



## THE FURNITURE HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

No. 171

AUGUST 2008

### 'SUCH COSTLY FURNITURE, SUCH BEDS OF STATE'\*: REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSERVATION AND RE-DISPLAY OF QUEEN CHARLOTTE'S STATE BED

This Summer and Autumn visitors to Hampton Court will have the opportunity to see Queen Charlotte's magnificent bed, from the Royal Collection, for the first time in years as major conservation work reaches completion (figure 1). This work has a complex and chequered history of its own: what began in the 1950s as good, but old fashioned, restoration work transformed into conservation, only to be interrupted by the devastating fire of 1986. One of the benefits of this drawn-out process is the new information it has produced about the bed's enigmatic past.

The bed comes near the end of the line of great four-poster state beds in England. It is a relic of a bygone age of elaborate court etiquette and was probably never slept in. Within years of its creation the Royal Household had been drastically reformed and even the very proper George III and Queen Charlotte had little practical use for such empty show. As well as being a significant expression of the queen's individual patronage and taste, its design is in the very latest neo-classical style.

Unlike many eighteenth-century royal objects the precise origins of the bed are obscured among the records of the queen's private purse (the choice of funds is significant as it betrays the Queen's close personal interest). Its early history has been pieced together from circumstantial evidence. The bed was finished in 1778 and soon placed in the Queen's State Bedchamber in Charles II's Star Building on the north side of Windsor Castle. At this point in their reign the king and queen were looking to accommodate their ever-increasing family and contemplated improving the old castle. However, when advised of the prohibitive

\* This title comes from an anonymous mid-eighteenth century poem on Harewood House



Figure 1 Queen Charlotte's state bed now back on display at Hampton Court.  
 Conservation of the curtains will be completed this year.  
 The Royal Collection

costs, they enlarged what became known as the Queen's or Upper Lodge outside the Castle walls. The state rooms inside the Castle were still maintained. The king appropriated Queen Anne's old state bed for his State Bedchamber (Hugh Roberts, 'A Neo-classical Episode at Windsor', *Furniture History*, 1997, pp. 177–187). In 1772, the Queen commissioned an up-to-the-minute state bed to take its place. Eschewing traditional velvet or damask upholstery, she turned to Mrs. Phoebe Wright's School for Embroidering Females to produce beautifully conceived floral needlework. And so began a collaboration that was as much an act of social as artistic patronage. Until her death in 1818, the queen supported six young girls at Mrs Wright's charity school for the large sum of £500 a year. Letters unearthed by Mary Phillips (*Connoisseur Year Book*, 1961, p. 93 and Olwen Headley, *Queen Charlotte*, 1975, p. 130) reveal that the queen took a close interest in the creation of her embroideries which took five years to complete. She learnt the names of the girls who were 'orphan daughters of clergymen', obliged to find a respectable living. The floral swags and posies on the bed and its accompanying seat furniture, all varieties grown in England, are a clear expression of Queen Charlotte's love of botany, as well as her own interest in women's work, which she encouraged in her daughters and friends. They are drawn and laid out with great sophistication, the flowing lines of the garlands softening the severe, classical lines of the carved bed stock. It has been suggested that the flower painter Mary Moser R.A. designed the bed hangings, as she worked for Phoebe Wright's niece and successor Nancy Pawsey in 1778. Moser later painted a room for the Queen at Frogmore House. But credit might equally go to Phoebe Wright, for she was also a noted textile designer in her own right (N. Rothstein, *Woven Textile Design in Britain to 1750*, pp. 15, 128).

The queen's own part in its design should also be considered. Her own children were tutored by leading artists, including Moser herself.

Surprisingly the designer of the highly architectural bed stock itself is unrecorded. The overall form of the bed follows a particular strand of state beds going back to Queen Anne's bed at Windsor (1714) and occasionally even earlier. These all share rectilinear form and classical architectural mouldings, relying on the richness of their textiles for effect rather than the passementier's art. What stands out on this particular bed are its richly carved and gilded Corinthian foot posts and prominent cornice, with its honeysuckle-ornamented acroteria. The latter completely hide the elliptical tester dome, whose sumptuous embroidery and gilt wood interior may only be enjoyed by the bed's occupant (figure 2). This appears to be a very early and sophisticated use of such features on a state bed. Indeed, in his round up of royal beds Peter Thornton perceptively suggested that this was all replaced in the 1830s (*Connoisseur*, June, 1977, p. 142). With the benefit of recent detailed examination during conservation we now know that the whole bed stock is contemporary with the embroidery (although the ornament was replaced with composition during early restoration). Thornton was right to highlight the modernity of this feature, for it may even pre-date that *tour-de-force* of neo-classical bed design, Robert Adam's state bed for Osterley



Figure 2 The inside of the tester dome, showing original textiles and gilding. The Royal Collection



Park in 1776. For all its brilliant design, the Osterley bed still sports a great exterior dome. Such domes had their heyday on beds in the 1750s and 60s.

