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In this Issue

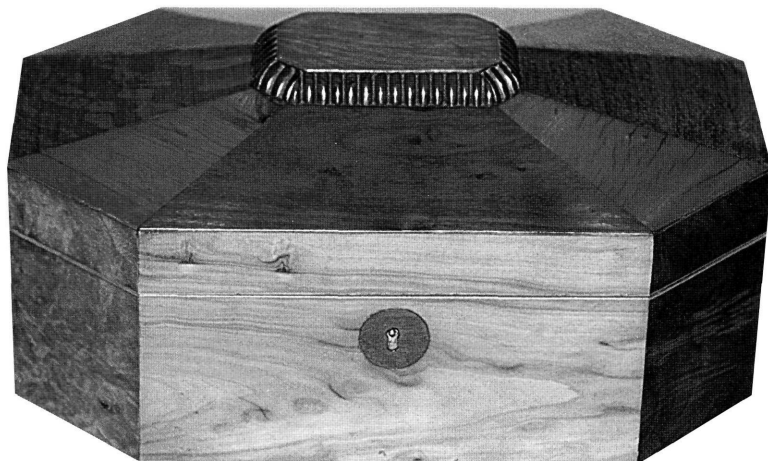
- Tolerably Good Furniture
- Art and Design in Western Australia – Part 1
- Antiques of the Future
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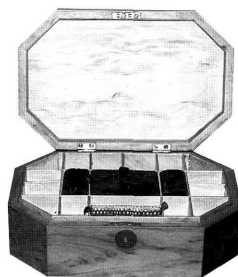
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CONTENTS



10

Art and Design in Western Australia Part 1

Dorothy Erickson



19

Antiques of the Future

Michael Bogle



4

Tolerably Good Furniture *R A Fredman*

18

Wanted State of the Waratah



28

Diana Pottery's Musical Jugs And Mugs *Alan J Robb*

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Cover Artists in King's Park overlooking Perth: unidentified artist inscribed 'MH', watercolour, size 500 x 320mm, 1890s. Collection Royal Western Australian Historical Society.

Plate 1.
Cedar
Chiffonier
c. 1835.



In 1791, Lieutenant William Bradley wrote in his journal an "Account of the Different kinds of Timber & the use it is fit for; in Port Jackson" that the timbers included a "bastardised mahogany" which made "tolerably good furniture".¹ He was undoubtedly referring to *Toona ciliata* (formerly *T. australis*) or red cedar, the timber that helped this nation become established and which is now synonymous with beautiful old Australian furniture.

Red cedar became an integral part of Australia's early industry, with no fewer than 1,500,000 super feet of timber cut, sawn and shipped from Sydney by 1836. Some went to England, where it was used in the cabinet-making and building industries. One notable use of cedar was in ornamenting

TOLERABLY Good Furniture

R A Fredman

Cedar was Australia's premier cabinet-making timber. Queensland researcher Bob Fredman analyses the features of this timber in Australian furniture since as early as 1791. The quality of the timber can vary considerably, and contributes to the appeal of the finished furniture.

Windsor Castle. Large amounts were used for joinery throughout the eastern Australian settlements, and a small portion went into the construction of our first furniture. Red cedar subsequently became the most characteristic timber of Australian cabinet-making for 100 years.

The history of red cedar has been well documented in accounts by Fahy, Simpson & Simpson in *Nineteenth Century Australian Furniture* (1985) and J. Vader in *Red Cedar, the Tree of Australia's History* (1987). Some comments by earlier authors give an interesting perspective on its place in history. Australian botanist J. H. Maiden wrote in an 1889 overview on the use of cedar "Its use, especially in NSW and Qld, is so well known it is unnecessary to dilate upon it".² Government

Forester E.H.F. Swain in *The Timbers and Forest Products of Queensland* (1928) noted that Queensland was then supplying a surprising 100,000 super feet of cedar to the market per annum, and that “The rich furniture of earlier days was generally made of red cedar, which vogue, however, has departed from the home in this generation to the offices to which it now lends dignity”. He added that “No wood looks as rich when polished” and that red cedar had “a certain place among the great cabinet timbers of commerce”.³

The first reference to the red cedar tree in Australia was in 1790, and it probably began to be used for furniture making about this time.⁴ Being easy to work and readily available, it was quickly accepted. Properties such as its appearance, light weight, insect repellence and durability in the weather ensured that it would remain popular for a variety of uses. In the nineteenth century it was heavily utilised for a wide range of architectural purposes such as windows, doors and stairways. There are still some houses extant that also have the walls and ceilings made from cedar.

In the twentieth century one of the biggest users of red cedar was the railway, where cedar was used extensively in the building of carriages. This is probably where the supply from Queensland in the 1920s was destined. It was also a favoured timber for the hull and floats of seaplanes because of its weight and low swelling coefficient when wetted,

and similarly was suited to making boat hulls and marine fittings. There are many more specific uses that could be listed, however it is best remembered for its use in furniture.

Australia is not the only country where red cedar grows, as it is also found in Asia and India where it is known as “toon”. Vader refers to the use of toon for furniture making in India,⁵ but other documentation on its overseas use is limited. A very interesting (to Australian furniture collectors) advertisement in the *South Australian Register* of 8 February 1840 advised that the auctioneer J. Richardson “has just received a large consignment of very superior Cedar chairs being Indian made”.

Cedar was also exported from Burma to England prior to Australia’s export industry, and was marketed there under the name Moulmein cedar. Hence Australia cannot claim to being the sole home of a red cedar cabinet-making industry, but there is little doubt that it reached its apogee here.

The quality of red cedar varies greatly from tree to tree and cut to cut, and this variation is of considerable importance in the appreciation of



Plate 2. Cedar chest of drawers c. 1845.



Plate 3. Cedar chiffonier c. 1850.

Australian cedar furniture. At worst it is a poor cabinet-making timber, and at best it is very good indeed. It could not be said, however, that it is the equal of the finest mahogany. In respect of strength, lustre and grain the West Indian mahogany, favoured by English cabinet-makers, is a superior timber. In fact red cedar was often shipped to England as packing case timber. It was utilised there in cabinet-making only as a secondary timber, a purpose for which even poor cedar is ideally suited.

The key to utilising red cedar as a primary cabinet timber is to understand that its density can vary considerably. For example a CSIRO study in 1960 found it can vary in basic density from 21 to 36 lb per cubic foot, or 53%, which is a very large range indeed.⁶ In comparison, the same study found that silky oak varies only from 29 to 36 lb per cubic foot, or 22%. Low density cedar is too soft, porous and plain to be a primary timber but there was still a lot of furniture made from this inferior material.

Low and high density timber can come from different parts of the one tree, but in general terms the timber from fast-growing, tall rainforest trees is less dense and of straighter grain than timber from dry country trees. The better Australian cabinet-makers in the nineteenth century were acutely aware of this variability in red cedar and were careful in selecting their timber. Edward Hunt and Andrew Lenehan, for instance, were two whose furniture now bears testament to the selection of good timber.

Australia's cabinet-making artisans could produce a very good product using superior cuts of timber, good design and quality cabinet-making. A superior cut of cedar characteristically shows a combination of strong lustre and colour, which are properties associated with high density timber. Lustre, which is the manner that light is reflected by the wood elements, is red cedar's strongest attribute. It provides magnificent hues, which respond to differing light conditions.

Colour variation can also be dramatic, with a range from brown-black to yellow. This variation is caused primarily by prolonged stresses on the tree causing a change in the cell structure. For example very dark "compression" wood often occurs in the butt of a tree where the wood elements have been subjected to the axial load from the weight of the tree growing above. It can provide good contrast to

lighter coloured adjacent elements, but can be a difficult cut of timber to cure without inducing fatal warping or cracking.

In England the solution to warping and cracking which is common in solid mahogany was to make extensive use of gluing veneers on to more stable timbers. Australian cabinet-makers, while they used the veneer technique from time to time, had considerable success with using red cedar in "solid" construction.

A reference to the recognised benefit of solid cedar construction at the time can be found in the correspondence of cabinet-maker George Best of Launceston to his family in England dated 17 May 1836. Best wrote of the local cedar furniture "... being all solid it stands well" while he described imported English furniture as "... being veneered it is constantly coming to pieces".⁷

A popular cut of cedar with good cabinet-makers was "ribbon" pattern. This comprises lustrous stripes overlying the grain, as in a c. 1845 chest of drawers (*Plate 2*), and is found when a log with "interlocked" grain is quarter (radially) sawn. Interlocked grain is defined as grain that spirals up a tree, with the direction of the spiral changing with successive growth increments across the stem radius. The ribbon effect appears when the successive layers of wood elements lie in opposing directions relative to the plane of the saw cut, thereby reflecting the light equally from every second layer.

