won’t answer, will look odd [sic]’.<sup>73</sup> It seems perfectly acceptable for Gillows to have allowed clients, who after all are paying for the items of furniture, to have some say in what the end product looked like, but the influence of the client has been ignored by furniture history, especially where the ‘great’ names are concerned.<sup>74</sup> Boynton attempted to silence Gillows’ critics over their producing items which were past their fashion window,<sup>75</sup> by suggesting that the so-called ‘unfashionable’ items were in fact the customers’ choice and not Gillows’ lack of modernism.<sup>76</sup> But he does not allude to the clients’ input in the design process, only in the choosing of the particular design. Boynton could have asserted as a positive way of telling Gillows’ story that Gillows’

<sup>70</sup> WCA, 344/165/179, 21/2/1765, Gillows to Charles Strickland at Sizergh Castle.

<sup>71</sup> WCA, 344/165/179, 21/2/1765, Gillows to Charles Strickland at Sizergh Castle.

<sup>72</sup> Gillows refer to these items in their letters, for example WCA, 344/170/599, Gillows to Mrs. Barker, Marshfield, Settle, c. February 1785 ‘as to tea-kettle stand we made and sent by Mr. Barker’s order on his seeing one we had made for Mrs. Livesay we don’t think that they would suit everyone’s taste, neither shall we make any more unless they are bespoke’.

<sup>73</sup> WCA, 344/168/270, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1778, Gillows to Jacob Nelson, merchant, Liverpool. 344/168/217, Gillows to Mr. Hamilton, King Street, Manchester, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1777, writing that they had ‘drawn and enclose[d] an original design of a large and handsome library bookcase’, as for the client’s design, ‘it won’t look well to have a drawer in the centre to write on as that would reduce the height of the doors’.

<sup>74</sup> See for example Christopher Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, (London: Studio Vista, 1978)

<sup>75</sup> For example as suggested by Edwards and Macquoid, vol. II, p. 243, my appendix III.

<sup>76</sup> ‘The last group of tea-tables, entirely a-typical for its date (1786) was probably the taste of the Hamburg client who ordered it’, see my figs. 28, 29, 30 and 31, Boynton, p. 25. Within the archive are several examples which back up Boynton’s assertion, for example, Gillows wrote to George Welch in 1790, sorry that he did not like the furniture for his sitting room, ordered in September 1788, but that they would do their best to resell it. However Gillows were ‘afraid it will be attend with more loss than you may expect as few now chuse to have white dimity covers to chairs and sofas [sic]’, WCA, 344/172/151, Gillows to George Welch, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1790.

items were all the more ‘special’ or even ‘exclusive’ because of this client input. Instead he uses the information negatively, to refute the claims of furniture history in a way that still allows Gillow as the ‘design controller’ to become one of the ‘great’ makers; a subgroup within the furniture system. If Boynton had allowed Gillows’ liaisons with customers to be known then Gillows would have been placed outside of furniture history, and this was, as we have seen, not Boynton’s agenda. Gillows’ autobiography, especially the letters to the clients, illustrates that they worked with their customers to arrive at an end product, that a dialogue existed between Gillows and their clientele, and also between Gillows and other furniture-makers. It is possible that there were more firms like this in the eighteenth-century, and that the life-story of other firms has been changed by a desire to make them conform to the system of furniture history.

As well as using designs from clients and accepting their suggestions concerning changes made to products, Gillows also allowed some of their furniture to be made by other firms. For example, on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1765, they wrote to ‘Mr Beetham [sic], Liverpool’, asking what wages were due to a journeyman there for making a chest of drawers and ‘toylet [sic]’.<sup>77</sup> It seems that simple ‘known’ items, or items that Gillows could supply a pattern for, were commonly made by other firms, and then sold through Gillows: one letter to joiner John Rumley states that

your nephew Thomas Inform’d us that you cou’d make us a parcel of Windsor chairs and Wished to Know the Pattern therefore shou’d be glad you wou’d make us a dozen as soon as Possible... Shou’d be glad to Know how soon you can Send ‘em as we are in want of ‘em, and also how many more you think you cou’d make for us during this Year... at 5/- or even 5/6 each ... – will take a quantity [sic].<sup>78</sup>

Gillows contacted John Rumley again in 1777, they told him that if he would like to move to Lancaster ‘we expect we can give you constant employ’ making Windsor chairs.<sup>79</sup> Specialist items supplied by Gillows were almost always made by other firms; for example Funeral items, ‘15 shields... black gilt... one with Gloria at top’ were ordered

<sup>77</sup> WCA, 344/165/162, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1765, in this particular example Gillows could be, from the wording, just asking for a price comparison. In another instance Gillows wrote to John Gore Booth asking him to pay his bill, but instead of sending the money to Gillows themselves, could he cover their debt to cabinet-maker Chippindale, for £6.1s.2d. WCA, 344/165/135, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1769.

<sup>78</sup> WCA, 344/168/184, Gillows writing to John Rumley, a joiner working near Ulverstone, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1777.

from 'Robb. Spragging and Son [sic]',<sup>80</sup> and glass from glass grinder Paul Unwin.<sup>81</sup> Problems with Bittiffe, another glass grinder, led Gillows, in an order for '2 Glasses with Japan'd frames in Genteel Shape, plates 19 x 16 ½ [inches]', to note that 'the last you sent was a very awkward figure, the curves were bad, either send neat ones or none at all'.<sup>82</sup> Gillows also bought quantities of parts for their furniture from other makers. They wrote to Pedder, a supplier of seats for fitting into chair frames, ordering 'loose bottoms with neat plain satin hair cloth for 30 common size chairs and 2 armed', in 1780.<sup>83</sup> Gillows' trade with Pedder went both ways, in 1781 they wrote to him that 'we have 12 Chairs Fan Backs ready made of the Pattern you sent [sic]'.<sup>84</sup> Gillows added their own twist to the pattern 'they have taper'd Legs Something like those you did not approve ... we think they Seldom make any other Shape in London and we never do it here ... unless ordered otherwise therefore hope you'll be reconciled to that form [sic]'.<sup>85</sup> Despite these changes, Gillows were still utilising someone else's design, *their* employees producing furniture for *another maker*. Gillows' method of stamping their wares from the 1770's onwards, means that they were not adverse to placing their 'name' onto the work of their employees, see for example my fig. 120, so why should it be different with the work of someone outside the firm? This process of allowing other makers to produce Gillows' furniture and vice versa, meant that some furniture under the designation 'Gillows' was actually not produced by the firm at all, and that some furniture under another name should, if we are to follow the categorisations of the furniture system, be declared to be 'Gillows'. If we return briefly to the chairs that Sarah Nichols discovered at Sotheby's, my figs. 75 and 76, they were stamped not only with a design number, 10827, but also some initials, 'WL'.<sup>86</sup> 'WL' were the journeyman's initials, in this case Will Lupton, whose name appears on the petty ledger in the archive as the maker of 6 mahogany

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<sup>79</sup> WCA, 344/168/190v, Gillows to John Rumley, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1777.

<sup>80</sup> WCA, 344/165/183, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1764, order for shields of 'various sizes and prices', from Gillows to Spragging.

<sup>81</sup> WCA, 344/165/185, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1764, Gillows to Paul Unwin, Montagu Close, Southwark, Gillows wrote that they 'desire glasses may be as clear of faults as possible'.

<sup>82</sup> WCA, 344/165/164-3, Gillows in a letter to Mr. J. Bittiffe ordering mirrors, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1765. Mr Bittiffe is listed at the same address as Paul Unwin, see note 80.

<sup>83</sup> WCA, 344/169/394, Gillows to Pedder, chair-maker, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1780.

<sup>84</sup> WCA, 344/169/460, Gillows to Pedder regarding his order for chairs, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1781.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Nichols, 'A Journey through the Gillow Records', p. 37

chairs, number 10827 on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1790 for an ‘M. Parker’ of Halifax.<sup>87</sup> In instances like this, the furniture historians become confused: as we have two names, we have two authors, Gillows *and* Will Lupton, which calls into question ‘Gillows’ as the designer/maker. It appears that Gillows were happy, as long as the furniture got made and the customer paid them. But does their autobiography tell us that Robert and Richard Gillow designed at least some ‘Gillows’ furniture?

The furniture historians ignore the behind-the-scenes makers and designers, the stagehands, those who were not at the forefront of the furniture-making firms (but who had influence nevertheless) because they do not fit with the ‘hero’ notion that the historians have cultivated. Recent furniture histories such as those of Pat Kirkham and Clive Edwards, offer Gillows, alongside Chippendale and Linnells, as examples of ‘comprehensive manufacturers’.<sup>88</sup> Under this title Gillows employed ‘joiners, carvers, gilders, mirror-workers, upholsterers’<sup>89</sup> and so on. As Gillows themselves declared as a piece of self-promotion in 1769 ‘[w]e now have ... a choice collection of workmen to execute any thing that maybe wanted in our way as cabinet makers and upholsterers. We also make all sorts of glasses or picture frames, either carved or gilt and burnished or plain...[sic]’.<sup>90</sup> But within furniture history these employees are viewed as busy drones, doing as they were told and not having any input in the design process. Are we to believe what furniture history and in turn Boynton, tells us, that, like the furniture-makers’ customers, Gillows’ workers were mute when it came to design decisions? The Gillow ledger reveals many of Gillows’ items to have been designed by their employees. For example William Becket designed and made a secretaire bookcase in 1790, for which he was paid £4.0.6.<sup>91</sup> Gillows’ main designer-maker appears to have been Thomas Romney, producing around fifty designs for the firm.<sup>92</sup> His designs included a sofa in 1787, my

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<sup>87</sup> Nichols, p. 37

<sup>88</sup> Clive D. Edwards, *Eighteenth Century Furniture* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 18 and Pat Kirkham, ‘The London Furniture trade, 1700-1870’, *Furniture History XXIV*, 1988, p. 57

<sup>89</sup> Edwards, 1996, pp. 18-19

<sup>90</sup> WCA, 344/165, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1769, Gillows to an unknown, and, presumably, prospective client.