A contender as the overall designer for Queen Charlotte's bed is John Yenn. Yenn, an assistant to Sir William Chambers, was first mentioned by Hugh Roberts in connection with his designs for neo-classical interiors at Windsor (H. Roberts, 'A Neoclassical Episode at Windsor', *Furniture History*, 1997, pp. 177–187). He also linked Yenn with the Soho cabinet-maker Robert Campbell, who was the maker of the throne and canopy in the King's Audience Chamber at Windsor. Campbell probably also supplied the carved framework of Queen Charlotte's bed together with two en-suite chairs and ten stools (*George III and Queen Charlotte, Patronage and Court Taste*, ed. J. Roberts, 2004, pp. 276–7).

However, now we know that the bed's design is all of a piece could it perhaps be a little too advanced for a man described by Sir William Chambers as 'an ingenious faithful intelligent servant'? Among Yenn's drawings at the Royal Academy of Arts is a superb presentation cross-section of a large town house, dated 1774, which includes a domed bed (RA drawings collection, Yenn, B15). Although this does share ornamental details with Queen Charlotte's bed, it has a conventional large exterior dome. As more of Yenn's drawings for furniture are examined the less capable he seems to be of devising the advanced design of the queen's bed. As John Harris pointed out in his exhibition of Yenn's drawings, Yenn could be mischievous and could even be described as a 'mannerist' on paper, yet he rarely achieved such originality in stone — nor in wood (J. Harris, *John Yenn Draughtsman Extraordinary*, Heinz Gallery leaflet, 1973). It is possible that Chambers could be the *eminence grise* behind the queen's project, guiding his former pupil's pencil. After all he had produced many highly original designs for the royal family over the years. This suggestion might help explain why the only bed design previously attributed to Chambers, made for the 4th Duke of Marlborough, has failed to convince (H. Roberts, 'Nicely fitted up', *Furniture History*, 1994, pp. 120–3). Intriguingly that bed, which was made by Mayhew and Ince, is very similar to the domed bed in Yenn's Academy drawing.

More of the bed's later history has now been revealed. During its first quarter century at Windsor part of the embroidery was apparently removed and applied to new silk hangings: according to early guidebooks, the original green and cream ground on the exterior was replaced with Garter blue, although no trace of this was found during conservation. By the early 1800s James Wyatt had begun remodelling the state rooms and the bed disappeared from view. Newly discovered craftsmen's signatures and the dates 1819 and '20 on the bed's cornice and inside the valances confirm that the bed was restored by royal cabinet-makers France and Banting. Although not traced in the royal accounts, the work was perhaps commissioned by the Prince Regent in anticipation of his accession. The bed reappears in guidebooks in the newly-enlarged Queen's Bedchamber by 1827. Following that room's incorporation into the new Royal Library in the 1830s, the bed was moved to Hampton Court. There it took pride of place in the King's Bedchamber, ousting William III's ancient bed. Analysis has now confirmed that, some time after 1861, the precious embroideries were cut out yet again and reapplied to synthetically dyed purple silk. This silk too has mostly decayed, but it can still be seen on the upper valances of the bed. Only the inside of the tester and its valances retain their original cream satin. The two-colour, water-gilded ornament in yellow and green gold, attributed to Robert Campbell, also survives. The whole effect is ravishing, like some royal bibelot.

The lengthy conservation of this superb and fascinating bed is reaching completion and it may now be admired once again together with its en-suite furniture and the paintings which reflect the former Queen's State Bedchamber at Windsor. The bed can be seen by special tour on Wednesday afternoons during the summer and autumn or by appointment (for Hampton Court opening times and contact details visit [hrp.org.uk](http://hrp.org.uk) or call 0203 166 6311).