Interlocked grain in trees is believed to occur primarily as a result of genetic causes, although there is evidence that harsh growing conditions may also contribute to its occurrence. It is uncommon in red cedar, but appears regularly in many hardwoods.

The best ribbon cuts were often reserved for use as crossbanding, where distinct, regular and tight striping parallel to the grain was required by the good cabinet-makers.

Ribbon effect can occur at any angle to the grain of timber, and when at 90 degrees to the grain is commonly described as "fiddleback". Cuts of cedar featuring spectacular fiddleback patterns were often reserved for feature panels on chiffoniers, sideboards, bookcases and wardrobes. The c. 1850 Tasmanian chiffonier (*Plate 3*) demonstrates the

use of door panels with fiddleback and compression wood. Fiddleback cedar was also used for veneering, as the late nineteenth century cabinet (**Plate 4**) shows.

The primary attributes of good red cedar in the context of aesthetics are that it takes a polish well and is suited to Australian furniture styles. In appearance it does not have the very fine cell structure of mahogany, which was the timber that our first cabinet-makers (who were European-trained) were most familiar with. Red cedar soon found acceptance in Sydney and Tasmania as a suitable substitute. There were, however, still a few pieces of Australian furniture made with mahogany veneered surfaces such as the sideboard fig. 348 in *Australian Furniture*.⁸ Although not technically the equal of mahogany, cedar imparts to Australian furniture an appearance that is arguably very harmonious.

The chiffonier (**Plate 1**) features good cedar throughout. Note the strong ribbon pattern in the crossbanding, the wider ribbon in the backboard, the compression wood in the doors and the drawer front, and the fiddleback in the shelf posts. It displays well the aesthetics that are characteristic of the best early Australian furniture.

Red cedar in quality cuts is not often seen in Australian miniature furniture. A chest (**Plate 5**) is an uncommon example of a miniature featuring good timber.

Red cedar could be claimed to be the ideal timber available for furniture of the Australian style, but this would apply only to case furniture. It is generally a timber with low tensile strength and would not be a first choice for the making of chairs, where stresses on the legs, back and joints are very high. Early chair-makers in Australia used local hardwoods such as rose mahogany (*Dysoxylum fraserianum*) or red mahogany (*Eucalyptus resinifera*), and red cedar for chair-making.

Somewhat surprisingly, red cedar seems to have been the favoured timber for chair-making in early times. Convincing evidence of this occurs in the furniture inventory of Government House, Parramatta compiled in 1821 by H. C. Antill.⁹ His inventory notes the existence of 106 chairs in the house, of which 53 or exactly half are specified as being made of “cedar”, with the balance largely



Plate 4. Cedar cabinet c. 1870.

unspecified. Cedar was probably the preferred timber because it was more available, easy to work and adequately strong in the short term. Such chairs however had a low survival rate as a result of premature breakage and genuinely early full sets are now rarely found.

An interesting cedar chair (**Plate 6**) that has survived from the first half of the nineteenth century was made in Tasmania. This chair is surprisingly fine, with arms less than an inch thick. Part of the reason why the chair-maker could make it of such fine proportion is that he used very dense fiddleback cedar in its construction. This is a graphic illustration of a craftsman using select red cedar to match a specific strength requirement.

Much could be written about the variations that have been found in cuts of red cedar. There are many types of stress pattern, normally found in timber cut from the butt of trees. A totally different cut known as burr cedar, resembling dark walnut, can be sourced from burls that grow on the trunk of the tree. There are also methods of cutting a log on an angle to give flame pattern grain or even a bulls-eye pattern, although pure grain effects without colour variation and lustre tend to be more interesting than appealing.

The colour of cedar in old furniture can vary considerably. Some early Sydney furniture appears to have been stained to achieve a deep plum colour,

in the same manner as some contemporary restorers have been known to impart a red colour. Other pieces have acquired a soft orange colour through the patination of old french polish. Prolonged exposure to light however can impart an unattractive grey tone.

It is often said that red cedar furniture ceased being made after approximately 1890 because supplies of timber ran out. Given the volumes still available in Queensland at that time, a more likely scenario for its demise was price and fashion. Long haulage distances and demand from other industries such as railway carriage builders would have pushed prices up, probably well beyond the price of alternative cabinet timbers such as pine, maple and silky oak. Fashion also played a part, as stronger timbers than cedar were required to make the fine legs and posts on Edwardian style furniture. A small quantity of new furniture is still being made from Australian red cedar.

There was a marked change in the way cedar was used during the span of its use. The earliest timber was sourced from southern New South Wales and would have generally been of higher quality than later rainforest sources. As demand from the joinery shops and furniture manufactories rose, the search for cedar moved northwards and the quality declined, necessitating the increasing use of mediocre cuts as the primary timber in furniture. The use of good cuts was gradually restricted to feature panels, as is demonstrated on the c. 1870



Plate 5. Cedar miniature chest of drawers c. 1860.



*Plate 6.
Cedar chair
c. 1840.*

wardrobe (*Plate 7*) which apart from the exceptional door panels is comprised largely of poor timber. In contrast the c. 1840 clothes press (*Plate 8*) is made from superb timber on the front, sides



Plate 7. Cedar wardrobe c. 1880.



Plate 8. Cedar clothes press c. 1840.

and even the back! These examples indicate a trend of timber quality declining with time. There are exceptions to this trend but it is a useful guide to identifying earlier pieces and better cabinet-makers.

Correct identification of red cedar is a continuing problem, especially with the demise of timber technology as a profession. There has long been confusion between mahogany and good cedar once it has become patinated. Small items of furniture such as writing slopes and boxes that have been imported can feature the foreign "cigar box" cedar timber *Cedrela mexicana*. Vader has unearthed another possible pretender with a report that onionwood or bog onion (*Owenia cepiodora*) from New South Wales was known to be sold as red cedar.¹⁰ Fortunately red cedar dust has a distinctive fragrance when fresh that can assist in identification.

This paper has examined issues pertaining to the use of red cedar in Australian furniture up until its demise about 1900. It has also introduced the notion of timber quality as an important parameter in assessing the overall quality of a piece, and as a guide to its age. William Bradley still has some credibility when he stated that red cedar makes only tolerably good furniture. With the benefit of hindsight we can say that mediocre red cedar made tolerably good furniture. Good red cedar made great furniture.

R A Fredman is a civil engineer and a collector of early Australian furniture based in country Queensland, where he runs a small cattle property.

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- 1 *A Voyage to New South Wales. The Journal of William Bradley RN of HMS Sirius 1786-1792*, Sydney 1969 p. 144.
- 2 J. Vader, *Red Cedar The Tree of Australia's History*, p. 144.
- 3 E. Swain, *The Timbers and Forest Products of Queensland*, p. 106.
- 4 Letter from Governor Phillip to Lord Sydney 13 February 1790.
- 5 Vader, *op. cit.* p. 144.
- 6 Kingston & Risdon, *Shrinkage and Density of Australian and other South-west Pacific Woods* p. 20.
- 7 Best family papers (La Trobe Library, Melbourne).
- 8 Fahy & Simpson, *Australian Furniture: Pictorial History and Dictionary*, fig. 348.
- 9 Bigge Appendix. Bonwick Transcripts. Series 1, Box 27, pp. 61899-61906 (Mitchell Library).
- 10 Vader, *op. cit.* p. 185.



Plate 1. Artists in King's Park overlooking Perth: unidentified artist inscribed 'M H', watercolour, size 500 x 320 mm, 1890s. Courtesy Royal Western Australian Historical Society (Inc).

Art and Design in Western Australia

Part 1

An introduction
to the 19th and
Early 20th
Centuries.

Dorothy Erickson

In the 19th century most of the Australian Colonies set up art and design schools. This and the following series of articles celebrate the centenary of the WA School of Art and Design (Perth Technical School), and covers artists and designers in Western Australia primarily in the first twenty years of its existence. They are excerpts from the forthcoming book: *A Century of Art and Design in Western Australia: Perth Technical School 1900-2000*, edited by Dr Erickson to be published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

Western Australia's first public art school, Perth Technical School, was officially opened on 16 May 1900. This incorporated the Perth Technical Art School where classes commenced in 1898. The late development¹ of such a significant 19th century institution was due to the particular history of this independent colony.

The Swan River Settlement, established in 1829, originated quite differently from the older colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. It was the first of two settlements to be founded as free colonies. The terms for colonists appeared very favourable and attracted educated and urban men and women who were personally interested in the arts and who brought their servants. Few, however, had any practical experience of farming and in consequence economic development was painfully slow. When the colony failed to prosper convict labour was requested to assist in building the necessary infrastructure and provide workers. At this time, 1851, the first of the Mechanics Institutes – forerunner of the Technical School – was opened.