<sup>91</sup> WCA, 344/67/116, Ledger book, 1790.

<sup>92</sup> Thos. Romney or ‘Rumney’, appears in the Ledger book over 160 times, it is not completely clear which items he just made and which he designed, also he appears to have designed items which have been made

fig. 87,<sup>93</sup> a music desk in 1794,<sup>94</sup> a table for Tatton Park in 1795, my fig. 32, right,<sup>95</sup> and a bookcase for Shugborough also in 1795.<sup>96</sup> Richard Gillow is mentioned as a designer in the ledger also, 12 mahogany chairs with ‘backs some of my own pattern in parlour of my invention’, were noted by him in 1760.<sup>97</sup> But within furniture history even Robert and Richard Gillow as designers have been over-shadowed by those that they worked with and the possibility that they used other people’s designs.

The fact that Gillows worked with Samuel Wyatt, is something that both Boynton and Gillows themselves, recording it within their autobiography, were proud of. Boynton writes ‘Robert was a great friend of the architect Samuel Wyatt, an alliance that brought numerous important commissions ... and raised Gillows’ standards of design’.<sup>98</sup> He is paraphrasing a 1784 letter written by Gillows to Dawson, a tradesman who supplied wood to the firm, Gillows boasted that ‘Robert, who is intimately acquainted with Mr. Wyatt in London’ would collect the ‘deals’ on Wyatt’s behalf.<sup>99</sup> The first reference to Wyatt in the Gillow archive is in a letter to an unknown customer in 1771, ‘Robert Gillow has talked to Mr Wyatt the architect about our mahogany in Rathborn’s hands’.<sup>100</sup> Gillows worked with Wyatt on commissions at Kinnel Park, they wrote to Mrs. Hughes there in 1797, explaining to her that they ‘took Mr. Wyatt’s directions and saw Captain Hughes in London respecting the furniture wanted for your house’.<sup>101</sup> At Winnington Hall, they declared to Richard Pennant, the owner, that they had ‘rec’d letter from Samuel Wyatt ordering us to make 16 dining chairs to match colour of piece of damask enclosed – like Sir Thos. Egerton’s, but with red leather seats [sic]’.<sup>102</sup> In a letter to a Mr. William Hutchinson accompanying some designs for chairs, Gillows referred to a design

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by other makers in the Firm, therefore I have estimated how many items Romney *actually* designed. The examples which follow are ones where Romney is clearly indicated as the designer of the piece.

<sup>93</sup> WCA, 344/94/71, ledger book, August 1787.

<sup>94</sup> WCA, 344/96/1133, ledger book, November 1794.

<sup>95</sup> WCA, 344/97/1206, ledger book, November 1795.

<sup>96</sup> WCA, 344/97/1152, ledger book, March 1795.

<sup>97</sup> WCA, 344/89/93, Richard Gillow, ledger book July 1760

<sup>98</sup> Boynton, p. 20, for a biography of Wyatt see my appendix VI.

<sup>99</sup> WCA, 344/170/572, Gillows to Dawson, wood supplier, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1784.

<sup>100</sup> WCA, 344/168/229, Gillow letter to an unknown customer, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 177. Lindsay Boynton believes the customer to be Richard Pennant, MD, of Winnington Hall, Cheshire, Hartley Library, MS 301, box 44, folder 1, part 1.

<sup>101</sup> WCA, 344/173/293v, Richard Gillow to Mrs. Hughes, 28<sup>th</sup> September 1797.

numbered '44', a 'neat...mahogany of Wyatt's', illustrated in my fig. 77, left.<sup>103</sup> Gillows seemed keen to publicise their relationship with the architect and to accept his design ideas. But Samuel Wyatt was an architect: can his influence be seen within Gillows' furniture? Boynton certainly seems to think so, placing as he does great emphasis upon the 'sober restraint and even austerity' of Wyatt's designs, that led to the 'severe geometric line and form ... that is unquestionably the hallmark of the best Gillow furniture',<sup>104</sup> visible for example in my fig. 117. The Wyatt brothers, James and Samuel, have been recorded as architects who favoured austerity, especially Samuel, who learnt his trade under Robert Adam.<sup>105</sup> Samuel is known for being an 'innovator', taking out a patent in 1800 for building cast-iron bridges and warehouses.<sup>106</sup> In a book about the Wyatt architectural dynasty, J. M. Robinson is keen to point out that Samuel Wyatt's 'practice as a country house architect began to flourish' when he settled in London in 1774.<sup>107</sup> This was partly because 'Samuel was a master of interior decoration in the Adam manner' which was 'at its most elegant in the Red Drawing-Room at Shugborough'.<sup>108</sup> Gillows made furniture for Shugborough between 1794 and 1795, including two sofas and twelve chairs with square backs (akin to those in my fig. 117) and tripods with ram's heads, both indicative of the type of designs that Boynton associates with Wyatt.<sup>109</sup> But the designs at Shugborough cannot be attributed to Wyatt as in the Gillows' books there is no mention of them working with Samuel Wyatt at this particular house: they dealt instead with the owner, Thomas Anson.<sup>110</sup> Despite Robinson's comments, Samuel Wyatt is more readily noted for his use of new building materials, for example by John Summerson who wrote that he was an architect who could

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<sup>102</sup> WCA, 344/168/61, Gillows writing to R. Pennant, MP, Winnington Hall, Cheshire, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1775

<sup>103</sup> WCA, 344/172/275, Gillows to Wm. Hutchinson, Eggleston, nr. Barnard Castle, drawings sent out, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1791.

<sup>104</sup> Boynton, p. 20

<sup>105</sup> Howard Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1660-1840*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 1124, see also my appendix VI.

<sup>106</sup> John Martin Robinson, *The Wyatts. An Architectural Dynasty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 35

<sup>107</sup> Robinson, p. 28

<sup>108</sup> Robinson, p. 31

<sup>109</sup> Boynton, p. 20, see also p. 32, note 33.

<sup>110</sup> WCA, 344/96/902, January 1794 and 344/97/1152, January 1795, items made for Thomas Anson of Shugborough Manor, including two sofas and ten chairs, two armchairs, a secretaire and two tripod stands.



‘bridge the widening gap between architecture and engineering’,<sup>111</sup> than for his interiors, which were ‘plain’<sup>112</sup> and ‘unexciting’.<sup>113</sup> It is difficult to estimate how much influence Wyatt had on Gillows’ designs as there are no sketches by Wyatt in the Gillows’ archive, and only a few references to him. Certainly their later furniture was austere in parts, see for example a night table, my figs. 41, 42 and 43, a looking glass, my figs. 66 and 67 and a sketch and photograph of a chair my figs. 83 and 84, but that could have been simply because their clients wished it. Gillows did however work at houses either built or added to by Wyatt, for example at Constable Burton in Yorkshire and at Doddington Hall in Cheshire (see appendix VI), but the designs for the furniture for these houses are few and far between, they were possibly made by the London branch and therefore not recorded at Lancaster. The designs for the items at Winnington Hall and Kinmel Park and for chair no. 44, do appear, from Gillows’ letters to the customers, to have come from Wyatt. But Gillows’ attitude towards accepting design ideas from their clients and employees makes it possible for every piece of furniture to have been a collaboration, whether with Mrs. Hughes or Thomas Romney or Samuel Wyatt. Wyatt is yet another possible ‘author’ of Gillows’ designs.

Gillows have also been accused of taking designs from the pattern books of the day.<sup>114</sup> The only example within the archive of Gillows actually buying a pattern book is from 1760. Gillows in Lancaster wrote to James Gillow in London,

have seen an advertisement in the News Papers mentioning another Book being publish’d Intitled (I think) Household Furniture in Genteel Taste price Bound 7/3 or 7/6 which shou’d be glad you wou’d buy for me and send in the first Box Mr. Worswick may have from Mr. Fleetwood [sic].<sup>115</sup>

<sup>111</sup> John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain, 1530-1830*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 445

<sup>112</sup> Gervase Jackson-Stops, *The English Country House, A Grand Tour*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1985), p. 43

<sup>113</sup> Bryan Little, *English Historic Architecture*, (London: Batsford, 1964), p. 184

<sup>114</sup> For example Susan Stuart suggests that a clockcase made by Gillows was in fact a copy of one made by Chippendale, Susan E. Stuart, ‘A Neat Clockcase, Ornamented’, *Antiquarian Horology*, December 1984, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 125-43

<sup>115</sup> WCA, 344/164, Gillows in a letter to James Gillow, in London, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1760. Richard Gillow, showing his architectural roots, bought *Vitruvius Britannicas* for 4 guineas in 1761, WCA 344/89/79, Richard Gillow inquiring about architecture books, and then confirming that he would like to buy *Vitruvis Britannicas* 31<sup>st</sup> May 1761