Thanks must go to Sir Hugh Roberts, Director of the Royal Collection, for his original work on royal and neo-classical furniture, Morgan Feely at the Royal Academy drawings collection, Annabel Westman, Aasha Tyrrell of Carvers and Gilders and the Conservation and Collection Care section at Historic Royal Palaces for their inspiration and discoveries.

Sebastian Edwards  
Historic Royal Palaces

## GEORGE AITCHISON'S FURNITURE FOR LEIGHTON HOUSE

On 31 October 2008, Leighton House Museum closes to facilitate 12 months of refurbishment and redecoration funded by the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea. The building will be entirely rewired, the outdated heating system renewed and security and fire detection systems replaced. The disruption caused will also present the opportunity to revisit the decoration and presentation of the interiors and to consider again how they were furnished.

The tragedy of Leighton House remains the sale of Leighton's fascinating and extensive collections of fine and decorative art following his death in January 1896. His two sisters, Augusta and Alexandra who inherited his entire estate, initially attempted to sell the house and contents intact as a permanent memorial to their brother. When no buyer was forthcoming and attempts to auction the house alone also failed, the sisters consigned virtually the entire contents to Christie, Manson & Woods with the sale taking place at King Street, London over 8 days from 8 July 1896. The sale made more than the sisters had originally asked for house and contents together, confirming the scale of the bargain that had been missed.

Recent research has established just how far the house was conceived around the display of particular works of art. Without its contents, the building no longer quite 'makes sense' in the way it once did. Occasionally items from Leighton's collection do resurface. In 2006, a late fifteenth-century terracotta relief by the Florentine sculptor Rossellino was acquired at Sotheby's and hangs once more in the Silk Room on the first floor. However, perhaps the greatest loss remains the pieces of furniture specifically designed for the house by its architect, George Aitchison (1825–1910).

Leighton and Aitchison met as young men in Rome in the early 1850s. Having completed his formal training in Frankfurt, Leighton was working on the paintings with which he would launch his career. Aitchison, the son of an architect was touring Italy and would leave Rome to travel with fellow architect William Burges. Leighton remained in contact with Aitchison and when he came to build his house on the edge of Holland Park in 1864 engaged his 'old friend' as architect. Aitchison remained the only architect to work on the house through its many extensions and embellishments completed over the next thirty years. Leighton was clearly closely involved in all stages of the design and construction of the house and in several contemporary accounts, the furniture is attributed jointly to Aitchison and Leighton. Although we cannot be certain, it appears that all the furniture was designed and made as an integral part of the original conception of the house in 1864.

The exact number and type of the furniture they produced together is uncertain. Edgcumbe Staley in his biography of Leighton published ten years after his death, described how 'the suites of tables, cabinets, bookcases etc., which Aitchison had designed were worked out in common wood, stained black, with arabesques in white holly, varnished over until they produced the effect of ebony inlaid with ivory'. However, the 1896 sale catalogue positively identifies only a single bookcase as being designed by Aitchison. Contemporary descriptions and articles on the interiors nevertheless confirm that two



Figure 3 One of the glazed bookcases in the studio standing behind one of Leighton's canvases

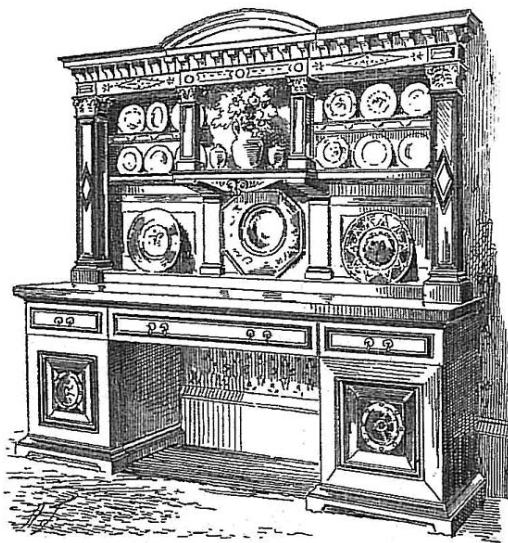


Figure 4 The massive studio sideboard illustrated in *La Construction Moderne*, March 1896

further bookcases and the dining room sideboard were also to his design, making a total of at least four items in all. Not every part of the house was photographed in Leighton's day and the Christie's catalogue is not entirely reliable and so it is possible that further Aitchison-designed furniture was located within these 'blind spots' around the house.