Economic life

The 'Cinderella Colony' became visibly more prosperous in the late 1890s and the population grew dramatically. The principal cause of this new affluence was the gold mining boom in the harsh interior, on the Eastern Goldfields – the new El Dorado. Cities flowered almost overnight. Technological advancement was rapid. Electric

lights and telephones became common, the railways were extended and the port of Fremantle was opened up to traffic.

Of the immigrants germane to our story many of the earlier ones came for health reasons, attracted by a climate beneficial to tuberculosis sufferers. Later arrivals came for business opportunities, drawn to a colony that had escaped the world depression of the 1890s. An enormous number of young men went to the goldfields to try their luck. They included **Frederick Williams** (1855-1929) who led the push to set up the Perth Technical Art School, the artist and future curator of the West Australian Art Gallery; **George Pitt Morison** (1861-1946); and **James Linton** (1869-1947) who became the most important art teacher in Perth as he guided the Perth Technical School's Art Department through 30 years of growth.

Perth was a thriving city expanding at such a rate that the authorities were almost unable to deliver the necessary civic services, such as a Library, Art Gallery and Art and Design School. It was, however, a pleasant place to live, as May Vivienne wrote:

"Perth is beautifully situated and one cannot fail to be charmed with its picturesque and lovely surroundings ... a handsome and prosperous city with noble buildings on all sides, electric light, tram cars, beautiful parks around it and yachts dancing on the Swan River."²

Social changes

The 1890s were a time of considerable social change. Settlers of the colony, who had only gained control of their destiny with an elected parliament in 1890, were soon introducing reforms. Most of the changes effected by the new laws impacted on the future Technical



Plate 2. Coolgardie Exhibition building as seen in the Western Mail Christmas number 1899.



Plate 3. Interior of the Art Gallery in the former gaol at the WA Museum c. 1904. Courtesy WA Museum.

School. The *Married Women's Property Act*, Universal Manhood Suffrage, compulsory education to 14 years of age and Adult Franchise (Women's Suffrage) were promulgated before the upheaval of Federation in 1901. Local feminists were gentlewomen in the vanguard of women's affairs from an early date.

The first women's club in Australia, the Karrakatta Club, formed in Perth in 1894 for "mutual improvement and social

intercourse", had the arts as one of its four major streams of endeavour.³ **Margaret Forrest** (1844-1929), the Premier's artist wife, was in charge of arts and was also a member of the WA Society of Arts which pushed for the Art School to be set up. Artwork had by this time become a fashionable occupation for unmarried 'gentlewomen' and a number set up their own studios or art schools.⁴

The active and influential women's network encouraged

more freedom for many women from several levels of society. Instead of receiving their art training privately as was customary, many women began attending the Technical Art School and were joined by others, both male and female, for whom art had previously not been an option.

The Western Australian Society of Arts 1896-1914

Artistic activity was dominated by immigrants to the colony who had trained in Europe and retained strong ties via the art magazines that proliferated from the 1890s. In England the ideals of design reformers such as Henry Cole, John Ruskin and William Morris had encouraged painters and architects to extend their activities to cover both design and the various practices of the decorative arts, resulting in the Aesthetic Movement. British magazines such as *The Studio*, *The Magazine of Art*, *The Artist*, and *The Art Journal* brought this ethos to Perth.⁵

By the first decade of the 20th century, the Aesthetic Movement had evolved into Art Nouveau. This modern style was international but with distinct regional variations known under a variety of names.⁶ Art Nouveau coincided in Australia with "Federation Style" which had much in common with other 20th-century manifestations of the style such as the Darmstadt "Jugendstil", Viennese "Secession" and the Glasgow Style. Western Australia with its booming economy readily adopted this new style into its architecture, domestic art and applied artwork.

Henry Prinsep (1844-1922), Cecilia and Herbert Gibbs (1852-1940), Bernard and Harry Woodward, James Linton and Lottie Barrow, (Mrs James Linton 1876-1949), brought the Aesthetic heritage with them to share with Josephine Prinsep, née Bussell (1849-1929), Margaret Forrest, née Hamersley and young Deborah Drake-Brockman, later Mrs Hackett, then Dr Buller-Murphy (1888-1965) - all members of establishment families in the West. The earlier arrivals were members of the first art society - the Wilgie Sketch Club. Together with Anglo-Irishman John Winthrop Hackett (1848-1916), they were a powerful social force in setting taste in Perth. Like many late Victorians, they felt the need to explain, educate, direct and convert the public to this end. They planned to have an art collection established. Even so, it was not until the first decade of the 20th century that an art collection and a public art school were established.

Members of the Western Australian Society of Arts, successor to the Wilgie Club, enjoyed painting excursions, soirées, group debates, held design competitions and exhibited both fine and applied arts in their annual exhibitions. In this they followed the example of the Beaux Arts in Paris and the Royal Academy in London. The Royal Academy admitted the applied arts in the 1890s. This had an important impact on attitudes to the visual arts in Western Australia and affected the classes offered at Perth Technical School. Neither in Western nor South

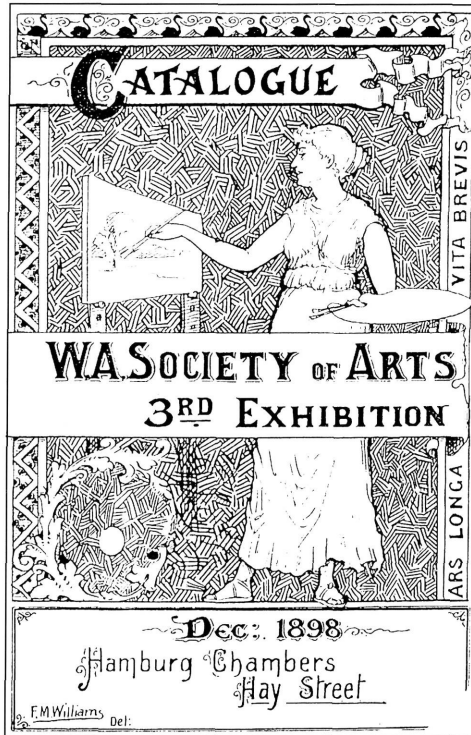


Plate 4. F. M. Williams: Design for the Society of Arts Catalogue cover, pen and ink, 1898.

December 1899 the Society held its fifth exhibition in "a building attached to the old Government



Plate 5. Charlotte Bates Barrow: Sketch of James W. R. Linton's studio, exhibited with the Society of Arts, from the line drawing illustrated in the Catalogue 1901.

Australia were separate arts and crafts societies formed. Both States had art schools with a strong emphasis on design run by masters who practised design for the decorative arts. Western Australia was exclusive enough to develop along the lines that suited it. According to William Moore, author of the authoritative *Story of Australian Art*, Western Australia became the third art centre in Australia.⁷

The Technical School and the WA Society of Arts were closely intertwined making it reasonable to suggest that the evening technical art school grew out of the classes held by the Society in the rooms used by them in what became the Technical School. In

Boys School.”⁸ The Art Department was formally set up here two months later. Society members who studied at the Tech before WWI included **Florence Adams, Dorothy Allen, Enid Allum, Kitty Armstrong, Monna Beel, Miss L(ily?) Cavanagh, Gertrude Ford, Alice Glyde, J. M. Jenkins, Olive Parrant, Mrs A. E. Tomlin, Kate O'Connor, Miguel McKinlay and Flora Le Cornu** (Mrs Landells). Staff from the school, **J. W. R. Linton, David Edgar, Loui Benham plus Francesco Vanzetti, John McLeod and Daisy Rossi** of Fremantle Tech, were Society members. The

Society’s exhibitions were almost the only outlet for display of local talent.

Frederick Matthew Williams, President of the Society from 1898-1904, was born in England in 1855 but educated at the National Gallery School, Melbourne in the 1880s. Williams was the creative force behind the courses in the institution which, according to William Moore, he had campaigned to set up.⁹ He was also a vigorous president and a member until his departure from the State about 1916. However it was **Bernard Woodward** (1847-1916) and

James W. R. Linton who dominated the direction the institutionalised arts took in Perth. Both were imbued with the ideas of members of the English Art Workers’ Guild, such as Walter Crane, with whom they were personally acquainted.

The Museum and Art Gallery

Bernard Woodward, the director of the Museum and Art Gallery (which opened in stages from 1892) played a pivotal role in the artistic life of the colony. Woodward had studied in a variety of educational institutions for both the arts and sciences in London. He modelled the Museum and Art Gallery in Perth on the South Kensington schools model where the Art School and the Victoria and Albert Museum were inter-related as were the Imperial Institute and the Natural History Museum.