Thomas Sheraton's books are not mentioned within the archive, although Gillows did subscribe to the first edition his *Drawing-Book*.<sup>116</sup> T. Starkie's request for a design from *The Cabinet-Makers and Upholsterer's Guide* was met with 'We have not Hebblethwaites's Publication and are at a loss to know the Form of Bracket you approve of [sic]'.<sup>117</sup> However this does not mean that Gillows did not own any more books, indeed their offer of using something of Chippendale's design for Sir George Warren's bookcases<sup>118</sup> and the fact that they refer to 'Household Furniture in Genteel Taste' as 'another Book' suggests that they had access to other publications. Boynton's own observation regarding the pattern books being a veritable free-for-all submits that this 'borrowing' of designs was common practice.<sup>119</sup> Some of Gillows' designs are very similar to those of other makers, for example my figs. 28 and 29 show a Gillows' tea table that is like a design by Chippendale, my figs. 30 and 31. My figs. 44 and 45 are a Gillows' design for a wash basin stand and a photograph of a Gillows' stand from Ardgowan akin to a design for a wash basin stand from Sheraton, my fig. 46. A sketch and photograph of a vase-shaped knife case from Denton Hall made by Gillows in 1787, my figs. 62 and 63, can be likened to a vase designed by Hepplewhite in the same year, my fig. 64. The fact that Gillows owned at least one pattern book is hardly surprising, and why should they be chastised for doing as everyone else did? Alongside Robert and Richard Gillow, the clients, other cabinet-makers, Gillows' employees, Samuel Wyatt and the pattern books all appear to have played some part in the design of Gillows' furniture. This eclectic approach to designing does not fit into the 'Firm of Gillow', led by Robert and his son Richard, constructed by Boynton, nor does it fit with the furniture historians idea of the single designer/maker, the 'hero', a sub-group in the furniture system. Gillows' own autobiography threatens the idea that they jealously guarded their designs, that their furniture was all their own conception, that they were concerned about authenticity, about the individual 'author'. If not as 'individual' designers, did Gillows see themselves as makers of innovative furniture?

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<sup>116</sup> Boynton, p. 18

<sup>117</sup> WCA, 344/175/42, Gillows in a letter to T. Starkie, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1801.

<sup>118</sup> WCA, 344/165/175, 26/4/1765, letter from Gillows to Sir George Warren.

<sup>119</sup> Boynton, p. 22, the pattern books were 'a lake in which anyone might fish'.

### Gillows: Innovators?

Lindsay Boynton moved towards creating a style for Gillows that, in order to refute the claims of Nemnich and the furniture historians, was dependent upon a certain amount of innovation in design. Boynton discussed the 'buffet' and the combination of swollen bracket feet, let-down shelf and pediment with shield, that characterised the Gillow 'look',<sup>120</sup> my fig. 109. He also mentioned the 'remarkably 'modern'' style that Gillows adopted, influenced by Samuel Wyatt, but which he saw, paradoxically, as 'particularly their own',<sup>121</sup> for example my fig. 117. But this kind of reasoning is rather spurious, other than when a direct attribution to a design thought up by Robert or Richard Gillow appears recorded in the books,<sup>122</sup> leaps made to assess them as authors of a particular style are just leaps. If either Robert or Richard Gillow had thought up, designed and developed a particular style, surely they would have recorded it in their autobiography? Gillows, as we have seen, shared designs with other makers, architects, employees and clients. But at least one innovative design can be directly attributed to them. In November 1766 Gillows ordered '16 brass feet To pattern to rise and fall like a candlestick [sic]' from James Hewitt a brass founder.<sup>123</sup> The following year Gillows wrote to Hewitt again concerning these same 'brass feet' which turned out to be 'Billiard Table legs'.<sup>124</sup> Gillows told Hewitt he 'ought not to make 'em for any person's else but our selves as we have been at a Great Deal of Trouble and expense about 'em [sic]'.<sup>125</sup> Gillows design for a portable, or collapsible, billiard table on folding brass legs seems to have been popular with clients after about 1767 (my fig. 101). A portable billiard table was bought by John Egginton in 1768 for which he paid £7.0.0, its frame was of 'Strong Season'd Oak'.<sup>126</sup> Gillows expected secrecy from Hewitt, but they were not true to him, they ordered '6 sets brass billiard table legs ...desires they move steady and easy

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<sup>120</sup> Boynton, p. 29

<sup>121</sup> Boynton, p. 28 + 18

<sup>122</sup> WCA, 344/89/93, for example 12 mahogany chairs with 'backs some of my own pattern in parlour of my invention' Richard Gillow recorded in the Ledger book July 1760.

<sup>123</sup> WCA, 344/165/138, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1766, Gillow to James Hewitt, Brassfounder, Wolverhampton.

<sup>124</sup> WCA, 344/165/133, 24<sup>th</sup> May 1767, letter from Gillows to Hewitt.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> WCA, 344/165/109, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1768, letter from Gillows to John Egginton, Nottingham.

but not to joggle' from Townsend & Co. in 1768.<sup>127</sup> Gillows' repeated references to this design for folding legs, and the orders that they received for it, seem to suggest that it was a design of their own, but there is no way to prove beyond a doubt that this was so.

However, on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1800 Richard Gillow of Oxford Street received Patent number 2396, for

Constructing Dining and other tables supporting one or more leaf or leaves or flaps by sliders of wood or metal or other ... drawn out from either end or side – to any length found convenient – 1 or more leaf (s) may be laid thereon and table extended without increase of legs or pillars.<sup>128</sup>

This patent proves that one design can be said to be Gillows' own, designed by Richard Gillow, the younger, son of Richard who joined the London Firm in 1796<sup>129</sup>, and patented in order to prevent plagiarism. The design can be seen in my fig. 113, where the box for storing the extra leaves can be seen under the table on the right, a patent table was sold from Colne House in 1983, a photograph and provenance form my fig. 112. But although the patent example does show that Richard Gillow the younger was innovative at least once, it does not illustrate that this innovation in any way offered a 'style' for the Firm, so much desired by Boynton. We have to ask, as this is the first patent for the firm and it was not taken out until 1800, if Gillows cared about plagiarism before this date? They were content to share their previous designs with customers and rivals, they tell us this themselves, so it is difficult to envision them as the sort of makers who sought to create their own particular style. Were Gillows' concerned with fashion, appearance and beauty?

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<sup>127</sup> WCA, 344/165/108, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1768, letter from Gillows to Townsend and Co.

<sup>128</sup> Hartley Library, MS 301 Box 10, Folder 2, part 14, copy of the patent entries for London, May 1<sup>st</sup> 1800.

<sup>129</sup> Boynton, p. 31, note 31

Gillows: makers of beautiful furniture?

Gillows wrote in response to queries over delays, that ‘an extensive house sometimes takes two or three years in furnishing’.<sup>130</sup> To one customer they wrote that as the goods ‘are to be made in an elegant stile, they cannot be hurried, therefore must beg your indulgence in point of time [sic]’.<sup>131</sup> Was this simply an excuse for being slow? We are dealing with Gillows’ autobiography: they are writing the letters to the clients. The excuses are couched in appropriately obsequious terms; Gillows are represented as humble victims of circumstances beyond their direct control, but a number of the letters do call for extra ‘time’.<sup>132</sup> Did Gillows sometimes get lost in the details of the items that they were making? Was the appearance of their furniture so very important to them? Some of Gillows’ orders belie the fact that there was any kind of stylistic scheme behind the products that they made. Gillows ordered ‘Mache Ornaments for 3 Glass Frames different sorts in the Newest Fashion’ from Mr. Babell,<sup>133</sup> an example that suggests that Gillows had little control over the style of the goods that they received. One order to a supplier reads: ‘please to send 2 ... Back Gammon Tables with old Plays wrote upon ‘em as usual [sic]’.<sup>134</sup> These vague orders may well have been only for items that Gillows intended to sell ready-made in their shop, rather than for the bespoke pieces that they ‘designed’ for individual clients. And yet when Gillows ordered a chimney piece to be made for Mr. and Mrs. Brockholes of Cloughton Hall from a marble cutter, they didn’t enclose a sketch and their instructions were simply that ‘no tawdry ornaments [should be

<sup>130</sup> WCA, 344/174/143 (no date, c. 1799), Robert Gillow III (son of Richard) to Reverend Henry Askew of Greystoke Rectory, who had been complaining about various problems including the delay in the delivery of his firscreen. The letter continues ‘if we were not paid till the last articles was sent, no capital wou’d be equal to carrying on our business [sic]’, evidently the Reverend was considering withholding payment.

<sup>131</sup> WCA, 344/173/258, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1797, Gillows to Joseph Hornby, Ribby, near Kirkham, telling him that his waiters are in hand, but may take a while to finish. In 1814 it took 6 months for a bookcase to get to the customer who had ordered it, WCA, 344/99/1952, Gillows seemed to make things very much at their own pace.

<sup>132</sup> WCA, 344/170/577, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1784, Gillows’ letter to Richard Cardwell Jnr., Blackburn, they wrote, for example, that they ‘must admit it’s a long time since you ordered the dining tables and wardrobe, but neither is forgotten’. The wardrobe was to be sent the following Monday, and the excuse that they gave for the delay was that they could not find wood ‘as would answer both for you and us’. Planks were either too broad or too narrow, properties ‘being confined both in length and breadth of each board and also to be of fine quality’.

<sup>133</sup> WCA, 344/165/145, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1766, Gillows to Mr. Babell, Carver and Modeller, near James Street, Long Acre.

<sup>134</sup> 344/165/181, 16/12/1764, Gillows to Wilson & Brown, silversmiths. Also MS 301, Box 46, Folder 4, p.184, Card 11.

placed] upon the front of them, except a pineapple or some other small and neat affair'.<sup>135</sup> Perhaps they simply felt that they could trust the marble cutter's judgement in this case, yet another 'designer' to add to the list. A letter to Hewitt, brass founder, finds Gillows in a less nebulous manner ordering 'some uncommon sort of things wch for fear of Mistakes have sent the Patterns ... to cast 'em by'.<sup>136</sup> Regardless of why these items were ordered, Gillows do seem to have been rather haphazard in their approach to the stylistic details that the furniture historians look so closely for.