The four Aitchison pieces were sold as the final lots on the first day's sale on Wednesday July 8, 1896. Lot 137 was described as 'An Upright Ebonised Book-Case, inlaid with scrolls in ivory after a design by Aitchison, 6 ft long'. The buyer is given as Aitchison himself at a price of £13.2.6. The following item, lot 138 was 'A Massive Book-Case, with glass doors above, and doors enclosing drawers below, inlaid with ivory with bosses of lapis lazuli — 6 ft long' (figure 3). Together with its companion, sold as lot 139, these were bought by 'Murray' at a cost of £24.3.0 each.

The three bookcases were all located at the east end of the studio on the first floor of the house. The two glazed bookcases sat in shallow niches on either side of the large studio screen. These were the most handsome of the pieces designed for the house, with inlaid decoration that repeated the motifs incised into the door architraves throughout the interiors and elaborate curvilinear scrollwork reminiscent of Aitchison's designs for the mosaic floors in the staircase hall completed around 1881. The single bookcase sat close by against the north wall, to the right of the great north window.

Lot 140, the last of the group was described as 'A Massive Ebonised Sideboard with folding doors at the side and three drawers, shelves above, inlaid with scrolls, &c in ivory and light wood, with bosses in lapis lazuli — 8 ft. 6 in. long, 8ft. 2 in. high and was purchased by 'Morse' for £19.8.6. This was evidently designed for the dining room and was positioned between the two doors on the south side of the room. The interior was described by Mrs Haweis in her book *Beautiful Houses* of 1886:

'The colouring is warm, somewhat dark, consisting of a deep red wall, oak mantelpiece and chairs (the last covered with brown leather), and a big ebonized sideboard, designed by Mr Aitchison. The blackness of this latter is broken by a crowd of china on its shelves, blue Nankeen and old English and by a pretty little silver coffee service of Turkish work.'

Although sold in 1896, a photograph of the dining room dated 1902 when the house had already become a museum in Leighton's honour, shows the sideboard still in position, its new owner perhaps daunted by the challenge of moving it. There is no indication of when it did finally leave the house.

The location of all these items remains a mystery. We would like to believe that some or all of them still survive, their owners simply unaware of the connection to Leighton House and that eventually they will be reunited with the interiors. Tantalisingly one piece did very nearly return. The museum archives contain a letter from the Council's Chief Librarian, then responsible for Leighton House, dated October 1938 to a Mr R. G. Fox in which the offer of a single large bookcase 'designed for Lord Leighton' is declined on the grounds that 'there is no available space and incidentally no practical use it could be put to.' Presumably the unglazed piece bought by Aitchison at the sale. No such concerns would apply were it ever to be offered to the museum again!

Daniel Robbins  
Leighton House

## FUTURE SOCIETY EVENTS

### BOOKINGS

For places on all visits, please apply to the Activities Secretary, Clarissa Ward, 25 Wardo Avenue, London, SW6 6RA, tel. /fax 020 7384 4458, enclosing a separate cheque *and* separate stamped addressed envelope for each event *using the enclosed booking form*. Applications should *only* be made by members or family members, and by those who intend to take part in the whole programme. No one can apply for more than one place unless they hold a joint membership, and each applicant should be identified by name. If you wish to be placed on the waiting list please enclose a telephone number where you can be reached. Please note that a closing date for applications for all visits is printed in the *Newsletter*. Applications made after the closing date will be accepted only if space is still available.

### CANCELLATIONS

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

N.B. PLEASE REMEMBER TO SEND SUFFICIENT STAMPED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPES FOR ALL APPLICATIONS, INCLUDING REQUESTS FOR DETAILS OF FOREIGN TOURS AND STUDY WEEKENDS.

### ANNUAL LECTURE

*The London Furniture Industry 1640–1720*

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

Wednesday 15 October 2008, 6.00 pm for 6.30–8.00 pm

The 2008 Annual Lecture will be given by Laurie Lindey, who is currently working on her PhD at the University of London. In recent years, she has worked as research assistant to Dr David Mitchell, the Goldsmiths Company, Dr Tessa Murdoch, Dr Adam Bowett, Dr Amin Jaffer and Eleanor John, and has written articles for the Society's newsletters on specific aspects of the London furniture trade at this period.