In Perth the Technical School and other educational institutions were encouraged to draw on the collections as teaching aids. The philosophies of John Ruskin, William Morris and others pervaded Woodward’s thinking and that of the entire art establishment, leading to the belief that a refined environment, conducive to the study of excellence in design, form and purpose could educate the populace and so instil in them regard, reverence and respect for higher social ideals. These would act to reform character, moderate intemperance and annul other vices.¹⁰

“We desire to show the public all possible shapes and colours ... so that they may learn what to select and what to avoid, ...the

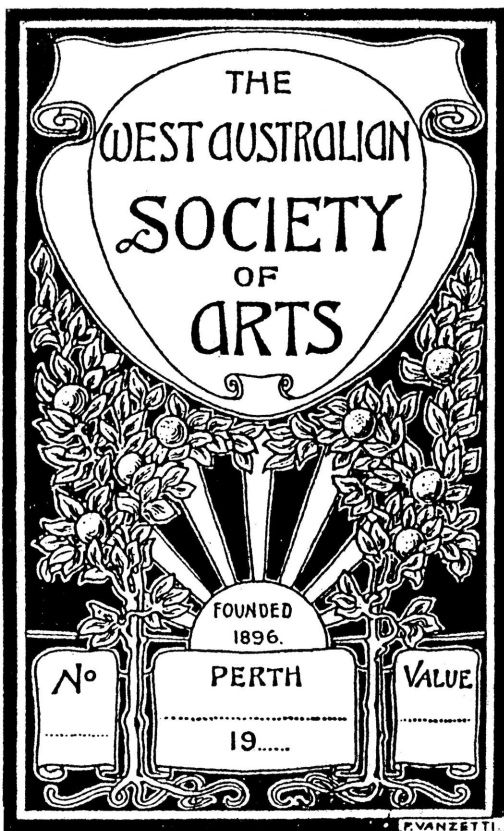


Plate 6.
Francesco Vanzetti: Design for a Society of Arts bookplate.
The Western Australian Society of Arts exhibition catalogue 1904.

labels in many cases point out the good and bad points in the designs. ...Nearly all the visitors belong to the labouring class ...In older centres of civilisation ...all classes are now trying to make their homes more beautiful, and we desire to show ...how the same things may be done in Western Australia."¹¹

Woodward was charged with creating a Museum and Art Gallery that would be all things to the small community. His responsibilities, which began with a geology collection, were expanded to cover natural history as well as the fine and applied arts in which he had a particular interest. Woodward wrote:

"Never since the days of the Ancient Greeks has a Century opened in which so general an interest has been taken by all classes in Art work, and never before has there been so general a recognition of the importance of what is now known as Domestic Art, that is to say in the adornment of our homes and of all they contain in the way of furniture, fittings, and articles of domestic utility."¹²

Woodward considered it important that applied arts be well designed and that the local artists and workers should have good examples to study, in order that they might successfully compete with their counterparts in the older centres of civilisation.

The collection comprised three major streams: Oriental works, Antiquarian and Modern. The purchasing for the metal collection illustrates the *modus operandi*. The first purchases were a selection of Indian objects

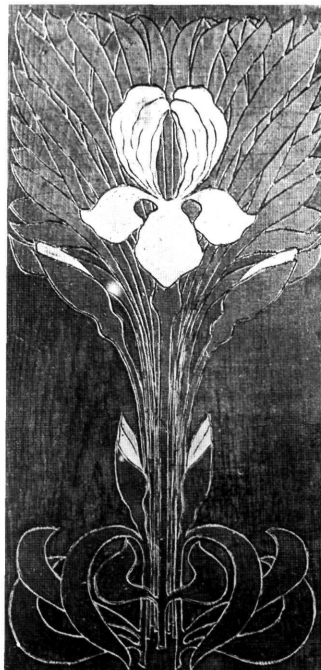


Plate 7. Door Panel Design by Francesco Vanzetti c 1904 polychrome gilded wood exhibited with the Society of Arts and used in lectures on Design at the Museum and Art Gallery c 1909. From the lantern slide in the collection of the WA Museum. Photograph Douglas Elford, courtesy WAM.

chosen by **Henry Prinsep** in Ceylon in 1897. A collection of Japanese works sourced by the Director of the Imperial Museum, Tokyo followed in 1902-4. Electrotype copies of historic works in the Victoria and Albert Museum arrived between 1906 and 1910.¹³ The modern collection began in 1901 with selections from Liberty & Co's first catalogue, and from Richard Rathbone's workshops.

Then came an instructive selection from English couple Nelson and Edith Dawson. One of their finest works was acquired in 1904 when Dawson wrote to Woodward that he "should like the museum to have it."¹⁴ The fine repoussé steel, silver and enamelled triptych firescreen was not only one of the highlights of the collection, it was arguably one of the highlights of British metalwork of the period and was prominently illustrated in *The Studio* in 1903.¹⁵ This, along with the remarkable Japanese enamel vases in the collection, must have



Plate 8. May Gibbs, daughter of Herbert and Cecilia Gibbs, feminist cartoon, Western Mail Christmas number 1907.

been both inspiring and intimidating for the local students and their teacher.

A significant proportion of the collection consisted of examples of "Art Industry" intended for the two-fold purpose of assisting the population to improve its taste in fittings for dwellings and encouraging the local industry to improve its designs. By 1907, when Woodward compared the art

collections with those in Victoria and New South Wales, he felt able to write:

"our gallery is certainly more valuable from an educational point of view, which is the *raison d'être* of a National Gallery, as pointed out in critiques in last month's *Studio* and *Burlington*."¹⁶

Woodward and Linton appear to have worked well together in the first years. On Linton's

suggestion Woodward purchased paintings, drawings and objects required for study by the students¹⁷ and for half a day per week he kept the gallery free for their use. In 1902 Linton and Mrs Purdie, the Tech School director's wife, made lantern slides based on "good and bad design" which were used in lectures held in the gallery.¹⁸ A second series featured views suitable for sketching and painting and was used to illustrate some of Ruskin's precepts.

Woodward's attitudes were typical of many in the burgeoning community made confident by the goldrushes. They were mirrored in the many Western Australians learning new skills to make objects for their new homes - homes which reflected the entire spectrum of styles which were fashionable, ranging from the eclecticism of Aesthetic interiors, through to those with touches of Arts and Crafts historicism, to the sparser early modernism of late Art Nouveau/Federation Style¹⁹ exemplified in the homes of **Bessie Rischbeith**, **Mattie Furphy** and others connected with the Art School.²⁰ Prosperity increased until 1913 when Western Australia went into a low-level recession from which it did not emerge until the next mineral boom in the late 1950s.²¹

Notes

- 1 A School of Arts and Manufacturers was established in France in 1829 the year the colony was founded, the British Schools of Design in 1837, Melbourne School of Art in 1839, Queensland School of Art in 1849, Sydney School of Art in 1860 and Adelaide School of Design in 1861.
- 2 May Vivienne, *Travels in Western Australia: Being a Description of the Various Cities and Towns, Goldfields and Agricultural Districts of that*



Plate 9. Margaret Forrest in court dress 1897. Family collection.



Plate 10. Margaret Forrester's reversible card/tea table, jarrah, 1890s. Formerly in the Hall Collection. Current whereabouts unknown.

- State. London, Heinemann, 1902, p. 106.
- 3 *Karrakatta Club Incorporated: History 1894-1954*, Perth, Imperial Printing Co., 1955, pp. 6, 10.
 - 4 Herbert Gibbs and Henry Prinsep taught in the late 19th Century. The art school run by the Misses Creeth were in a number of locations including: St George's Terrace Perth (1898), Hay Street, 13 Wilson Street, West Perth (1929), and 38 Parliament Street, West Perth (1930). Kate O'Connor and May Gibbs taught and, following Linton's urging, pursued further studies in Europe. Flora Le Cornu was in Guildford 1906 and, as Mrs Flora Landells, in Maylands in 1925. Cecil Ross, later Mrs Eagleton, was in Claremont from 1914. Annie Andrews, Daisy Rossi and Florence Fuller were in St George's Terrace. Montagu and Stella Lewis Marks were two artists who had an art school 1913, Henri Van Raalte, followed by Margaret Saunders, had Perth School of Art in the 1920s and 30s. Stanway Tapp, the head of Art at WA Newspapers for many years, was also a teacher of note to those trade trainees in the first decades of the century.
 - 5 Advertised in the WA Society of Arts catalogues. Linton's brother-in-law, Granville Fell, was the editor of *The Connoisseur*. Linton also took *The Art Worker's Quarterly* while German, Austrian and Italian art magazines

were taken by expatriates of these nations.