Despite their acknowledgement that it could take some time to do, Gillows did produce entire room schemes. One example is Farnley Hall, Yorkshire, the carpet, for an octagon-shaped room, was sent to along with 12 painted chairs (design no. 18235, featured in my figs. 80, 81 and 82), 4 mahogany stands with round bottoms for firescreens, window cornices and 2 circular flower stands.<sup>137</sup> Careful measuring had been undertaken to ensure that everything would fit, a letter was sent out to Mr. Fawkes of Farnley Hall requesting a plan of his drawing room that showed both the position and the dimensions of the windows.<sup>138</sup> Gillows wrote to Mrs. Fawkes to let her know that they had received her letter and the drawings of the ceiling and had passed them on to their London counterparts and requested that a carpet to be made to match:

– one of [the] leading London makers says it can't be made as large as ceiling but can imitate ceiling in circle of 3 yards in middle of carpet and make border on edge to match border of ceiling and fill rest with mosaic work ... hope it'll be ready as soon as chairs, window cornice, &c. [sic].<sup>139</sup>

Through their autobiography Gillows give the impression that the way that the room looked was important to them. They recommended to customer 'Samuel Hibbert Jr.' that his room would 'not look well unless both piers are furnished alike *in fact or in appearance* ... we would advise you to have another [commode] with plain drawers at

<sup>135</sup> WCA, 344/166/56, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1770, Gillows to Mr. Chas. Bromfield, marble cutter, Liverpool ordering a chimney piece for Mr and Mrs. Brockholes.

<sup>136</sup> WCA, 344/165/144, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1766, Gillows to James Hewitt, brass founder, Wolverhampton, ordering '24 of one sort and 2 of other'.

<sup>137</sup> WCA, 344/172/338, Gillows to Mrs. Fawkes, no date, c. November 1791.

<sup>138</sup> WCA, 344/172/304, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1791, Gillows to Mr. Fawkes, Farnley Hall, Yorks., goods sent to the value of £57.2.9.

<sup>139</sup> WCA, 344/172/329, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1791, Gillows to Mrs. Fawkes, Farnley Hall.

least so that both piers may be furnished alike in that respect'.<sup>140</sup> Despite their lack of interest in the details of some of their items, they were only too ready and willing with their advice concerning the best way to arrange furniture and the 'styles' that were deemed to be the most fashionable. Gillows gave somewhat mixed advice, for example, to their customers as to the shape of tables. In 1778 Gillows wrote that 'Oval Tables are now more fashionable than Square ones, but a good square one may have 2 semicircular ones made rejoined – a mode much accepted'.<sup>141</sup> In 1784 they told one customer that 'there is no prevailing fashion in tea tables', either square or oval were fine.<sup>142</sup> In the same year they told another that they could 'hardly say whether Square or oval card tables are more fashionable, since we sell about equal qty of both but we think oval more fashionable [sic]'.<sup>143</sup> By 1796 Gillows were selling to a customer, Mrs. Clifton, card tables 'with the corners taken off[f] as being most fashionable'.<sup>144</sup> John Winn wrote to Gillows in 1776 asking for their opinion on the scheme of furnishing for a dressing and breakfast room. Gillows replied:

we think it wd look quite as well to have a commode for clothes in centre of room (not so high as a bookcase) but to have a writing part as you describe with private drawers &c and room for clothes below it, but no upper part above – would look heavy for clothes in this case, as it must project 6" or 7" before the bookcase. The bottom front of one bookcase would hold as many clothes as the ... top of the commode. Glass doors for bookcases are used as much as ever [sic].<sup>145</sup>

Once again Gillows are dispensing their advice on the details, but they are working with the customer, to provide something that will suit them as well as be of the prevailing fashion. It is possible to analyse through what Gillows tell their clients what styles were most liked at what time. However, the client will always have their own opinion and their influence cannot be ignored. Mrs. Clifton, for example, returned her card tables, requesting two with rounded corners instead.<sup>146</sup> Gillows were careful about their choice

<sup>140</sup> WCA, 344/169/465, Gillows to Christopher Hibbert Jr. Manchester, writing on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 1781 after receiving his order for 2 commodes for 'different rooms', one room with two pier tables already in it, the words in italics are my emphasis.

<sup>141</sup> WCA, 344/169/123, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1778, Gillows to the Reverend Mr. Heber.

<sup>142</sup> WCA, 344/170/389, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1784, Gillows to Rev. Mr. Withnell, Skipton.

<sup>143</sup> WCA, 344/170/447, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1784, Gillows to Mrs. Pedder.

<sup>144</sup> WCA, 344/173/133, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1796, Gillows to Mrs. Clifton, Lytham Hall.

<sup>145</sup> WCA, 344/168/176, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1776, Gillows to John Winn, Halifax.

<sup>146</sup> WCA, 344/173/133, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1796, Gillows to Mrs. Clifton, Lytham Hall.

of wood for items, they noted that 'plain satinwood [is] not 1/3 the Value to us as that wch. is finely Clouded or Curled [sic]'.<sup>147</sup> Gillows' choice of satinwood is illustrated in my figs. 89, 90 and 91, photographs of a commode that the firm made for Workington Hall, Cumbria, in 1788. They were also keen to publicise their connection to London and the 'new fashionable' patterns that could be found there. Gillows, Lancaster for example, wrote to the Reverend Thos. Wilson that '[a]s we carry on business in London as well as here; we are speedily informed of what is most fashionable there...'.<sup>148</sup> Co-ordination was a consideration, John Trafford was asked by Gillows if the 'mahogany armchairs [are] for same room, if so, we'll make [the] legs to match [the] sideboard'.<sup>149</sup> Appearance was important to Gillows, but it does not seem that it was the most important regard of all. Gillows propensity to make things such as 'another Whimsical Affair',<sup>150</sup> and to add things like 'any old India pictures'<sup>151</sup> to a fire screen, suggests that the care and attention paid to the attractive details was not always great. So does Gillows' autobiography tell us what they did focus on when they made their furniture?

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<sup>147</sup> WCA, 344/170/454, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1784, Gillows to Worsick and Allman, St. Kitts.

<sup>148</sup> WCA, 344/170/53, Gillows to Rev'd Thomas Wilson, Carlisle, regarding the cost of drawing room chairs made from mahogany. On 1<sup>st</sup> June 1782 Gillows gave a price of 28s 6d to 35s 6d for 'fashionable' chairs.

<sup>149</sup> WCA, 344/170/475 (insert) 4<sup>th</sup> May 1784, Gillows in a letter to John Trafford.

<sup>150</sup> WCA, 344/165/181, referring to 'A large Tea Tray with little Twin'd Ballusters Round And on Astragal Molding...', Gillows placed an order for two sets of solid silver furnishings, adding 'now what we want from you is the solid silver Furniture that is to be about this Tray [sic]' in a letter to Wilson & Brown, silversmiths, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1764.

<sup>151</sup> WCA, 344/170/222, Gillows to Reverend Myddleton, Denbigh, the fire screen cost £1.9.6, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1783.



### Gillows: Makers of Functional Furniture?

In 1783 Gillows sent their 'Book of Prices' to William Mass, a fellow cabinet-maker from Liverpool, at his request. The prices, Gillows told Mr. Mass, were as 'agreed upon between the Masters and Men in Lancaster by wch. the Prices of Work in General has been Regulated and when any varies from it wch often is the case we pay more or less according as there may be more or less Work put in [sic]', tapered legs for example, illustrated in my figs. 17 and 18, were 1d extra each on most items, and on chairs and tables, 1 ½ d extra.<sup>152</sup> The details were added on piece by piece and charged as they were added. Item two in my appendix VIII is a bill sent to Tho. Leigh Esq. in May 1790.<sup>153</sup> The bill illustrates the breakdown in cost of a 'neat large double field bedstead', Gillows' charging for the fabric for the bed and for the time spent 'cutting out and making'. For Gillows, working by this method, practical business issues had to be heeded. The cost of wood, the cost of paying the men to do the work and the cost of any 'sundries', all had to be covered by the price placed upon the item, and somehow, a profit still had to be made. Therefore Gillows' autobiography offers examples of the firm explaining seemingly high charges to their customers. To a customer in 1778 Gillows wrote that chair design 'no. 23 is quite a new pattern and would require waste of good wood to make the back properly' making the chairs cost 18s 6d each.<sup>154</sup> Compare this to a chair sent to Mrs. G. Wilson in the same year, 'elegant, plain mahogany' with green leather seats fixed with brass nails, that cost 12s 6d.<sup>155</sup> Concerns over the cost and waste of 'good wood', propose that for Gillows these issues were as important, if not more so, than the design itself. Gillows carried over their practical business ethic onto the furniture that they made; they were involved in the way that the furniture was working, not just in how it looked. Gillows autobiography explains to us how they made functional objects. The process of contacting the customer on a regular basis to ask about various features was not just about how an item *looked*, but also about how it *worked*.

<sup>152</sup> WCA, 344/170/200, 27<sup>th</sup> February 1783, Gillows to William Mass, Cabinet-Maker, Liverpool, complying with his request and sending him the Book of Prices.

<sup>153</sup> WCA, 344/172/154, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1790.

<sup>154</sup> WCA, 344/169/8, Gillows to Robert Dyneley 29<sup>th</sup> April 1778, the new pattern has a round top rail and a shaped front rail, the price does not include the seat, it is a new design from London.

<sup>155</sup> 344/169/55, 24<sup>th</sup> July 1778, Gillows writing to Mrs. G. Wislon, Yorkshire, also ordered a commode a chest of drawers, an oval card table and a tea table. The current cost of 'good bay mahogany' to Gillows was 6 shillings per foot. 344/169/105, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1778.