The doors will open at 6.00 pm when wine and soft drinks will be available. The lecture will begin at 6.30 pm.

Admission is free but attendance is by ticket only, which must be acquired in advance from the Activities Secretary. Numbers are limited to 90.

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND SPECIAL TALK BY PHILIP CLARIS  
THE NATIONAL TRUST COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT PROJECT,  
FOLLOWED BY AN AFTERNOON VISIT TO THE REFORM CLUB**

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

Saturday 29 November 2008, 10.30 am–3.30 pm

The Annual General Meeting for the financial year ending 30 June 2008 will be held at the East India Club, 16 St James's Square, London SW1. The AGM will start at 10.30 am (coffee from 10.00 am) followed by Works in Progress talks by Christopher Rowell, the National Trust, Treve Rosoman, English Heritage, Sarah Medlam, Department of Furniture Textiles & Fashion, Victoria & Albert Museum and a curator from Temple Newsam House, Leeds.

After a light lunch, there will be a tour of the Reform Club at 100 Pall Mall. This Italian Renaissance style masterpiece of Sir Charles Barry was inspired by Palazzo Farnese and was completed in 1841. The interiors, which remain as original, are richly flamboyant in decoration and most of the furniture was made by Holland and Son to the designs of Barry.

Admission to the AGM is free but all members wishing to attend should notify the Activities Secretary at least 7 days in advance. Tickets for lunch and the afternoon visit are available at a cost of £25 per head and likewise must be booked with the Activities Secretary at least 7 days in advance.









## OTHER ITEMS

### FURNITURE HISTORY FOR SALE

A member has generously donated to the Society a run of *Furniture History* from Vol XIX (1983) to XLIII (2007) for sale in aid of Society funds. Members interested in acquiring these should make an offer to Brian Austen, 1, Mercedes Cottages, St. John's Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 4EH, tel/fax 01444 413845, email: brian.austen@zen.co.uk. No reserve applies and the highest bidder will be the purchaser. Collection will need to be arranged by the purchaser from central London or they can be posted at the purchaser's expense. Bids will be accepted up to and including 30 September 2008, when the successful purchaser will be informed. If an email address is provided, bidders will be kept informed of the current price as the sale progresses.

### SUMMER OPENING OF BUCKINGHAM PALACE

This year sees the 16<sup>th</sup> Summer Opening of Buckingham Palace, when the magnificent State Rooms open to the public. For the first time ever and for this year only, visitors will be able to experience the spectacle of the Palace's Ballroom set up for a State Banquet. The horseshoe-shaped table traditionally used on such occasions will be dressed with a dazzling display of silver-gilt from the Grand Service, first used to celebrate the birthday of George III in 1811, and adorned with beautiful flower arrangements. Lavish buffets of tureens, dishes and fine English and Continental porcelain will flank the table. The Summer Opening of the State Rooms at Buckingham Palace is from 29 July to 29 September 2008. Open daily 09:45–18:00 (last admission 15:45). Admission by timed tickets. Advance tickets: [www.royalcollection.org.uk](http://www.royalcollection.org.uk) or (+44) (0)20 7766 7300.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Suggestions for future reviews and publishers' review copies should be sent to Dr Reinier Baarsen, Reviews Editor, Rijksmuseum, PO Box 74888, 1070 DN Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Tel. 00-31-20-6747220. e-mail: [r.baarsen@rijksmuseum.nl](mailto:r.baarsen@rijksmuseum.nl)

Jörg Meiner, *Möbel des Spätbiedermeier und Historismus, Die Regierungszeiten der preußischen Könige Friedrich Wilhelm IV. (1840–1861) und Wilhelm I. (1861–1888)* (Berlin: Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, 2007) 533 pp., 329 col., 188 b/w illus. ISBN 978-3-05-004353-1, 128.

This publication is the third in a new series of catalogues of the decorative arts in the collections of the Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg. The first, published in 2000, describes the embroideries, and the second (2001) the chandeliers; the present volume is the first of a projected five dealing with the important holdings of furniture originally in the possession of the Prussian royal family. Mainly dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these are nowadays exhibited in altogether 27 castles and palaces.