- 6 "Stile Liberty", "Stile Inglese", "Studio Stil", "Moderne Style", "Jugendstil", "Belgische Stil", and "Secession".
- 7 William Moore, Introduction to "A Loan Exhibition of Works of Art from Private Collections incorporating 'A Memorial Exhibition of the Works of the Late JWR Linton'" held at AGWA. 1955.
- 8 *West Australian (WA)* 9 Dec. 1899, p. 37.
- 9 William Moore, *The Story of Australian Art from the Earliest Known Art of the Continent to the Art of Today*, 2 vols., Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1934. vol. 1, p. 228. Society of Arts meetings, as reported in the newspapers in 1899, indicate his interest in the project (WA. 21 Mar. 1899, *Morning Herald* 18 Mar. 1899). Moore claims May Gibbs as a student of the Tech but her name does not appear on any exam results and, as her parents were trained artists and teachers, her attendance seems unlikely.
- 10 Woodward in "Art elevates and refines", WA 18 August 1905.
- 11 WA 14 Oct. 1902.
- 12 Bernard Woodward, *The Western Australian Museum and Art Gallery Guide to the Arts, and Arts and Crafts: with a catalogue of the Sculptures, Paintings and Black and White Collections*, Perth, The Committee of Management, 1904, p. vi.
- 13 The first were purchased by Hackett in England, the rest were selected by Edward Strange of the Victoria & Albert Museum – another member of the Art Workers' Guild.
- 14 Letter 24 Mar. 1904, AGWA archives. For further information on this and other sections of the collection, see D. Erickson, *A History of the Metal Collection of the Art Gallery of Western Australia*. 1986.
- 15 *The Studio*, 1903 no. 28, p. 124.
- 16 Minutes of the Committee of Management of the Museum and Art Gallery, Batty Library 1035.
- 17 In one instance Linton wrote to his father with a message from Woodward for Sir James to buy £50 worth of jewellery from Alexander Fisher. Linton wanted to use this as "an object lesson" for his students and mentioned that he had

previously advised Woodward to purchase pieces from Fisher (13 Apr. 1905, J. W. R. Linton file AGWA).

- 18 These, now somewhat incomplete, are in the collection of the Western Australian Museum. They comprise slides made by Linton and 1909 additions by Pitt Morison.
- 19 All were intertwined and this was not seen as inconsistent. The early modern movement continued to describe objects using the same vocabulary, derived from Ruskin and Pater, as was used in the 1890s Craft Revival. For further reading on this notion, see Stella Tillyard's excellent book *The Impact of Modernism 1900-1920: Early Modernism and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Edwardian England*, London, Routledge 1988. It was confused by Oscar Wilde in his lectures which advocated ideas culled from both Whistler and Morris.
- 20 The furniture in these could often be a curious mixture of modern and antique. Linton, like American poet Ezra Pound, was Janus-faced with private furniture turning to the ambience in which he grew up. He made pieces of medieval-looking furniture such as a baby's cradle.
- 21 Brian De Garis in the *Western Australian Year Book*, 1972.

Dr Dorothy Erickson

Dorothy Erickson is an artist and art historian resident in Perth. Dr Erickson was awarded her Ph D from the University of Western Australia for her thesis on gold and silversmithing in Western Australia. She is a former editor of *Craftwest*, Western Australian editor for *Artlink* and contributor to many journals including *Craft Arts International*. She is just completing a history of design in Western Australia with profiles of 50 contemporary designer makers.

Dr Erickson has a busy schedule exhibiting her jewellery in Japan, Melbourne, Vienna and Sydney last year, with new shows coming up in Japan and Vienna.



State of the Waratah

Long before European settlement, New South Wales' State flower was named waratah, red flowering tree, by the Aboriginal people. John White, surgeon on The First Fleet sent a waratah specimen to England in 1791, and a hand coloured plate by Sowerby appeared in *Smith's Botany of New Holland* in 1793. Many have since drawn inspiration from this unique and glorious flower thought to have evolved one hundred million years ago in Gondwanaland.

The Exhibition 'State of the Waratah' will focus on all aspects of the waratah: its history, cultivation and application as an image in art, design, fashion, architecture and commerce and is an official event of the Olympic Arts Festival. It is sponsored by the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, and will be shown in the S. H. Ervin Gallery at Observatory Hill and in The Palm House in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney from 1 September 2000.



Wooden box c. 1920.

Loans include works from the collections of the National Gallery of Australia and the Art Gallery of NSW, the State and National Libraries, the Australian War Memorial and the Powerhouse Museum, as well as private collections.

We already have over 100 loans but is there an exciting "waratah something" out there which has escaped our attention?

If you know of such an item please contact Rosie Nice, Tel (02) 9365 2442, Fax (02) 9365 2202 or e-mail: nice@ozemail.com.au.

Peter R Walker Writing Award 1999

Peter R Walker Pty Ltd, dealers in fine art, sponsors the Australiana Writing Awards, a cash prize of \$250 for the best article published in *Australiana*.

From a strong field of articles in 1999, the Editors have chosen John Hawkins' series of articles on the Australian visits of the Duke of Edinburgh. The winner was chosen on the basis

of the articles' originality, comprehensive factual and picture research, broad geographic impact and collector interest – even though most of the items described would have been melted down in the 1890s.

The Award was presented at the Australia Day lunch, where John Hawkins was also the Guest Speaker.

Antiques *of the* Future

Michael Bogle

Frank De Groot (1888-1969) was a quixotic Sydney character from his arrival from Ireland in 1910 until his return to Dublin in 1950. Although he is best known for his spectacular opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932, Frank De Groot's most significant contribution to the city is the design, manufacturing and marketing of period reproduction furniture.¹



Plate 1. Frank De Groot. The Home 1 May 1932.

Frank was born in Dublin in 1888 into a family descended from the Antwerp De Groot family, a dynasty of carvers and gilders. De Groot's father, Cornelius, was a notable Dublin carver and sculptor in stone. Cornelius had been represented among the medal-winning wood carvers at the Great Exhibition of All Nations, London, 1851.²

Frank De Groot arrived in Australia in 1910, after youthful experience in the British Merchant Navy and a five-year apprenticeship with his uncle Michael Butler, a Dublin antique dealer who later opened sale rooms in London.³ On arrival in Sydney, he was fortunate enough to meet publisher George Robertson and Robertson's friend and associate Fred Wynmark.

In 1910, Wynmark was attempting to open an art gallery in the rear of Angus & Robertson's bookstore. It is not entirely clear when Angus & Robertson began selling antiques but they were issuing catalogues by 1910.⁴ De Groot, with his Dublin and London connections, was able to assist them. De Groot's manuscript in the Mitchell Library claims that Robertson advanced him £10,000 for British purchases of antiques for sale in the gallery. One of these Angus & Robertson purchases, an 1851 carved yew sarcophagus wine cooler, found its way into the home of S.H. Ervin, and is now in the National Trust (NSW) collection.⁵

From 1910 to 1914, De Groot was associated with Wynmark at the Angus & Robertson Gallery in Castlereagh Street. Among De Groot's favoured clients were Dame Eadith Walker, S. H. Ervin,

Sir Thomas Anderson Stuart, the Vickery family, William and Robert Dixon and the Hordern family.

When war threatened in 1914, De Groot returned to Ireland to enlist. He sold his remaining stock to Anthony Hordern & Sons, which, according to De Groot's manuscript, used his inventory to start the Anthony Hordern's Art Gallery in their George Street store. De Groot first served with the Hussars and by the end of the War he found himself a Captain in the Tank Corps.⁶

On his demobilisation and return to Australia in 1920, he provides this description of himself on his 14 May Immigration Permit form in the De Groot papers in the Mitchell Library⁷:

Eyes: Blue
Colour of Hair: Brown
Complexion: Fair
Face: Long
Nose: Straight
Forehead: High

Travellers in this innocent age were required to provide their own description before the introduction of the international passport system. De Groot describes living at *The Astor*, Macquarie Street, (after 1923 when the building was constructed), later moving to Rose Bay.⁸

De Groot soon begins his own business in antiques and reproduction furniture. He uses an artisan named "Jansen" and a furniture maker named Leonard Facer to assist him with repairs and new works.⁹ By September 1921, Sydney Ure Smith and Harry Julius's new magazine, *The Home*, announces that "De Groot's rooms have only recently



Plate 2. Frank De Groot's Harbour Bridge mount (described as a "weedy chestnut") held by a NSW constable. Sam Hood Collection, Image Library, State Library of NSW.

opened to the Sydney public" at the address "De Groot's Auction Rooms, *Lanark House*, 148 Phillip Street, Sydney (**Plate 3**)."¹⁰ His advertisement promises clients "Antiques and high class Reproductions". These early advertisements in *The Home* were the beginning of a unique symbiotic relationship between Sydney Ure Smith's magazine and Frank De Groot.

