

Australiana

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SIMPSON'S ANTIQUES

FINE AUSTRALIAN ANTIQUES



A rare, early and important press-moulded, glazed and gilded earthenware *Jardiniere* signed by the NSW art potter Gertrude E. Brown, with barbotine and underglaze painted decoration of kookaburras in a landscape, c. 1910, ht 17cm, diam 22cm.

To be featured in Casuarina Press's forthcoming publication *Australian Art Pottery 1900 – 1950* edited by Kevin Fahy, Keith Free, John Freeland and Andrew Simpson.
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COVER: Neil Douglas (1911-2003), wall plaque painted with lyrebird and butterflies amid ferns, signed and dated, d 36 cm. Courtesy Marvin Hurnall.

Editorial

The University of New South Wales is leading a group of institutions seeking funds to create a *Dictionary of Australian Artists Online*. Based on Joan Kerr's *Dictionary of Australian Artists*, her book *Heritage: The Women's Arts Book*, her database and Vivien Johnson's *Aboriginal Artists of the Western Desert*, it will use digital technology to create an authoritative online resource, as well as an interactive platform for gathering and publishing further research.

Professor Joan Kerr proved herself a marvellous organiser, by getting grant funds and harnessing her students and colleagues to contribute to these still very useful publications. When she retired from formal academic life a year or two ago, she was looking forward to continuing her research, her publications and her public activities. We admired and liked her so much that the Committee of the Australiana Society agreed to nominate her for an Australiana Award last year.

So we were saddened to hear of Joan's death on 22 February, the day after her 66th birthday. The Society was well represented at her funeral, held at Edmund Blacket's historic St Stephen's Church at Newtown NSW. The eulogy delivered by Peter Watts, Director of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, perfectly captured her vivacity, warmth, humour and achievements. No one could describe Joan's smile spreading

and her laugh erupting better than Peter did. Both *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* commemorated her work in obituaries in early March.

Joan Kerr set a wonderful example of what can be done to further knowledge of Australian art, architecture and history – an example that I hope we can learn from, both as a Society and as individuals.



These are some of these things we should and will be doing through our magazine, our events and activities:

- We will continue to publish new research by our members that helps to build up a broader picture, and allows us and others to gain a clearer picture of the development and diversity of Australian arts, history and decorative arts.
- We will publish concise articles, along the lines of dictionary entries, that capture the essence of some of the well known, and lesser-known, artists and other figures in the field of Australiana.
- We will publicise new exhibitions, both public and private. In the past we have generally concentrated on those of public institutions, but in this issue we publicise a major retrospective show at a commercial gallery.
- Collecting can produce some tough lessons, and we can share practical advice and tips. In this issue, Christian Da Silva talks about waxing and cleaning furniture.
- We will publicise and review new books.
- We will arrange social events, conferences and excursions.
- Two heads are better than one, so if we know about members' collecting and research interests, we can coordinate their efforts by putting people in touch with each other so they can cooperate. Here's an example.



Pokerwork

Pokerwork is the old craft of burning or etching a design on a household item and then colouring the resulting pattern with indian inks, and one where very little is known of the practitioners.

Two Canberra sisters, Lindy Cayzer and Wendy Macklin, are seeking information on the history of pokerwork in Australia in the early 20th century. Specifically Lindy and Wendy want information on how this craft was so rapidly adopted in Australia, how the designs were modified to our native flora and fauna, and whether anybody else in Australia is trying to restore or preserve these items. If you can help please get in touch with lindy.cayzer@visability.com.au or wendymacklin2001@yahoo.com.au. ■

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Charles Astley

The career of an artist and art teacher on the Darling Downs

GLENN R. COOKE

L.J. Harvey was not the only teacher to create a 'school' in Queensland. Charles Astley was another, operating in Toowoomba and Warwick on the Darling Downs

An obituary in *The Warwick Daily News* of 20 June, 1929 recorded:

Art and musical circles in Queensland have suffered a severe loss through the death of Mr Charles Ernest Astley one of the best known art instructors in the service of the Queensland Education department. ... The late Mr Astley, who was 60 years of age, had spent many years in Warwick as instructor in arts, woodcarving, pottery etc. at the Warwick Technical College, and had earned the respect and reverence of a large circle of friends in Warwick. He was beloved by his students, and his passing, although not unexpected, came as a great shock to the teaching staff and students of the College.