Gillows sent out a sketch of a wardrobe that a customer had ordered in 1783, explaining how it could best be used:

a Compleat Lady's Ward & acknowledged to be such by most Persons of Taste ... at the top there are 12 or more racks to hang 12 lady's gowns at full length without rumpling any one of which may taken out without incommoding the rest and with more care than if they were in drawers, of which there are more in the centre [sic].<sup>156</sup>

Gillows then clarified that the right hand wing of the wardrobe had deep drawers whilst the left had room for petticoats, with sliding shelves above for hats and so forth. Coming apart in four sections for ease of movement, this item cost 16 ½ guineas.<sup>157</sup> Throughout the archive are reminders that furniture is made to be used, chairs are for sitting upon, tables are put things on or eat of off, desks are to write at, beds are to sleep in, wardrobes are for clothes, chests are for storage and so on. Nearly every item that Gillows as furniture-makers made had a specific use: a function. Gillows were a business above all, and they catered for their market, they made the sorts of things that their clients would buy: useful things.

To take an example of Gillows' treatment of a purely practical item, and one that Richard Gillow the younger definitely designed, we have Gillows' comments on the dining table (see for example my figs. 110 and 113). Although these tables employed the beauty of 'very fine wood', they were made to be used; to be dined at, and therefore needed to be able to accommodate the diners. Gillows' customers thought carefully about their dining arrangements, one asked Gillows for a set of tables with tops of 'very fine wood, legs on an improved plan as not to inconvenience any sitter'.<sup>158</sup> Gillows recommended that dining tables 'should be 7 or 8 ft shorter than the room they are for to leave room at each end for a chair and servant to pass'.<sup>159</sup> They made a set of dining tables for Jacob Nelson designed so 'that you may Dine a Number of Company from 2 to 14 Comodiously [sic]'.<sup>160</sup> Also, Gillows produced dining tables that changed according how they were

<sup>156</sup> WCA, 344/170/289, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1783, Gillows to 'Thos. Wilson, atty., Preston,' after receiving his order for a wardrobe, feeling that he might appreciate a sketch and an explanation.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> WCA, 344/172/307, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1791, Gillows to Joseph Pilkington, near Bolton, confirming his order.

<sup>159</sup> WCA, 344/173/116, 30<sup>th</sup> August 1796, Gillows to John Leaf, Manchester.

<sup>160</sup> WCA, 344/169/178, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1779, Gillows to Jacob Nelson, merchant, Liverpool.

needed. A sketch of another dining table sent to Sir Thomas Frankland 'may be used either as a Horse Shoe Table or as a large Oval Table according as the different parts may be join'd...hope it will answer your purpose both as a summer and winter table [sic]'.<sup>161</sup> Similar attention was paid to the uses of library and writing tables. A sketch sent to a customer of a writing drawer opens with a slide, with ledges at the back and ends so that 'paper may be locked up without being moved [or] damaged which is a great convenience when a person is interrupted before they have finished the business before them'.<sup>162</sup> A second sketch sent to the same customer was of a 'circular library table all the drawers turn round so that a person sitting may bring any of the drawers to him and the drawers are alphabeted with inlaid letters [sic]'.<sup>163</sup> An example of a Gillows' writing table is in my figs. 9 and 10, and a circular library table with alphabeted drawers is in figs. 14 and 15. A 'Watson's Writing Table' with an angled, rising lid, and a 'new sort of bureau writing drawer, a rising flap on slide, 2 small drawers at the back of slide with ink and sand bottles', was made for the Earl of Eglinton in 1799.<sup>164</sup> This table is in my figs. 22 and 23. Gillows were not alone in thinking about what an item was 'used' for. A table similar to the 'Watson's Writing Table' was made by Sheraton, 'to write and read at. The top is lined with leather or green cloth, and cross-banded. To stop the book there are two brass plates let in, with key-holes; and in the moulding, which is to stop the book'.<sup>165</sup> Although the description here considers cross-banding and linings, attractive details, Sheraton, like Gillows, considered that writing tables were useless if they did not make some sort of provision for 'writing'. But tables are practical items, the assumption that function must be considered is an easy one to make, did Gillows bestow this sort of practical forethought upon all of their items?

In 1768 Gillows wrote to Lamb and Leear, agents who sold on Gillows' furniture in Dublin, Ireland, regarding the price of 'stuffed' (padded and upholstered, see for example

<sup>161</sup> WCA, 344/67/123, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1775, Gillows to Sir Thomas Frankland, MP, Bond Street, London. Items ordered for his country seat, Stockeld Park, including a dumb waiter, for an example of these see my figs. 59, 60 and 61.

<sup>162</sup> WCA, 344/170/317, 18<sup>th</sup> August 1783, Gillows to Mrs. W. Bootle, Latham, two sketches included.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> WCA, 344/98/1497, Gillows sketch and estimate for a Watson's writing table, dated 19<sup>th</sup> January 1799.

<sup>165</sup> Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing-Book*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), p.396. Plate 44 has an illustration of it, left-hand picture.

my figs. 85 and 86) chairs. 'Mahogany Chairs made of good Jamaica Wood; what is seen and of good Oak, what is Covered – 8/6', and then upholstered 'in the commonest Manner – 10/6...[or] in the best Manner – 12/6'.<sup>166</sup> In 1768 the 'best' completely upholstered, armchair that Gillows made cost one guinea, and a sofa was £4.18.0.<sup>167</sup> Gillows were keen to point out that they still thought about the practical issues arising from making upholstered chairs, and that the chairs were expected to have a long life. 'These kind of Chairs and Sofas are Generally made of Beech or other White Wood, what is covered, but we make 'em of Oak. And Tho' it comes Higher they are much better for it. As the other will soon Worm Eat'.<sup>168</sup> Although, bearing autobiographical issues in mind, this could be an excuse for charging Lamb and Leear more money for stuffed chairs, for, presumably, they would have to sell the items on at a profit somehow, Gillows were still thinking about the practicalities of owning, using and keeping furniture. Another customer, requesting for 'Satin mohair' seats to be fastened over his chairs, was told by Gillows that 'it cannot be done in that manner ... Black [leather] is the most eligible in our opinion for a dining room as it will not stain'.<sup>169</sup> Like tables and chairs, beds also met with the 'function first' treatment from Gillows. For the turn-up bed, a bed which could be closed up and when this was done looked like a bookcase or a bureau, Gillows recommended that 'White Morine', a thick cotton fabric, would not do for the bedding. This was because 'White Morine' was 'too bulky' and would 'go yellow being shut up' and would start, rather alarmingly, to 'smell'.<sup>170</sup> Completed, with 'brass wire panels and hangings' which would not 'smell', the bed cost £13.13.0.<sup>171</sup> It appears from Gillows letters that problems with unpleasant perfumes were common, especially with beds. To Mrs. Crackett, Gillows wrote,

we are sorry to hear that the feathers in the bed were not perfectly free from Smell which is very difficult to prevent in new Beds ... we are persuaded that if you observe the following method they will soon be perfectly sweet Vizt. as soon as convenient in a morning after the Bed has been Slept in let all the Bed Cloaths be taken off the Bed be exposed to the Air as long as possible during the day with the windows open in fair weather where this

<sup>166</sup> WCA, 344/165/113, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1768, Gillows writing to Lamb and Leear.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> WCA, 344/165/113, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1768, Gillows to Lamb and Leear.

<sup>169</sup> WCA, 344/169/544, 16<sup>th</sup> October 1781, Gillows to Edward Falkner, Liverpool.

<sup>170</sup> WCA, 344/169/486, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1781, Gillows to John Preston, Reverend, Blake Street, York.

<sup>171</sup> WCA, 344/169/501, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1781, as previous note to the Reverend John Preston.

method has been regularly observed we have known feathers that has had an Offensive smell cur'd in the course of a month [sic].<sup>172</sup>

On the very same day that Gillows endeavoured to provide a solution to Mrs. Crackett's bed problem, they told another customer that '... [w]e can also supply you with Feather Beds which we will warrant *perfectly sweet and free from any offensive smell* which is an article rarely to be met with'.<sup>173</sup> The letters illustrate that Gillows were salesmen and could be economical with the truth, but they are also evidence that practicality was a selling point. Furniture historians have ignored these practical issues and Boynton, despite having written an article for *Furniture History* on the agonies of the 'bed-bug',<sup>174</sup> does not acknowledge the attention paid by Gillows to utilitarian concerns, although their autobiography is littered with examples. Perhaps this is because furniture historians have been constrained by stylistic categories, seeking out the things that defined the way that the furniture looked in order that the piece could be classified. But it is clear that Gillows, if not other eighteenth-century, furniture-making firms, saw furniture as a useful product, made to last beyond its 'fashionable' life.

Gillows did blend their desire to make useful items with an awareness of the more attractive qualities, such as style, fashion and design that furniture could have. They wrote to a client in 1791 that 'we think the best way to fill up the space at each end of the sideboard table ... wou'd be to have 2 small tables supported by pedestals the same height as the sideboard table top and to serve like a Continuation of the table [sic]'.<sup>175</sup> These small tables could, alternatively, be a 'pair of elegant pedestals and vases ... one of which fitted up for warming plates, other with drawers, one of vases lined with lead [sic]', at an estimated cost of 23 guineas.<sup>176</sup> The mode of use of these pedestals and vases as a continuation of the sideboard can be seen in the photograph of the dining room at Workington Hall, my fig. 115, and in Hepplewhite's scheme for a dining room, my fig. 114. Gillows offered to send a draft of a pedestal and vase 'in the present Taste' obtained

<sup>172</sup> WCA, 344/173/150, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1796, Gillows to Mrs. Crackett.