The 266 catalogue entries are organized in twelve chapters, arranged according to the individual residences from which the furniture originates. A general introduction provides a survey of the state and private apartments in the Prussian palaces, and their furnishings during the post-classicist decades with which the catalogue is concerned. Subsequently, each chapter is preceded by an essay on the building history of the castle or palace in



question, as well as the use of its apartments and interiors. Together, these introductions underpin the twofold purpose of the catalogue as stated in the preface. Its aim is not just to describe the furniture collection, but also to link it with the furnishing history of the apartments and rooms that originally held the various items. Based on a thorough study of the royal archives and inventories, the history of each building and the decoration and function of the individual rooms are elucidated. Floor plans of apartments are illustrated, as well as historic and present-day views of interiors. The papers documenting the commissioning of the furniture have yielded many designs for specific pieces; these are also illustrated.

The curator of the furniture collection, Afra Schick, contributes an essay on the 'separation of style and ornament' thought to be characteristic of historicism. She bases her observations on the furnishing of the royal apartments in Schloss Orangerie in Potsdam installed in 1858–59 and largely preserved intact. Ornamental elements were culled from various styles — in the case of the Orangerie, baroque, rococo and classicism; the selected elements were abstracted, simplified and combined in a piece of furniture with no consideration for the original proportions or the structure of which they formed a part. Consequently, whereas historicism is normally regarded as a period of stylistic pluralism, it would be more apt to speak of ornamental pluralism. It may be questioned if this release of the ornament from the form to which it is applied, and the consequent freedom of the ornamental decoration, does not already hold true of late eighteenth-century classicism which might therefore be considered the first 'neo-style'.

Brief contributions on restoration by Ulrike Eichner and Marc Heincke clarify two innovative techniques of the 1840s. The library in Schloss Charlottenburg, executed in sycamore by the Berlin court workshop of Joseph Schneevogel in 1845–46, was given a cool transparency by applying a bleached shellac, and Marc Heincke illustrates the standard way to imitate Boulle marquetry through the example of two cabinets, probably made in Germany in the 1840s: ruby red shellac was applied to an irregularly painted ground, and etching took the place of engraving on brass.

The catalogue deals with all types of furniture but does not describe fixed elements such as panelling, built-in looking glasses and side-tables – in view of the emphasis put on the relationship between furniture and interiors, this is surprising. Every entry lists not only the maker, date, materials, marks, history of the use of the piece and its present location, but often also mentions recent restoration or conservation treatments. Nearly all the furniture is illustrated in colour. It is briefly described and then discussed in a lengthy commentary which usually contains much information on the maker, the acquisition and the employment of the piece. Because Prussian royal furniture is so well documented, there are sundry surprises. Many fully historicist pieces, such as neo-rococo ones, are shown to have been made remarkably early, i.e. in the early 1840s. Often highly unorthodox in their design, a large number of items stand out because of the extraordinary quality of execution. An appendix lists a selection of furniture workshops and suppliers to the Prussian royal family, and an extremely useful illustrated list of inventory marks will undoubtedly lead to the identification of items lost during the War. Unfortunately, the quality of the illustrations is not very good throughout. Most pieces have been newly photographed, but the pictures are quite small and not very sharp, rendering it impossible to study the furniture in detail.

This catalogue, packed with new information, seems a wonderful herald of the volumes to come. In particular, it is hoped that the one describing the furniture from the time of Frederick the Great, so splendid and so little published, will appear soon.

Achim Stiegel

Shelley Bennett and Carolyn Sargentson (eds.), *French art of the eighteenth century at The Huntington* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008) 496 pp., 250 col., 200 b. & w. illus. ISBN 978-0-300135-947, \$125.

As set out in Shelley Bennett's introduction to this catalogue, the celebrated collection of French eighteenth-century art at the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, California, is mainly constituted from three groups: works bought by Henry and Arabella Huntington for the mansion, built from 1907, which now houses the museum; the large and important Arabella D. Huntington Memorial Collection assembled by Duveen, Huntington's foremost supplier, in just two months in 1926–27, upon the death of Arabella; and the 1978 bequest of Judge and Mrs. Green, mainly remarkable for its paintings. The massive catalogue, which for the first time describes and illustrates every piece in the collection, is a delight to peruse. It includes Sèvres porcelain, gold boxes, paintings, sculpture and textiles; the present review is concerned only with the furniture and the gilt bronzes and clocks.