De Groot had an aptitude for publicity and within 12 months of opening his Auction Rooms, he arranges an interview in *The Australian Home Builder* with Nora Cooper, a seasoned writer on home furnishings and architecture.¹¹ His rooms had now shifted to 39 Bent Street, Sydney. "De Groot", says Cooper, "may well be regarded as a pioneer in this part of the world



Plate 3. De Groot's sale rooms. *The Home* 1 September 1921.

... Mr De Groot comes of a line of cabinet makers, so that his instinct for design is, so to speak, born in him.' "

"... [T]he furniture of Mr De Groot's own make [is] the centre of interest. In design he favours Chippendale, Adam, and William and Mary, these being especially suitable for reproduction in Australian woods. Queensland maple, he contends, is often superior to the mahogany of the 18th century. All his designs are carried out ... with an eye to the conditions of the country, and secondly, with a soundness of construction and perfection of finish rarely to be found, alas! in this age of cheap mass production".

In the Nora Cooper interview, De Groot emerges as a translator of 18th century English furniture styles, content to maintain the lines and mass of period furniture with concessions to 20th century housekeeping. "Pure Chippendale," says De Groot, "is not suited to Australia as the bold carving catches dust." He modifies his carving accordingly. De Groot consistently uses Queensland maple as a primary furniture timber.

By 1926, De Groot moves from the city into *McLachlan House*, McLachlan Avenue, Rushcutters Bay where he establishes furniture workshops and a showroom. In this location he continued to enhance and promote the craft values of his reproduction furniture as well as

sell antique furniture, art, carpets and bibelots.

De Groot's new advertising strategy begins to feature the skills of his artisans. In a full-page ad in *The Home*, he praises the work of A. B. Stowe, one of his *McLachlan House* carvers. "[Furniture] produced by the skilled hands of the master craftsman [A. B. Stowe]. Men who can take our beautiful Australian woods and with supreme artistry, create furniture the equal of any in the world."¹²

In October 1927, De Groot's advertisement in *The Home* announces that he employs 80 craftspeople and in the November issue of the journal, this number has risen to 100 Australian experts. These employee figures seem implausible given the size of the Australian furniture market in the 1920s. But during the late 1920s, De Groot is producing (and illustrating) Queensland maple dressing tables in the Chippendale style; Queen Anne-style chairs; Chippendale-style desks; leather-upholstered chairs; Sheraton-style wardrobe with panels of Richmond River cedar salvaged from *Burdekin House*; a line of small caskets in Australian timbers; and store fittings for David Jones and other retailers.

In the midst of this frenetic advertising campaign, with its unverifiable boast of 100 artisans employed in his Rushcutters Bay manufactory, De Groot suddenly decides in June 1928 that he is going abroad and announces a sizeable auction in the following month at James R. Lawson's rooms in Castlereagh Street.



Plate 4. A card table in "the 18th century style". *The Home* 1 March 1922.



Plate 5. A De Groot chair for David Jones' restaurant. *The Home* 1 July 1927.

A remarkable open letter from De Groot to Sydney Ure Smith published in the 16 July issue of *The Home*, explains "I propose to make the next six months a test of whether it is desired that I continue to make this class of furniture, both during my absence and after my return to Australia." De Groot promises that "I shall endeavour to keep my workshops open and my men together during my absence abroad, as the desire has so often been expressed that those fine craftsmen should not be dispersed, but this must depend on orders received and promises of support."

De Groot's buyers will be supplied with "Antiques of the Future". In his manuscript autobiography at the Mitchell Library, he recalls this dramatic return to Ireland in more modest terms, describing it as a "holiday".

In July 1928, De Groot's collection goes under the hammer. The Historic Houses Trust library contains a copy of the listings: *Catalogue of F. E. De Groot's Antique and Fine Reproduction Furniture, Rare China and Old Silver, Waterford Glass and Eastern Rugs... At the Gallery Auction Salerooms of James R. Lawson...* (24-25 July 1928). Most, if not all of De Groot's larger sales take place at Lawson's.

Following travels abroad, De Groot returns in ample time to open the Sydney Harbour Bridge on 19 March 1932. Although this feat is too well-known to describe here, De Groot was initially charged as being "a person deemed to be insane". On examination by a magistrate, he was found to be sane and charged



Plate 7. De Groot dressing table in the "Queen Anne style". The Home 1 February 1927

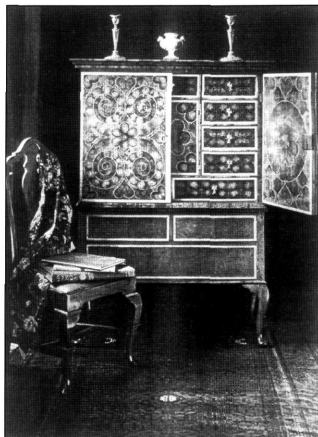


Plate 6. Original Queen Anne cabinet with De Groot restorations. The Home 1 October 1927.

with "Offensive Behaviour" (slashing the ceremonial ribbon with his sword) and received a fine of £5 plus costs. A framed section of slashed ribbon survives at the Australasian Pioneers Club, Sydney. During this time, it seems that De Groot has rooms at 32 Carrington Street, Sydney.

Despite De Groot's cavalier reputation, he receives a major commission for the *Australia Hotel* in 1934, while in 1935 he was selected by a group of citizens of the Federal Capital Territory to design and manufacture a suite of furniture

for Their Excellencies Sir Isaac and Lady Isaacs. This furniture was presented on 5 December 1935, seven weeks before Isaacs relinquished his post of Governor-General. From this suite, an easy chair now in the Mitchell Library carries a stamped brass plaque with a black japan finish: "Made by De Groot. Maker of Fine Furniture and Fittings. Sydney No. 142."¹³ It is unclear if this is a standard De Groot identification.

This veneered chair for the Governor-General (**Plate 8**), with its ornament-free rectilinear lines and its symmetrical veneering suggests that De Groot is not immune to the furniture design trends of the 1920s and 1930s. It is one of the few pieces that show this facet of De Groot's later design work.

His feats of arms seem to do De Groot's reputation no harm as some of his better known furniture clients include Harry Ervin, another resident of *The Astor* noted for his bequest that established the National Trust's S. H. Ervin Gallery, and Dame Edith Walker of the mansion *Yaralla* at Concord.¹⁴ One of his earlier Sydney sales (1921) is a card table to Dame Nellie Melba for her *Coombe Cottage*.¹⁵

De Groot continued his association with furniture design and manufacture through the 1930s. He also exhibited with the Society of Arts and Crafts of N.S.W. in 1937 in a display organised in the Education Department Exhibition Galleries. The catalogue describes a "Scheme for Chimney Breast. Arranged by B. J. Waterhouse and Mrs A. J. Brown ... Georgian Mantel designed by John L. Berry, made

and exhibited by F. E. De Groot. Two Sheraton Chairs designed by John L. Berry, made and exhibited by F. E. De Groot".¹⁶

When the 1939-45 War began, De Groot re-enlisted and served as a staff officer in Australia based initially at Victoria Barracks, Paddington. The De Groots built their Castle Hill Road, Pennant Hills home, *Dunrath*, during wartime after dismantling and transporting it from its original location at Bellevue Hill. In 1945, he was discharged as a Major.¹⁷

By the 1940s, De Groot seems to withdraw from the reproduction and antique furniture business and by 1948, at the age of 69, he decides to sell up his Pennant Hills home and its furnishings and return to Ireland. Included in this sale are "the whole of the Templates, Shapes and Working Drawings used in the production of the famous De Groot Furniture".¹⁸ The remainder of De Groot's contents is cleared at a later Lawson's sale.¹⁹

The catalogue of the 1948 sale records some of the claimed 200 cabinet-makers associated with De Groot's work. "Mr De Groot wishes to place on record the names of three of the craftsmen most closely connected with the making of the sixty pieces of furniture bearing his name that are included in this sale. They are Mr Alfred Downes, foreman cabinet-maker; Mr H. Jackson, polisher; and Mr Harry Dellow; wood-carver. All three being craftsmen whose work can stand comparison with any of the well-known names of the XVIII century."

With this auction and the sale of his templates and drawings, Frank De Groot disappears from the Australian scene. He returns to Ireland in 1950. Pencilled notations from the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales library copy of the 1948 Lawson catalogue from his Pennant Hills sale record that De Groot's Lot 284 "Templates, Shapes, Cut-outs and Working Drawings" sold for a modest £42/10/0.

Some recorded or noted De Groot furniture

1921

"Reproduction made in Sydney of Queensland maple in Chippendale design." *The Home*, 1 September 1921, p. 23 (Plate 4).

1924

Nora Cooper. "Modern Furniture Design. A Chat with Mr F. E. De Groot." *The Australian Home Builder*, (illustrated), June 1924, pp. 35-35.

"In design he favours Chippendale, Adam and William and Mary, these being especially suited for reproduction in Australian woods. Queensland maple, he contends, is often superior to the mahogany of the 18th century."