Astley had been involved with the cultural life of the Downs from 1902, when he began teaching at Toowoomba, and in Warwick from 1908. Astley was a violinist who had performed with the Hobart Philharmonic Society and was equally involved with musical performance in Toowoomba and Warwick. Although this aspect of Astley's life is of significance in the histories of these two towns, this article focuses on his practice in the visual arts: painting, woodcarving, china painting and pottery as well as his teaching.

Charles Ernest Astley was born in London in 1869. We know remarkably little of his life in England, though he is reported to have studied under Frank Marriott at the Goldsmith Institute.¹

He came to Australia aged 18 and spent some time in NSW, where he married Mary Rankin at Wagga Wagga in 1894, before moving to Tasmania where their only child Cecil Bellaire was born in 1896. However, he made his greatest contribution to the visual arts, and spent almost 30 years of his life, in Queensland, in particular on the Darling Downs.

Although there may be a question over where he actually trained, the works that he painted in Tasmania show him to be a highly competent painter in a typical late 19th century manner. A melancholic feeling is evident both in the subject and setting of works such as *Ile of the Dead, Port Arthur* 1899 (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery). The symbolism of *The last of his tribe* 1894 (private collection, Murwillumbah) in which the blasted trees reflect the demise of the Aboriginal people of Tasmania is as conventional in its approach. I would have to suggest that these early works are of greater interest than any located which document his years in Queensland.

Toowoomba

Astley's connection with Queensland begins when he and his family settled in Toowoomba in 1902. There he taught music and conducted lessons in painting in oil and watercolour in rooms at the Town Hall and later the School of Arts.² He exhibited for the first time in this state by sending three works



1. Charles Astley (Australia 1869-1929), *Rose of Evening* 1926. Oil on canvas, 51 x 91.5 cm, Queensland Art Gallery, gift of Cecil B. Astley (the artist's son) 1926 Acc. 1:0145



2. Charles Astley (Australia 1869-1929), *Beaker* 1923. China painting on bone china blank in magenta, yellow and blue outlined background and yellow ground. Black rim, 10.5 x 8.2cm (diam.), Queensland Art Gallery, purchased 1988 Acc. 1988.022



3. Charles Astley (Australia 1869-1929), Covered bowl c.1921 and Vase 1921. Earthenware, press-moulded and carved with pink-brown glaze, bowl: 6 x 16 cm (diam.); lid: 4.2 x 13.8 cm (diam.). Queensland Art Gallery, purchased 1991 Accs. 1991.205, 1991.138a-b

to Brisbane for the Queensland Art Society's annual exhibition in November 1902. These works documented his former residence in Tasmania as the titles make clear.

168 *'Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home' The Cascades – Hobart.* (w/c)

170 *Mt Wellington, from Cascade Creek, Hobart*

176 *Evening near the Grey Lake, Hobart.*

The year 1903 was significant in the cultural history of Toowoomba as the writer George Essex Evans, inspired by the success of the Maryborough Eisteddfod, determined to create its equivalent in his home town. He marshalled local supporters and established the Austral Association which flourished until 1911. The Association was primarily directed to performance and although Astley was a violinist, he made his contribution and was praised for his effort as a committee member and exhibitor in the art section. He organised the first art exhibition which was held in the Alexandra Hall and, with his contacts with southern artists, persuaded Julian Ashton, Dattilo Rubbo and W.C. Piguenit to contribute to a substantial presence by Sydney artists. These, together with 56 of his and his students' works, formed the bulk of the 115 works in the exhibition.³ The Austral Committee purchased three of Astley's works from the competitive section for an Art Union: *Rising mist. Mt Pelican, Tasmania*, a watercolour and a black and white work *Autumn morning, Derwent Water*,⁴ and he had a substantial non-competitive display.