<sup>173</sup> WCA, 344/173/150, Gillows to Michael Taylor, Manchester, trying to persuade him to have the items made in Lancaster and not Manchester, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1796. The words in *italic* are my emphasis.

<sup>174</sup> Lindsay Boynton, 'The bed bug and the Age of Elegance', *Furniture History*, 1965, I

<sup>175</sup> WCA, 344/172/238, Gillows to Wm. Walter, Cromwest, near Halifax, advising that his 14 chairs are in hand and explaining how best to make use of space with a sideboard, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1791.

from Robert Gillow the younger in London, to a customer in 1777. Gillows annotated the sketch, explaining that:

vause a) is lined with lead to hold water and has brass or plated lock in front over drawer. B) is also lined with lead to receive the slop of a) and hold water to wash glasses &c. c) is a cupboard to hold 2 chamber pots d) is a drawer to hold a few bottles. Other pedestal looks the same but vause a) lined with Tin to hold temperature to keep any little dish of meat &c warm. Front b. c. d to be lined with Tin and open all in 1 door inside lined tin with racks to keep plates warm, by heater at bottom.<sup>177</sup>

The uses of a pedestal and vase can be seen in sketches by Hepplewhite, my fig. 65. The vases looked elegant, and could also be useful, but they did not exist free from practical problems. Gillows professed to be ‘very anxious to complete in elegant manner’ a mahogany sideboard with pedestals and vases, and to this end ‘consulted Robt in London who says (what I am well convinced of) that is very difficient to make mahogany vauses to stand the mark without shrinking in Time [sic]’.<sup>178</sup> To take cutlery one ‘would need 4 [vases], which would take too much space on sideboard... Vase-shape not recommended for common use as they are subject to be out of order when used constantly [sic]’.<sup>179</sup> A vase as a cutlery holder can be seen in Hepplewhite’s sketch, my fig. 64. Gillows were not just concerned with the working details of clients’ dining room furniture, but also with the larger operative issues. ‘On further consideration,’ wrote to Gillows to a client, they would advise against two small sideboards for the recesses in his dining room on the grounds that ‘should you remove to another house... you will find them of very little use on which acct. we wou’d recommend one larger sideboard table to be placed in another part of the room... we have taken the liberty of giving you our opinion which we hope you will excuse [sic]’.<sup>180</sup> But to say that Gillows always considered function *before* beauty is to make a generalisation, there are exceptions to the rule. In 1790 Jason Starkey, for example, complained to Gillows, Lancaster, that the vases they had made for him were too high to support lights, and that he was afraid that his ceiling would become

<sup>176</sup> WCA, 344/173/102, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1796, Gillows to Mrs. Ashton.

<sup>177</sup> WCA, 344/168/238, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1777, Gillows to Thomas Mills, Barlaston.

<sup>178</sup> WCA, 344/169/176, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1779, Gillows to John Myddelton, Gwawyhogg [sic], near Denbigh.

<sup>179</sup> WCA, 344/172/157, June 1790, Gillows to Gideon Bickerside, Manchester, regarding his orders for dining tables, curtains and knife cases.

<sup>180</sup> WCA, 344/172/252, Gillows writing to Sam Riley, Burton, Kendal, with their solution, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1791.

discoloured should he place lights in the vases. Starkey proposed that Gillows should send him replacements that were half the height of the original vases, he sent a drawing of this new design to Gillows.<sup>181</sup> Thinking first of the functional requirements, Gillows should have supplied Starkey with smaller vases, they chose not to. Robert Gillow in London, who had supplied the original vases to Gillows, Lancaster, thought that in Starkey's new design for the vases, they were 'too small to look well' and suggested that instead of changing the vases themselves, only short candles should be used.<sup>182</sup> This recommendation takes into account first the attractive qualities present in the original vases, and then the practical concerns of Jason Starkey and his ceiling.

Gillows' own words present a different version of their 'life-story' to us. They do not come across as the firm portrayed by furniture history, middle-class, uninventive and overshadowed completely by their 'famous' connections, such as Samuel Wyatt. Indeed their autobiography suggests that they dealt with a wide range of clientele, from the Earl of Eglinton to Miss J. H. Leigh, they do have one invention to their name, the telescopic dining table, and Samuel Wyatt appears to have been one of a number of 'designers' that Gillows looked to for inspiration, their own employees, their clients, other furniture-makers and pattern books also playing a part in the design process. Nor do they fulfil the role of a single, named 'author', with clear, guarded designs and a definitive style, proposed by Lindsay Boynton. Within their autobiography Gillows are a firm full of people that worked together to produce useful furniture, sometimes designed, but sometimes not. The question does however remain as to why Gillows did not produce a pattern book. The answer might simply be that they did not want to. Gillows grew from provincial roots, and supplied furniture that made them a profit and kept the firm going, they had enough designs and designers, the 'pool of ideas' referred to by Boynton, they survived into the nineteenth century and beyond, and did so by working with their clients to produce furniture that sold. By having done so they challenge the furniture system and the furniture historians' preoccupation with the author.

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<sup>181</sup> WCA, 344/172/152, Gillows to Jason Starkey, Heywood Hall, near Rochdale, replying to his query about his vases, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1790.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

## INCLUSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS:

### CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

#### Conclusions:

We began this investigation with a question: who were Gillows? A discussion of Gillows' life story recorded in three bodies of material, first in history, then in biography and finally in autobiography, has presented us with three different views of the firm. By interrogating these three life stories we were able to analyse how the furniture of the firm of Gillows, produced between 1760 and 1800, has been seen by the furniture historians, by Lindsay Boynton and by Gillows themselves.

The work of E. H. Carr<sup>1</sup> enabled us to see that furniture history, like all history, is one that has been constructed by the historian. The taxonomic system contrived by the furniture historians to classify old English furniture of the period 1500-1800, that I have entitled the furniture system, has been viewed through Roland Barthes' *The Fashion System*.<sup>2</sup> The categories that have been defined within the furniture system rely too heavily upon the stylistic details of the furniture, and upon age and date and author. The creation of the stylistic classification around a particular maker/designer has caused furniture made by lesser known makers, those who do not have their own sub-groups within the system, to be mislabelled or given a broad definition, such as 'of the Hepplewhite period', thereby suggesting that these other makers are either not worth mentioning at all, or that they were not 'designers' but merely copiers. The way that the history of furniture has been created and sustained has meant that it is one that includes and excludes, praises and dismisses. A few, select individuals have written the history of furniture and their ideals have been perpetuated by those who have followed them, thus the furniture system continues today. The furniture system is far-reaching, the furniture historians are also the experts who describe and help to assign value to old furniture when it appears in the auction room. They write articles for journals and their way of

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<sup>1</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961)

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1983)



classifying furniture has also influenced the way that the history of the interior and the country house has developed. The work of the theorists has helped us to understand that the history of old English furniture is a flawed history. Its focus is too often upon the 'life' of the individual maker, upon the genius, the 'hero' and upon the pattern books of a few rather than the furniture of many. This preoccupation has meant that some makers have been written out of the history, that those who did not produce pattern books have been deemed less worthy of recognition than those who did produce them. The desire to search for the item's design and create its provenance has meant that furniture that does not fit within the system has been altered or simply ignored.

The information contained within furniture history pertaining to Gillows supplies an answer to the question, offering a fractured life story for the firm. A muddle of dates that record Gillows starting out in 1695,<sup>3</sup> a confusion over whether 'Gillows' was a 'firm' or an 'individual',<sup>4</sup> a series of claims made upon Gillows' behalf to fame, the invention of the Davenport,<sup>5</sup> the billiard table<sup>6</sup> and new styles of brass inlay<sup>7</sup> and Gillows appearance in various works of fiction,<sup>8</sup> have all contributed to form a slightly stilted version of their life. The furniture historians have not been able to completely ignore Gillows, so they have rewritten them. The Gillows that appears in furniture history is provincial, Lancastrian, unable or unwilling to produce a pattern book and reliant upon Wyatt or Adam, famous names, for their designs. The dependence of furniture history upon one particular quote, that of Nemnich, the German visitor, has suggested a reluctance on the part of the furniture historians to accept Gillows as anything other than the producers of furniture that was 'good and solid, if not always of invention and fashion'.<sup>9</sup> Thus

<sup>3</sup> John Gloag, *Short Dictionary of Furniture*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 176

<sup>4</sup> R. S. Clouston, 'Minor English Furniture-Makers of the Eighteenth Century', *Burlington Magazine*, article VI, 'Robert and Richard Gillow', 1905, 7, p. 45

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Edwards and Percy Macquoid, *The Dictionary of English Furniture*, in three volumes, (London: Country Life, 1954) vol. II, p. 202

<sup>6</sup> K.E. Ingram, 'The West Indian Trade of an English Furniture Firm in the Eighteenth Century', *Jamaican Historical Review*, 1962, p. 27

<sup>7</sup> K. Warren Clouston, *The Chippendale Period in English Furniture*, (London: Debenham and Feebody, Edward Arnold, 1897), p. 219

<sup>8</sup> Ingram, 'The West Indian Trade of an English Furniture Firm in the Eighteenth Century', p. 23, *Vanity Fair*, *HMS Pinfore*, and *Night and Morning*.