"A pair of twin bedsteads was particularly interesting being made from Richmond River cedar, recently obtained from *Burdekin House*. They were designed on Sheraton lines, inlaid and panelled and the rich satiny finish of the wood should prove a lasting source of joy to their possessor. A card table ... in maple,



Plate 8. A De Groot chair presented to "Their Excellencies Sir Isaac and Lady Isaacs by the Citizens of the Federal Capital Territory. 5 December 1935." Small Picture File, Image Library, State Library of NSW

polished a light walnut shade, was beautifully, though not heavily carved, a feature being the polished ash and tumbler trays let into the green baize surface. This is similar to one made by Mr De Groot for Dame [Nellie] Melba."

1926

Dressing table in 18th and early 19th century Chippendale style in Queensland maple. *The Home*, 1 December 1926.

1927

Dressing table in Queensland maple. *The Home*, 1 February 1927, p. 41 (Plate 7).



Plate 9. Queensland walnut-veneered secretaire in early 18th century style made for S. H. Ervin. Collection National Trust of Australia (NSW), Sydney. Photo Andrew Simpson.

Chippendale-style desk, Queen Anne-style chairs, Queensland maple, leather upholstered seats. *The Home*, 1 March 1927, p. 57.

“Old Masters” Queen Anne, William and Mary, Chippendale, Sheraton, Adam, Hepplewhite. *The Home*, 1 April 1927, p. 55.

Empire-style chair for new restaurant at David Jones. *The Home*, 1 July 1927, p. 43 (**Plate 5**).

A Wardrobe in the William and Mary manner. *The Home*, 1 August 1927, p. 48.

Sheraton-style wardrobe that “contains panels of Richmond River cedar from *Burdekin House*, Macquarie Street.” *The Home*, 1 September 1927, p. 59.

Line of caskets in Australian timbers. *The Home*, 1 December 1927, p. 69.

1928

Store fittings for David Jones. *The Home*, 1 February 1928, p. 47.

De Groot wardrobe. *The Home*, 1 March 1928, p. 51.

1935

Chair from suite made for Sir Isaac and Lady Isaacs. Label: in japanned brass, “Made by De Groot. Maker of Fine Furniture and Fittings. Sydney No.142.” Collection Mitchell Library. K. Fahy & A Simpson, *Australian Furniture. Pictorial History and Dictionary 1788-1938*, Sydney 1998, pl. 141 (**Plate 8**).

c. 1936

Queensland walnut-veneered secretaire in early 18th century style made for S. H. Ervin. Collection National Trust of Australia (NSW), Sydney²⁰ (**Plate 9**).

1937

“Georgian mantel designed by John L. Berry, made and exhibited by F. E. De Groot. Two Sheraton[style] Chairs designed by John L. Berry, made and exhibited by F. E. De Groot” in *Society of Arts and Crafts of NSW catalogue*.

Thanks to Megan Martin of the Historic Houses Trust of NSW Resource Centre for generous research assistance.

Notes

- 1 There are oblique references to De Groot's workshop and the Sydney furniture trade in Norman Lindsay's novel *Dust or Polish*, Angus & Robertson 1950, p. 84 and other references to the drunken furniture restorer "Peter Bodfish".
- 2 Frank De Groot, Typescript of Autobiographical Information, 1962. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, ML MSS 5243.
- 3 Butler, who specialised in reproduction 18th century furniture, is identified in The Knight of Glin (Desmond FitzGerald), "Dublin Directories and Trade Labels", *Journal of the Furniture History Society* [UK] vol 21, 1985, pp 258-272.
- 4 Heather Johnson, *The Sydney Art Patronage System 1890-1940*. Bungoona Technologies, 1997, p. 69.
- 5 Kevin Fahy, "Furniture", in *Treasures of the National Trust*, Sydney 1992, pp 29-31 and pl. 51.

- 6 Frank De Groot, *op.cit.* Note 2.
- 7 De Groot papers, Vol. 1. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, A 4957.
- 8 Frank De Groot, *op. cit.* note 2.
- 9 Frank De Groot. *op. cit.* note 2.
- 10 *The Home*, 1 September 1921 p. 23.
- 11 Nora Cooper, "Modern Furniture Design. A Chat with Mr F. E. De Groot", *The Australian Home Builder*, 16 June 1924 pp. 25-26.
- 12 *The Home*, 1 October 1926 p. 39.
- 13 K. Fahy & A Simpson, *Australian Furniture. Pictorial History and Dictionary 1788-1938*, Sydney 1998, pl. 141.
- 14 James R. Lawson Fine Art Auctioneers in conjunction with F. E. De Groot, Esq. 32 Carrington Street, *Auction of Estate of the late Dame Eadith Campbell Walker, DBE* [catalogue], 7 December 1939.
- 15 "Examples of Old Furniture at De Groot's Rooms, Sydney", *The Home*, 1 September 1921 p. 23.
- 16 *Society of Arts and Crafts of N.S.W. Annual Exhibition 1937* [catalogue], Education Department Exhibitions Gallery, 1937.
- 17 Frank De Groot. *op. cit.* note 2.
- 18 De Groot. "*Dunratb*" *Castle Hill Road, Pennant Hills* [catalogue]. James R. Lawson, 6 July 1948.

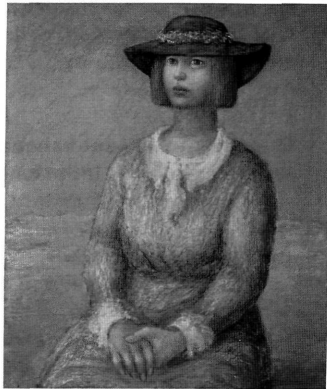
- 19 *Catalogue of A Most Important Collection of Antique and Period Furniture...Major Frank De Groot owing to his immediate departure for abroad ...* [catalogue], James R. Lawson, 13-14 December 1949.
- 20 "Australian Furniture", *Art and Australia*, November 1936; *Treasures of the National Trust*, p. 29 pl. 49; K. Fahy & A Simpson, *Australian Furniture. Pictorial History and Dictionary 1788-1938*, Sydney 1998, pl. 56.

Michael Bogle is a historian specialising in the history of Australian design. He has previously served on the Committee of the Australian Society and is a curator with the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, where he devised the 'Convicts' exhibition on show at Hyde Park Barracks, Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000.

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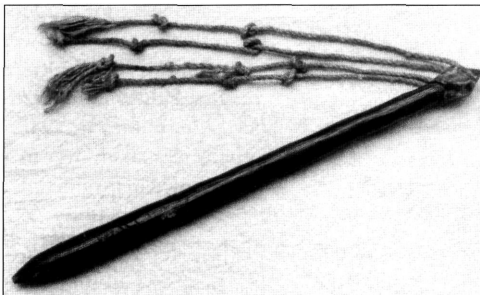
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First Fleet

David Blackburn,
Master of HMS *Supply*

Whip belonging to Blackburn made from an Aboriginal club. Blackburn was in Australia with HMS *Supply* from 1788 till 26 November 1791. Of extreme rarity and significance, this is one of the few surviving First Fleet items or 18th century Aboriginal artefacts in private hands. Recently purchased in London and sold to an Australian collector.

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Plate 1. Type 1 Mug, Type 1 Jug, Type 2 Jug.



In his history of the Diana Pottery, Geoffrey Ostling provides a fascinating insight into this little known manufacturer. He mentions in passing that the Diana Pottery produced musical jugs and mugs. Indeed, I believe it to have been the first, and only, Australian pottery to do so. The musical items are, however, not represented in the major collection of Diana pottery held in the Powerhouse Museum and nothing has been written about their production. This summary aims to make good that deficiency.

Background

Ostling records that the company began as a small backyard pottery in 1940 in Marrickville producing vases etc, expanding to a new factory in 1941 when production switched to "Navy and Munitions Canteen cups and mugs, and teapots and milk jugs for civilians" by direction of the wartime Government office responsible for production, the Commonwealth Manpower Authority. Diana resumed the manufacture of fancy pottery lines in 1946. The company was taken over in 1966 but continued in production until 1975.

A reprinted section from a 1952 catalogue of an exhibition at Anthony Hordern's stated that the company then employed a staff of more than 70. It said:

"Technical men imported from abroad made possible

Diana Pottery's MUSICAL JUGS *and* MUGS



Alan J Robb

After the Second World War, the modest Diana Pottery at Marrickville in Sydney's inner west aspired to greater things, introducing a line of moulded musical jugs and tankards on an Australian theme of 'Waltzing Matilda' to compete with the imported product.

the production, for the first time in Australia, of hand-painted articles such as *Waltzing Matilda* musical mugs and jugs.”