In the art section of the 1904 Austral Association he submitted a non-competitive exhibit in the black and white section, while in the section of 'landscape from nature in oils' his contribution was described as 'a most striking picture depicting a wheat field, with farm buildings and trees, and Gowrie Mountain in the distance'. Additionally, Astley was 'easily first' in the category for landscape in watercolours while another watercolour painting was highly commended.⁵ The titles of these paintings record his shift to local subject matter.

In the following year the President of the Association Mr Vernon Redwood remarked in his opening speech that 'He regretted to say that they had not been supported by Toowoomba competitors in the manner in which they should be. Teachers might have very well competed and also allowed their pupils to compete'. This criticism did not apply to Astley as he exhibited 21 works in the non-competitive section.⁶

In 1906 the adjudicator, J.S. Watkins from Sydney, noted 'Mr Astley's fine picture representing a scene below Tick Hill is

perhaps spoilt with too great severity in the foliage' while he was awarded a second prize in the section for original landscape in watercolour with *A settler's hut, Willowburn*. His contribution was not as prominently regarded as in earlier years, as on this occasion the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane sent a loan exhibit of six pictures while the Queensland Art Society sent 30 works by their members.⁷ He did not exhibit the following year as he had departed on a trip to England⁸ but in 1908, when one could have expected Astley to send a display from Warwick, there was no art section, nor in the succeeding exhibitions and the Austral Hall was largely devoted to that new and popular form of the visual arts – moving pictures.

In his early years in Toowoomba, Astley developed his exhibition profile⁹ and teaching professionalism¹⁰ to such effect that he was appointed to Toowoomba Technical College as a teacher of Painting Stages 1 & 2 in 1905.¹¹ The Department of Public Instruction's inspector later reported that Astley '...appears well qualified to teach drawing and painting. His teaching is marked by thoroughness and his criticism by intelligence'.¹² Astley, however, stayed only two years before taking his wife and son on the trip to England and Europe.

Where is the evidence of Astley's career in Toowoomba, as he is not represented in the collection of the Toowoomba Regional Gallery? Toowoomba works are obviously scarce. A private collection in Warwick has quite a few of Astley's work in various media (oil, black and white, sepia and water colour) dated from 1908 to 1910: two of England, *Gunar Is. Head, England* and *River Ouse, Sussex*; Scotland *October in the Highlands*; Norway, *Laerdalsoren, Ose Fjord, Raftsune, and Norwegian fjord*; Italy, *Lake Como*; and Australian scenes, *Barn Bluff, Lake St Clair, Tasmania* and closer to home *Near Tweed Heads, The Condamine at Warwick*, and *Near Canning Downs*. As Astley was in Warwick by late 1908, it suggests the European locations were the result of sketches on his European tour, worked up after he returned.

Astley has one link with the city, however. When Toowoomba became formally recognised as a city in November, 1904 the past mayors of the city and their families decided to honour the occasion by commissioning a mayoral chain. Astley designed the chain which was made by a local firm of jewellers Henry Walker & Sons as well as the medallion. The chain was presented to the Mayor of Toowoomba, Alderman Burstow on 19 January 1905.¹³

Astley did try to establish his credibility in Brisbane as, sometime after 1908, he exhibited with the New Society of Artists (the rival of the Queensland Art Society) and an unidentified press cutting notes '... in the rather gruesome still life work there is a good deal of quiet force if not originality'. This description rather suggests a still life with game which would be highly unusual in Astley's work. He also exhibited *A summer day on the Condamine* and some watercolours. After the demise of the New Society, works with Queensland titles were exhibited at the Queensland Art Society:

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1911 | 136 <i>Moora Park, Sandgate</i> (w/c) |
| | 137 <i>Woody point</i> (w/c) |
| | 138 <i>The beach, Sandgate</i> (w/c) |
| 1914 | 13 <i>Tweed Heads</i> (oil) |
| | 86 <i>Greenmount, from Danger Bay</i> (w/c) |
| | 87 <i>Near Victoria Bridge, Warwick</i> (w/c) |
| | 88 <i>Condamine at Warwick</i> (w/c). |

No special mention of his work is made in these reviews

which suggest there was little remark of his work compared to the other exhibitors in Queensland's premier art group. His painting activity appears to have quickly petered out and he disappears from the exhibition records. Only two paintings, *Sr Helena from Wynnum*, 1919 (private collection), and *Rose of evening*, 1926 have been identified.