<sup>9</sup> P. A. Nemnich, *Neueste Reise durch England, Schottland, und Ireland*, (Tübingen, 1807), p. 136, my translation.

furniture history engulfs Gillows' furniture as the product of a firm who did not produce a pattern book and were seen by their contemporaries as followers and not leaders in the field of fashion. Gillows were not one of the 'great cabinet-making firms'<sup>10</sup> so their furniture was not 'great' either: they do not receive a sub-group in the system, despite Boynton's protestations.<sup>11</sup>

Lindsay Boynton provided a biography of the firm of Gillows within his work, *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*. Boynton used this medium to readdress Gillows position in furniture history. In creating a biography Boynton has followed in the footsteps of the furniture historians. As Christopher Gilbert offered us the life story of Thomas Chippendale in *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*<sup>12</sup> providing this as a means of discussing his furniture, Boynton sought to provide us with the 'Firm of Gillow' an author of the Gillows' designs. Through the work of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Martin Heidegger, it has been possible to view Boynton's biography as a construction that relied upon devising the 'individual'. Boynton has struggled to offer us the life story of the firm as a coherent whole, working as he does at once inside and outside of furniture history. Boynton cannot break Gillows away from the system that has been created by the furniture historians, because if he does then they will not be recognised as one of the 'great' firms. Therefore Boynton must work within established norms. He addresses the furniture historians hatred of provincial firms, its reliance upon labels and names, its close association with the auction houses and its love of the pattern book, chastising the furniture historians' prejudice against Gillows because they do not meet their criteria and therefore are not readily accepted as a 'great' firm. The story of Gillows that Boynton gives us is one in which the firm, as an 'individual' maker of fashionable furniture, worked to provide a series of innovative and stylistically distinct designs that can be found in the Gillows' books, and have thus provided an 'unshakeable base'<sup>13</sup> for authentication within the auction house provenance. Boynton also gives us

<sup>10</sup> Bertha Shaw, 'Gillows of Lancaster - A Great Georgian Firm of Cabinet - Makers', *Country Life*, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1947, CII, p. 430

<sup>11</sup> Lindsay Boynton, *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*, (Royston: Bloomfield Press, 1995), p. 16, Boynton refers to 'in the manner of Gillow' appearing in more recent provenance.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Gilbert, *The Life and Works of Thomas Chippendale*, (London: Studio Vista, 1978), p.vi

<sup>13</sup> Boynton, p. 22

the one thing that Gillows do not have: a published pattern book. Boynton places Gillows squarely inside the furniture system, inside furniture history, whilst simultaneously criticising it. Boynton has not successfully accomplished his task, because the eighteenth-century Gillow pattern book does not exist and because he also looks towards Samuel Wyatt as the instigator of Gillows' style and thus undermines the 'firm' as the author of the designs. But he presents Gillows to us as a firm worthy of further consideration, with some innovative designs to their name and a style of their own even if it was influenced by those that they worked with, a firm dedicated to producing well-made furniture for all sorts of clientele, including the very wealthy.

Gillows' own words present a different version of their 'life-story' to us. Viewed as an autobiography through the work of Barthes and other theorists, Gillows' books present a story of a firm that worked with its clients to produce the furniture that they wanted. Gillows' furniture was a useful product tailored to the needs of those who purchased it, often not reliant upon a particular style. They did provide one solid innovation: the telescopic dining table of 1800. But there is no one, clear author at work within this life story. Gillows were keen to accept the input of their customers, their employees, the architect Samuel Wyatt, and even other furniture-making firms. The story of the firm that their own records tell us is not one that fits neatly within furniture history, that provides an obvious class for inclusion within the furniture system, nor is it akin to the stylistically driven and jealously protective firm that Boynton offers us. So who were Gillows?

We have three lines of investigation, three life stories, three different ways of looking at the same subject. Through these layers of story-telling has it been possible to uncover the true Gillows? Was Gillows' furniture 'a waste of good wood'? We know that the furniture historians have provided us with a number of 'facts' that seek to present the firm as followers and not leaders. We know that Boynton has sought to change this image, to reposition Gillows as one of the 'great cabinet-making firms', a firm with their own sub-group within the furniture system, and to this end has told us some things about them, but not everything. We know from what Gillows tell us that they made furniture,

useful furniture, furniture that was carefully priced, furniture that sold, we know that there were several people working in the firm, many designers and many makers. But we also know that their autobiography is as much a 'story' as that told to us by furniture history or within Boynton's biography. Gillows were after all working to sell their furniture, their books were a work of self-representation, and therefore may not always have been telling the truth. The three stories have all been written with an agenda in mind, we can question these agendas and understand the thinking behind them, but these three investigations show us that every reading of Gillows' own words will result in a different 'story'. None of the three constructions present us with a complete story, but they all prompt us to question what has been written about Gillows, to try and discover who Gillows were and what they thought about their furniture. Gillows existed ergo they should have a place in the furniture system. But if to include them is to try and *rewrite* the way in which they existed, then they become something other than themselves.

#### Future Directions:

This thesis has introduced the idea of a furniture system, a parallel to the *Fashion System* created by Roland Barthes. One of the themes to emerge from this system was the reliance of the furniture historians upon the biography of an individual maker, the creation of an 'author', of a 'hero' figure, a concentration upon the life of that figure and *subsequently* 'his' furniture. Gillows were presented within furniture history, prior to the work of Lindsay Boynton, as a 'problematic' group of makers or as Robert or Richard Gillow alone,<sup>14</sup> the 'man' who did not have the foresight to publish a pattern book and secure 'his' place as a designer/maker. Gillows did not fit within the system as the single hero figure so much desired by the writers of furniture history. Hence they were given other attributes, such as the dubious distinction of being middle-class makers of 'solid' yet neither innovative nor fashionable furniture,<sup>15</sup> brushes with fame, for example working with Samuel Wyatt or Robert Adam,<sup>16</sup> or their appearances in works of fiction.<sup>17</sup> Boynton's task was sifting through the fact and fiction written about the firm within

<sup>14</sup> For example in the work of Herbert Cescinsky and R. S. Clouston.

Clouston, 'Minor English Furniture-Makers of the Eighteenth Century', pp. 41-5, and Herbert Cescinsky, *English Furniture of the Eighteenth Century*, (London: G. Sadler, 1911), p. 268

<sup>15</sup> See for example the entry for Gillows within Edwards and Macquoid, vol. II, p. 243, my appendix III.

<sup>16</sup> Clouston, 1897, p. 131

furniture history and re-writing them in a more accurate and positive way. But Boynton's desire to raise Gillows' position within the system of furniture history led him to create a work about them that would be accepted by the furniture historians: a biography. Boynton offered his readers the Firm of Gillow, the author figure: the hero. But his attempts to assign a 'style' to that individual fell short because of the lack of published eighteenth-century pattern book under the firm's name. Boynton looked elsewhere for the quintessential Gillow style, turning to Samuel Wyatt, an architect, who may have aided Gillows in their search for inventiveness in design, and helped them to establish a 'look' that Boynton believed to be 'particularly their own'.<sup>18</sup> Boynton's search for a hero figure other than Gillows themselves, suggests that he was aware that Gillows alone would not be enough for furniture history, that a 'known' person was needed. The fragmentary nature of Gillows' own autobiography, the final line of enquiry, suggests that for Gillows themselves there was no great desire to establish a 'style', to have only one clear individual as a designer, or to ensure that their designs were recorded for all time in a published book. The 'life-story', the focus upon the individual, is not an adequate way of relaying information about Gillows, and the information that we do have about them contradicts the system set out by the furniture historians. Where do we go from here?

As I discussed briefly in chapter two, the work of feminist art historians has challenged a similar reliance upon the individual within the realm of art history. These historians believe that the focus on the biography of the 'great' artist, a man, has served to exclude women from the written history of art. Linda Nochlin discussed 'the whole myth of the Great Artist – subject of a hundred monographs, unique, godlike – bearing within his person since birth a mysterious essence ... called Genius'.<sup>19</sup> 'Genius' is a 'magical aura' that has surrounded the masculine creators of art since the Renaissance, relied upon for example by Vasari as he immortalised the *Lives of the Artists*, but something that women

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<sup>17</sup> See note 8.

<sup>18</sup> Boynton, p. 28

<sup>19</sup> Linda Nochlin, 'Why have there been no great women artists?' in E. Baker and T. Hess, *Art and Sexual Politics*, (London: Collier Macmillan, 1982), p. 7

are viewed, within traditional art history, as lacking.<sup>20</sup> Nochlin refers to the traditional ideology of the *wunderkind*, the child-prodigy, often from an underprivileged background, 'discovered' by an older artist or patron, or the idea of the poor, lower class, deprived man, scraping a living as a street artist, whose work, despite all odds, has come to be revered, that pervades through art historical monographs.<sup>21</sup> This type of mythology within art history pertains to the notion that these true Great artists were not taught how to draw or paint or sculpt, that despite enduring hardship, their skill was innate, that their spark of 'genius' still shone through. Similar criticism can be applied to the furniture historians as the creators a linear masculine history, for whom Chippendale, as the author of the *Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director*, is the 'genius' figure in the cabinet-making world. His innate skill, along with an early past that is shrouded in mystery, provided for us within the biography by Christopher Gilbert, ensures that he is renowned as a 'hero' and as a 'genius' and other makers are not.<sup>22</sup> The entry for Chippendale in *The Dictionary of English Furniture* (see my appendix IV) states that he was born in Otley, Yorkshire, the son of a carpenter and that '[a]lthough no definite details of his early life are known, it is probable that he was sent up to London by a local patron and apprenticed to a London cabinet-maker'.<sup>23</sup> The focus upon the 'genius' figure excludes those who do not have these attributes; they do not receive such careful biographical attention. The problems encountered by Ralph Fastnedge as he grappled with the difficult 'pre-Director' period where no one maker was supreme,<sup>24</sup> exemplified the theory that the furniture historians have come to rely upon these individuals as the means of writing about old furniture, without the known names the historians are lost. To return to an earlier and female example, the name 'Katherine Naish' is compounded by H. Clifford Smith's observation that 'it is a striking fact that in these Royal Ledgers *not one of hither to accepted leaders among the cabinet-makers* is ever mentioned': she, along with her fellow furniture-makers working at Buckingham Palace, John Bradburn and William Glais, is not 'known', she does not possess the necessary qualities for her 'life' to be

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<sup>20</sup> Nochlin, pp. 7-8

<sup>21</sup> Nochlin, p. 8, the author uses the example of Giotto discovered by Cimabue, referred to by Vasari.