The furniture hastily put together by Duveen as a memorial collection for Arabella, intended by Huntington to be part of the museum he was planning to establish, is of the most luxurious and lavish description and includes marquetry, Sèvres- and lacquer-mounted pieces that can vie with those in the Frick Collection or the Samuel H. Kress Collection at the Metropolitan Museum, both also essentially formed by Duveen. This kind of furniture has been much studied and we know a fair amount about it, but this has not deterred the author of the catalogue entries, Florian Knothe, courageously to come up with bold suggestions and enterprising new ideas. They are primarily based on close inspection of the physical condition of each piece which, however, is not described systematically or consistently. Every entry is augmented by fairly summary technical notes by John Childs, a conservator. There is no strict division between these notes and the commentaries: although the former concentrate on the construction and state of preservation, they occasionally contain suggestions about the original appearance of a piece based on extraneous evidence; on the other hand, the commentaries deal at length with changes made to the furniture and also describe elements of its appearance. Few details are illustrated and there are no diagrams or other drawings, which often renders it extremely difficult to follow the authors' reasoning. Furthermore, the technical notes and commentaries occasionally contradict one another. The reader is thus left with many unanswered questions. If, as seems likely, the desk attributed to Boulle, cat. no. 1, has been largely remounted and partly reveneered, why are these changes dated to the middle of the eighteenth century? The replacement mounts are in a fairly pure Louis XIV style which one would not expect to find at that period. And if the flat mounts surrounding the drawers of the desk attributed — without argumentation — to Doirat, cat. no. 2, are thought to be later. Why then is its *cartonnier*, whose foremost shared feature consists in precisely these mounts, accepted as original to it? Why is the desk, cat. no. 3, described as largely reveneered in the commentary, when the technical notes do not bear this out? Similar fundamental questions are raised by a large proportion of the entries.

The last-mentioned desk is attributed to Charles Cressent, but the reader is not told why. It may be reasoned that Alexandre Pradère's recent monograph on the *ébéniste* presents the latest thinking on this matter, but his arguments should still be summarized, particularly as the entries have no individual bibliography. References to previous literature must be distilled from the footnotes; extraordinarily, Robert Wark's summary but extremely useful 1961 catalogue of the collection (revised edition 1979) gets hardly any mention at all.

The compiler is refreshingly candid about the condition of the furniture which in many cases underwent considerable alterations. Occasionally, he seems to get carried away by a kind of iconoclasm. For example, although the differences in quality to be observed on the mounts of Martin Carlin's exquisite marquetry secretaire and commode, cat. no. 25, may suggest that some were replaced at a later time, the proposition that these pieces were not originally conceived as a set but considerably altered in the nineteenth century in order to appear so now, fails to take into account the highly distinctive character of their shape and decorative features. It seems unlikely that the secretaire was originally mounted with two enormous Sèvres plaques — no example with porcelain in this precise configuration is known, and the subtle differences between the marquetry designs on the commode and the secretaire only go to highlight Carlin's sensitivity. The recent emergence of a nineteenth-century commode assembled from the two corner cupboards which must originally have formed part of the same ensemble and which display further variations, strengthens this point, but the author could not have known this when compiling the text (Christie's London, 6 December 2007, Lot 168).

As the catalogue concentrates on the present physical state of the furniture, there is relatively little speculation as to first owners or early provenance; in the rare cases that there is, this is not always carefully presented. For instance, the Sèvres-mounted table reputedly sold by the Saxon Royal family in the 1920s, no. 26, was said by Wark to be a present from the Dauphine, Marie-Josèphe de Saxe, to her father, the Elector of Saxony. She died, however, in 1767, whereas the table cannot be earlier than 1781 because of its Sèvres marks. In the present catalogue its history is further embroidered upon: the table is again stated to be a present from the Dauphine to her father, but he is now incorrectly identified as Albert, Duke of Saxe-Teschen, who was in fact her brother. The picture is muddled even more because in the same entry Albert himself is said to have bought the table from Daguerre in 1781, and it is propounded that it may have been his first purchase of French furniture. None of this information is supported by any reference. Albert married the Archduchess Marie-Christine and they were jointly appointed Governors of the Austrian Netherlands in 1780. The celebrated, often-published series of drawings of porcelain-mounted furniture and other objects given by Rafael Esmerian to the Metropolitan Museum is with good reason linked to this couple, and to add to the confusion the catalogue entry proposes a connection with these drawings.