Rose of evening was clearly regarded as one of his most significant works. It depicts the banks of the Condamine River near Warwick and was presented by Astley's son Cecil Bellaire to the Queensland Art Gallery in 1926. The outstanding points of the work are perhaps the brilliant sunset effects, characteristic of the closing of a fine day, the calm which permeates the whole, and the careful study of the trees. The reflection effects are very attractive, and the work is thoroughly characteristic of the district.¹⁴

One would have to suggest it is typical of the renditions of dusk and a setting sun that were prevalent in Australian art from the 1890s. It is a competent work but of interest largely for its local and regional connections. However, by this time Astley has well and truly transferred his interests to other artistic activities.

Teaching at Warwick

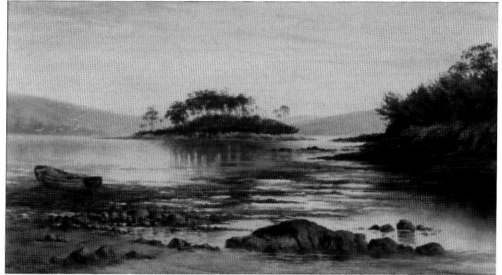
When he returned to Queensland in 1908 he took up appointment as art master at Warwick Technical College. As this placing was less than a year after his departure from Toowoomba, it would seem the appointment had been arranged before his departure.¹⁵ Astley threw himself into his new position and conducted classes at Milton Ladies College for Warwick Technical College the following year,¹⁶ art classes at State School Killarney in 1910 and drawing at Stanthorpe Branch classes in 1912.¹⁷

Warwick Technical College was taken over by the Queensland Government from 1 July 1910 to become the Warwick State High School and Technical College.¹⁸ In common with many technical education teachers then and now, Astley had to study in the position to upgrade his qualifications to meet the changing circumstances. For instance he requested the Department of Public Instruction to make arrangements for him to sit for Modelling Stage II at the Technical College exam in December 1912.¹⁹

The *Inspector's report of 13/10/1913* noted that Astley was teaching all the art subjects except woodcarving which was still being taught by Miss Edith Robinson who travelled from Toowoomba one day a week. The woodcarving classes were largely for hobbyists and the Inspector asserted that Miss Robinson's students would profit by joining the drawing and design classes. It seems that Astley's intention to begin classes in design at the College in 1911 had eventuated.²⁰

Astley was teaching woodcarving in the classes in townships outside Warwick such as those at Clifton and Tannymorel by 1917.²¹ It appears that he acquired his skill in this craft from Miss Robinson. Although Astley would have been acquainted with Miss Robinson's woodcarving classes while teaching at Toowoomba Technical College, it is more likely that she taught him in Warwick, as she too had been teaching there since 1908.

Miss Robinson had been teaching at Toowoomba since 1889 and the use of formalised floral designs and mirror-imaged motifs readily establishes his association with her design methods. A private collection in Brisbane has a desk and overmantel carved by Astley with wyverns (two-legged dragons which appear frequently in Medieval manuscripts). These were made originally for Mr and Mrs Henry Callow who operated a music shop in Warwick. Further evidence of his skills may be seen in the carved panel over the



4. Charles Astley (Australian 1869-1929), *Isle of the Dead*, Port Arthur 1899. Oil on canvas, 51 x 88.8 cm. Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Bequest of Mr & Mrs W.E. Fuller



5. The art section of the 1905 Austral Association displayed in Alexandra Hall, Toowoomba. Photograph courtesy of the John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.