<sup>22</sup> Gilbert, 1978, p. x

<sup>23</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, vol. II, p. 74, my appendix, IV.

<sup>24</sup> Ralph Fastnedge, *English Furniture Styles*, (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1962), p. 5

recorded.<sup>25</sup> Except for the misspelling of her name and the fact that she charged £205 for a four-poster bed for George III and supplied mahogany chairs to Buckingham Palace in 1766,<sup>26</sup> *The Dictionary of English Furniture* makes no further mention of Naish (her entry is my appendix V). But a woman working as an eighteenth-century cabinet-maker is an unusual occurrence. This is something that does not fit within the existing, male-oriented, system. Surely Naish is worthy of further consideration? Nochlin recommends that the notion of the innate genius should be removed from art history, that different questions should be asked of artists and their work, the focus not upon the individual but upon working conditions or changes in methods of production.<sup>27</sup> If we try to look at the furniture-makers in a different way, ask different questions of furniture history, try and remove the individual and the notion of genius, or acknowledge that there were more makers than those who published pattern books, that at least one of those makers was a woman, or that there were more people involved in the design process, such as the workers and the clients, where does this leave current furniture history?

Whilst Gilbert chose to tell us about Chippendale, Ralph Edwards focussed upon William Vile, and various other furniture historians created biographies of their favourites, other makers, Gillows as an example, were left unresearched and only briefly, partially, recorded. The creation of furniture history has long followed the process of individuals writing about individuals, thus Boynton, choosing to turn his attention to the life-story of Gillows, was producing a text that conformed to the ideals of this history. In writing *Gillow Furniture Designs, 1760-1800*, Boynton was searching for the spark of genius that would ignite a passion for Gillows in the hearts of the furniture historians. The reliance upon the idea that the style, age and authenticity of an item can be located within the *name* of the 'author', suggests that in order for Gillows, a firm, to be fully accepted by furniture history, in order for them to receive a sub-group within the furniture system, a single author had to be created for them. But with no published pattern book to recommend this author, the task was difficult. The 'mini' pattern book for the period

<sup>25</sup> H. Clifford Smith, 'Buckingham Palace', *Apollo*, January – June 1931, 13, p. 246, the words in italic are my emphasis.

<sup>26</sup> Edwards and Macquoid, vol. III, p. 1, my appendix V.

<sup>27</sup> Nochlin, pp. 10 + 36

1760-1800 produced by Boynton and explained through his essay on the 'Gillow Style' did not fill the gap completely. Even the Gillows' stamp, indicative of the 'Firm' as the 'author', was not, by itself a verified link to the design. Boynton was still left with no way to prove that the designs were the sole work of one man, Boynton had no 'genius' figure. Thus as well as providing the biography of the firm (rather than of the individual) and offering a series of unsatisfactory 'group' designs, Boynton supplied the notion of genius from outside of furniture history, looking towards the single figure of the architect Samuel Wyatt. The biography of Wyatt produced by H. M. Colvin in his *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1660-1840*, my appendix VI, notes that he was 'an architect who specialised in the designing of medium-sized country houses in an elegant and restrained neo-classical manner'.<sup>28</sup> As such he is a perfect choice as the inspiration behind the austere furniture that Boynton sees as the 'hallmark' of Gillows' style.<sup>29</sup> However the references to Wyatt in the Gillows' papers between 1760 and 1800 are few, and his design input is regulated to the chair that they named after him and the occasional mention in a letter to a client that they had taken his advice. Boynton's idea perhaps is that Samuel Wyatt is an undiscovered genius, Colvin refers to Samuel being overshadowed by his more famous brother James, 'lacking his brother's social and artistic gifts', which alludes to the sort of mystery that attracts interest and speculation. Wyatt performs a function for Boynton: he is an individual, with a 'life-story' and documented 'work' (buildings) to his 'name', his work with Gillows, no matter how small, is a coup, something that other makers do not have, and thus he is an indicator, no matter how slight, that there is more to Gillows' designs than the furniture historians have previously thought. He suggests a parallel with Chippendale, who worked with the architect Robert Adam.<sup>30</sup> Were Gillows, questions Boynton, brushed with Wyatt's genius? In doing so, he offers his readers a Gillows that can possibly be looked upon more favourably by the furniture historians. However Boynton's argument is constantly found wanting, despite naming a chair after the architect, Gillows own stamp, a signifying mark that denotes authorship, is placed upon the item and overrides the

<sup>28</sup> Howard Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1660-1840*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1995), p. 1125, my appendix VI.

<sup>29</sup> Boynton, p. 20

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. See also my appendix IV.



creative mark of Wyatt. Had Gillows thought very highly of Wyatt would they not have allowed his name to be placed on their pieces, as they did the journeymen's initials<sup>31</sup> or the patent table plaque (fig. 112)? A sign that would have ensured that Gillows remained permanently linked to Samuel Wyatt, provided the 'genius' figure and secured them a place within the furniture system.

If Boynton really was concerned with making Gillows 'different' or even with writing a life-story for them that did not conform to the norms of furniture history, then he might have focussed more upon the documented evidence of the input of the client that can be found in Gillows' own autobiography. Leaving behind the idea of the 'genius', the 'individual', the 'designer/maker', the 'hero', we can focus on those who made, within Gillows' work at least, the ultimate design decision: the buyers. Boynton's brief dalliance with Gillows' clientele was restricted to seeking out those clients who were 'famous' or wealthy or titled or Catholic. He was aiming to provide a list that would credit Gillows with a wide contemporary customer base that included people from all walks of life. Boynton's references to Gillows' clients are therefore excluding: they do not provide a complete picture of Gillows' clientele. Take for example the fact that within Gillows' estimate sketch books for the years 1784-1800 there are 222 female customers, out of a total number of 1927, I have prepared a list of the female clients in my appendix VII. This means that for that particular time period 12% of Gillows' clientele were women. These women have an important role in the evolution of Gillows' furniture designs as the female clients were just as involved in the design process as the males. It is hard to see from Gillows' recorded letters which designs were influenced solely by women as there is a movement of ideas between the firm, the female client and/or the male client. Letter three in my appendix VIII for example, is from Gillows to Mrs. Goddard, September 1782.<sup>32</sup> However Mrs. Goddard is taking Mr. Whitthers' advice on the mode of furnishing her drawing room, and having two sofas and chairs. But Gillows' input, in the form of asking at their London branch for the most fashionable way of setting out a drawing room, and that of Mrs. Goddard herself, for she has the final

<sup>31</sup> As mention by S. Nichols, 'A Journey through the Gillow Records', *Antique Collecting*, February 1986, vol. 20, no. 9, p. 36. The initials 'WL' on design no. 10344, refer to journeyman Will Lupton.

<sup>32</sup> WCA, 344/170/98, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1782.

say, means that the eventual design is the work of all three parties. Letter six in my appendix VIII is addressed to both Mr. and Mrs. Allcock,<sup>33</sup> suggesting that the information about their curtains is pertinent to both the man and the woman, rather than just to the man, that the final decision on the design will be a joint one. Gillows' letters suggest to us that when it came to furniture, it was not only the man who decided what to buy. To return to the work of the feminist art historians and the idea that the history of art is a masculine construction, we have here, in the story of Gillows, both the eradication of the furniture historians' individual, male, 'genius' maker *and* the involvement of a number of women in the design process. The furniture historians have not only chosen to prioritise the male furniture-maker, the 'hero', but also to ignore client input altogether. In the work of Boynton the notion of Gillows as an eclectic group of makers and designers who worked with their clients has been buried in order to present them as one entity, the Firm, inspired by the 'genius' of Samuel Wyatt. Subsequently the image that we have of Gillows if we look past the history and the biography, is one that disrupts the linear masculine story of furniture designing and making, requires us to ask more questions of the constructed history, readdress it, look at it in other ways.

As Linda Nochlin suggested within art history, the idea of removing certain notions of life-story and individual innate talent, can provide a different picture of the way in which artists worked. Nochlin, utilising the '*institutional* or the public, rather than the *individual*, or private, preconditions for achievement in the arts', was able to establish that the lack of available live nude models to women artists at the Royal Academy prior to the twentieth-century, meant that it was much harder for women to achieve real likeness within history painting.<sup>34</sup> Thus 'it was indeed *institutionally* impossible for women to achieve excellence on the same footing as men, no matter what their talent'.<sup>35</sup> By moving away from the life-story and the search for genius, Nochlin has developed a body of female artists, noting that some did succeed, not only in painting good likenesses, but also in making institutional changes. We can therefore look at Gillows differently if we remove furniture historical preoccupations. The idea of looking to the clients,

<sup>33</sup> WCA, 344/171/190-1, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1787.

<sup>34</sup> Nochlin, p. 36, the words in italics are Nochlin's emphasis.

<sup>35</sup> Nochlin, p. 37

especially the women, can also be applied to other furniture-makers, furniture history does not have to be a series of famous people, their lives and their authenticated furniture. A new way of answering the question: who were Gillows?, could be to see them through the eyes of their clients, both male and female. This would return to us the idea of Gillows' furniture as functional, items that fulfilled the needs of the customers, not only items that have been authenticated, or items that can be categorised within the stylistic boundaries of the furniture system.

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