When writing a critical review it is regrettably difficult to avoid devoting much space to a book's flaws. It must be stressed that the catalogue makes the Huntington furniture marvellously accessible, and there is a serious attempt to assess every piece in detail. Maybe the compiler has tried to achieve too much at a single go, in entries to whose length there must have been restrictions. This feeling is somewhat accentuated by the fact that the introduction to the furniture section, by Carolyn Sargentson, does not address aspects of the collection but constitutes an analysis of the writing furniture depicted on the famous snuff-box with interior views by Van Blarenbergh of the Paris town house of the Duc de Choiseul. This interesting essay is thought-provoking about the use of furniture, addressing issues of social history and gender, but its position within the catalogue is ill-defined. Whenever a link is proposed with items in the collection, there is a feeling of constraint — as with the hypothesis that porcelain-mounted *bureaux* were mainly made for women, an assumption that is refuted by nearly every historical example quoted in either the introduction or the catalogue entries.

By contrast, the introduction and the entries on the gilt bronzes and clocks are all written by Martin Chapman. In his essay he concentrates on the importance of gilt bronze ornaments within decorative schemes, both in the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, when wealthy American collectors such as the Huntingtons were

assembling interiors in the French eighteenth-century style. The entries are once more accompanied by technical notes, by Linda Strauss, and again these are not particularly consistent. Nonetheless, both these notes and the commentaries frequently discuss quality in design and execution: useful comparisons are made within the collection itself. This results in a valuable contribution to a field of expertise that is notoriously challenging. It is only to be regretted that the illustrations are quite small, so that the remarks on chasing and finishing cannot easily be checked. One of the results of this admirable catalogue will surely be that many visitors will come to the Huntington to look for themselves.

Reinier Baarsen

















#### THE OLIVER FORD TRUST AND TOM INGRAM MEMORIAL FUND

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

The Tom Ingram Memorial Fund makes grants towards travel and other incidental expenses for the purpose of study or research into the history of furniture (a) whether or

not the applicant is a member of the Society; (b) only when the study or research is likely to be of importance in furthering the objectives of the Society; and (c) only when travel could not be undertaken without a grant from the Society. Applications towards the cost of FHS foreign and domestic trips and study weekends are particularly welcome from scholars. Successful applicants are required to acknowledge the assistance of the Fund in any resulting publications and must report back to the Panel on completion of the travel or project. All applications should be addressed to Adriana Turpin, Secretary to the Fund at 39 Talbot Road, London W2 5JH, Turpinadriana@hotmail.com, who will also supply application forms for the Oliver Ford Trust grants on request. Please remember to send an s.a.e. with any request.

The committee requests that applications for study trips be made well in advance of the final deadline for acceptance — preferably at least one month before.

#### COPY DEADLINE

The deadline for receiving material to be published in the next *Newsletter* is **15 September**. Copy should be sent, preferably by email, to [laura.houliston@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:laura.houliston@english-heritage.org.uk) or posted to Ms Laura Houliston, 44 Harrow View Road, London, W5 1LZ, tel. 0208 810 4718.

#### OFFICERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS

*President: Sir Nicholas Goodison*

*Chairman of the Council: Simon Swynfen Jervis*

*Honorary Secretary: Lisa White*

*Honorary Treasurer: Martin Levy*

*Honorary Editorial Secretary: Jonathan Marsden*

*Council Members: Adam Bowett, James Yorke,  
James Rothwell, Matthew Winterbottom, Claire  
Jones, Jeremy Garfield-Davies*

*Honorary Newsletter Co-editors: Laura Houliston,  
Matthew Winterbottom*

*Activities Committee Chairman: Caroline Rimell*

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

ACTIVITIES SECRETARY (EVENTS BOOKINGS): Mrs Clarissa Ward, 25 Wardo Avenue, London SW6 6RA. Tel. and fax 020 7384 4458

*FHS e-mail: [furniturehistorysociety@hotmail.com](mailto:furniturehistorysociety@hotmail.com)*

*Web site: [www.furniturehistorysociety.com](http://www.furniturehistorysociety.com)*

*This issue edited by Matthew Winterbottom*

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

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

*The reviews in this Newsletter are published as the views of those persons who wrote them. They are accepted as accurate and honest expressions of opinion; those who wish to do so should write to communicate with the reviewer direct.*