Musical jugs

Musical jugs and mugs were well established by the time Diana ventured into their production. Probably the most well known producer was the English firm of Crown Devon whose entry into this field began in 1930 with a *John Peel* jug and mug (or tankard) featuring the legendary huntsman. A musical whisky flagon, a salad bowl and two styles of cigarette boxes later joined the range.

Other designs released in the 1930s included *Auld Lang Syne* and *Widdicombe Fair* (both in 1935), *Ikla Moor*, *Daisy Bell*, *Killarney* and *The Ashgrove* (all in 1936), the *Eton Boating Song* (1937) as well as jugs featuring Harry Lauder, Gracie Fields and Sandy Powell. Children's miniature mugs were also produced which played *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?* and *Hush a Bye Baby*.

Following the end of the war Crown Devon produced three patriotic musical jugs - *There'll always be an England*, *Rule Britannia* and *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

The company had fostered close links overseas which resulted in a strong export business. To coincide with a sales trip by their Managing Director in 1937 they had produced specialised designs appropriate to three of the countries visited: a *Sarie Marais* musical jug for

South Africa, a *Haera Ra* jug for New Zealand and an *Advance Australia Fair* jug for Australia.

Post-war production largely centred on traditional English designs and Crown Devon had a virtual monopoly on the production of musical novelties. Royal Doulton had produced a small number of musical character jugs between 1937 and about 1948 in five of their existing (non-musical) designs: *Old Charley* (playing *Here's a health unto His Majesty*), *Paddy* (*Irish Jig*), *Tony Weller* (*Come, landlord, fill the flowing bowl*), *Owd Mac* (*The Campbells are coming*) and *Old King Cole* (*Old King Cole*). Other manufacturers known to have produced a few musical novelties included Shelley and Arthur Wood, but their production was miniscule in

comparison to Crown Devon.

In 1951 Crown Devon suffered a major setback when on the night of 16 May fire swept through the factory. It destroyed about 44,000 square feet of floor space and large quantities of goods destined for export. A history of the company by Susan Hill says

“A significant portion of these goods were musical novelties awaiting the delivery of the musical movements prior to their despatch. By a cruel irony, the shipment of these musical movements arrived at the factory just a few days after the fire.”

It was nearly six months before Crown Devon got back into production and it was the end of 1954 before the factory reached full production again.



Plate 2. Type 2 Mug.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

"THE DESIGNS ACT 1906-1934"

APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION OF DESIGN IN CLASS NO. 4.

I, JOHN STRANAGHAN CHRISTOPHER, Director of DIANA POTTERY PTY. LIMITED of 122-126 Marrickville Road, Marrickville, near Sydney, in the State of New South Wales, Commonwealth of Australia, for and on behalf of the said Company hereby make application for the registration of the accompanying Design in Class 4 in respect of a

"J U G"

under the provisions of the Designs Act 1906-1934.

I do hereby declare that such Design is new or original, and has not yet been published in Australia.

And I do further declare that my said Company is the author of the said Design within the meaning of section 14 (2) and that the said Company has not effected an assignment or transmission of its rights therein.

The nature of the Design is as follows :-

The ornamentation of a jug as shown in the photographs herewith.

The Design is to be applied by pottery moulding or otherwise.

And I make this declaration conscientiously believing it to be true.

REGISTRATION
EXPIRED

For and on behalf of
DIANA POTTERY PTY. LIMITED.

Signed by the said JOHN STRANAGHAN CHRISTOPHER in the presence of :-

DATED this twenty first day of March 1951.

To,
THE REGISTRAR OF DESIGNS,
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

REGISTER DESIGN
SEE LIST
11 NOV 1952
DATED

ornamented jug with a swagman sitting on a three-rail fence under the shade of a tree, its trunk forming the handle of the jug. The swagman's dog lies at his feet and beyond the fence a flock of merinos graze. The head of a lamb peeps out from a sack slung over the swagman's shoulder. And lest there be any mistake as to the scene portrayed, the words "Waltzing Matilda" appear prominently in a banner under the spout of the jug. The application said that the design "is to be applied by pottery moulding or otherwise."

The copy of the design application shows that it was formally listed as a Registered Design on 11 November 1952.

An example of this design in the Robb Collection shows that the jug is 7.5 inches high and 6.75 inches from the spout to the handle. Pasted beneath the handle is a paper label (2.5 inches wide and 2.25 inches high) with the inscription:

WALTZING MATILDA
MUSICAL JUG

Design - Registration Pending
No. 28959-51
made in Australia by
Diana Pottery Pty Ltd

As the design registration was pending one can be confident that the jug was produced early in the production run, probably prior to November 1952.

To those used to the Crown Devon colour scheme of a cream background the Diana jug is quite different. There is little separation between the blue/green of the sky and the green of the grass foreground. The brown of the

Plate 3. Application for registration of design for jug, 21 March 1951.

Throughout their life Crown Devon appear to have sourced their musical movements from Swiss manufacturers, Lador, Reuge and Thorens being the three known to date.

It is against this background that the Diana Pottery produced its musical novelties.

Diana's Waltzing Matilda mugs and jugs

Two different items appear to

have been produced, a jug and a mug or small tankard. Two styles have been seen of each. Only the jug was registered under the *Designs Act 1906-1934*. The application for registration was lodged by John Stranaghan Christopher, Director of Diana Pottery Pty Ltd of 122-126 Marrickville Road, Marrickville at 3.30 pm on 21 March 1951.

It was accompanied by three photographs showing a heavily

tree trunk, fence and lettering appears to have been painted on and then wiped off so that the texture of the trunk, fence and writing is clearly defined in the grooves of the surface. The only apparent identification on the jug is a small "D51" below the flock of sheep (**Plate 1, Type 1 Jug, top right**).

One of the *Waltzing Matilda* musical mugs in the Robb Collection is of a very similar colour scheme. The tree trunk again forms the handle. The decoration is different in that the swagman now crouches before a fire and tends his billy, his bag is hung over the branch of a tree, a sheep (far too big to be a lamb) lies behind him and his dog looks out towards two troopers approaching on horseback. As with the jug a banner inscribed with "*Waltzing Matilda*" appears under the lip of the mug. The mug stands 4.5 inches high and 5.5 inches across from lip to handle (**Plate 1, Type 1 Mug, left**).

No record can be found of this design ever being registered under the *Designs Act* but the similarity of the painting, and the fact that the 1952 Diana catalogue refers to jugs *and* mugs, give confidence in identifying this as a genuine Diana musical mug of the 1951-52 era.

Two variations in decoration have also been found. One jug, with identical moulded decoration, is painted in much deeper colours and has some additional colours. Specifically, the tree trunk and fence are a mahogany hue so liberally applied as to obliterate the texture of the surfaces, while the berries and

tips of the tree are picked out in red and the swagman's waistcoat is now red and not blue (**Plate 1, Type 2 Jug, below**).

One mug could almost pass, at first sight, for a piece of Crown Devon. The background sky and hills are cream and the foreground is a pale green. The tree trunk handle is a mahogany brown compared to the original pale brown. The swagman now has a dark green shirt and dark brown trousers compared with the original light brown shirt and dark blue trousers. The words "*Waltzing Matilda*" are now clearly picked out in black (against the cream background) which is a vast improvement over the light brown wash on the original (**Plate 2, Type 2 Mug**).

The mechanisms found in these examples were made by Reuge, Thorens and Dalco - all Swiss companies. The Dalco movement, found on the latter jug, differs from the other mechanisms and attempts are being made to date this movement more accurately from records in the Swiss Patent Office.

Ostling has most helpfully contacted an ex-employee of Diana in an attempt to establish how long the musical jugs and mugs were in production and how many were made. The only details she could remember were that they were in production "for only about a year as they were too expensive to produce".

As more examples of these interesting novelties are located it may be possible to verify whether production did cease

around 1953-54 or later.

In his history of the Diana Pottery, Ostling reproduced a cartoon of the painting section of the factory, drawn in 1954. In the bottom left hand section can be seen clearly a *Waltzing Matilda* jug sitting among other containers of thinner, tea and "old dirty tea". What an ignominious fate for an example of a unique piece of Australiana,

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks are extended to Grace Cochrane and Dolla Merrillees of the Powerhouse Museum, David Cunningham of the Designs Office IP Australia, Geoffrey Ostling and Dorothy Johnston.

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Alan J Robb is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Accountancy, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. He has been collecting and restoring musical boxes and researching their history for 30 years. He would welcome information about other examples of Diana musical novelties. His contact address is 12 Guinness Crescent, Christchurch, New Zealand 8004 or by email a.robb@afis.canterbury.ac.nz.



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WHITLEY
OLDBURY ROAD
MOSS VALE 2577
NEW SOUTH WALES
AUSTRALIA



Australian Hallstand in Blackbean & Cedar, stylistically not by Prenzel, c. 1890.