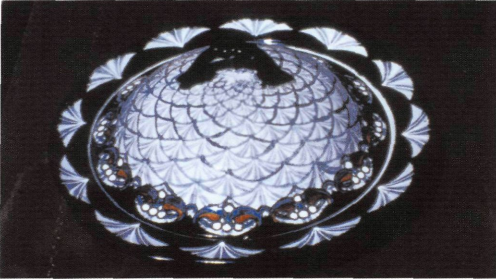
6. China painting display at Warwick Technical College display, August 1921 from The Queenslander. Photograph courtesy of the John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

entrance showing the coat of arms and motto of Warwick Technical College, 'Virtue et Labore'.²²

Astley was pleased enough with his classes at Tannymorel to assert 'I may say the Tannymorel classes are the best I have ever had'.²³ Consequently a display of the students' work was organised for January the following year and, to enable the students and teachers to attend, the Minister, Mr J.D. Storey, granted a half-day holiday. A review in the *Warwick Daily News* described the event in detail:



7. Gladys Fell, (Australia 1906-c.1985), Kookaburra bowl 1924. Earthenware, press-moulded low circular bowl on three small feet. Carved with a continuous frieze of kookaburras and glazed mauve/grey, 7.5 x 27.5cm (diam.). Queensland Art Gallery, gift of Mrs E.M. Bell in memory of Gladys Palmer 1989 Acc. 1989.017



8. Eunice Reid (Australia 1899-1977), Covered bowl 1924. China painting on bone china blank. Private collection, Canberra.

The hall has been tastefully and artistically decorated by the students, the walls being covered all over with brown paper, which formed a most effective background. Five pairs of stencilled curtains were shown, some having the design across the curtain, others with it running up and down the sides. The designs were all original, poppies, chrysanthemums, bluebells etc. being most effectively conventionalised. The eucalyptus was also used with excellent effect, in grey or black satin for cushions. There were also table centres, table cloths, tea cosies etc. Paintings were shown in both watercolour and oil, pretty monochromes in watercolour, and still life studies of bottles, jugs, fruits and flowers, also some very fair attempts at landscape work. Two very good casts were shown of a child, and mounted in frames of carved poppies by the students. The carving students showed some especially good work in frames, brackets and panels, the design in each case being original.

It would seem, at least, that Astley's classes in stencilling – which had been scheduled to begin, with classes in china painting, two years earlier – were indeed effected but it is highly unlikely that such work now survives. Although no direct mention was made, it seems that the Tannymorel students were all females, as domestic virtues were emphasised throughout the display. The description continues:

Little tables were arranged all around the hall, daintily decorated with flowers, and the visitors had an exceedingly good afternoon

tea dispensed to them by the students. It is to be regretted that there are not many more country towns like Tannymorel, the people of which have seized the opportunity offered to them by the Department of Public Instruction to educate themselves in the appreciation of art, which not only beautifies the home, but also educates the mind.²⁴

China painting classes

It was logical that he should think of beginning classes in china painting, as the craft was especially popular with women in southern states at that time. China painting was quite unusual in Queensland, the major practitioner being a Brisbane stained glass artist, Martin Moroney. Astley taught painting at Warwick from 1908, and information on china painting classes at Sydney Technical College (also begun in 1908) had, it seems, permeated even to Warwick, as several students in painting Stage I & II had expressed interest in the craft.

As classes were usually advertised well before they began, the actual commencement date of the classes is unclear. Astley intended to start classes in china painting from the third term in 1914²⁵ and even placed a large order for china paints with W.C. Penfold, Sydney. In 1915, a notice appeared in the local newspaper advertising that new craft classes in stencilling, china painting and pen painting would be given from the second term (from 15 May). However, as china paints need to be fixed by firing and a kiln was not in use at Warwick Technical College until mid-1918, Astley's experimentations must have begun after this date.

Pottery making

The course in china painting was probably initiated by Astley's own interest in the application of painting techniques, but pottery making was promoted at the Central Technical College in Brisbane through the success of the classes begun by L.J. Harvey in 1916. A pottery kiln arrived at Warwick Technical College on 17 May 1918 and Astley had 'high hopes' of starting classes by the middle of the term. His aspirations to begin teaching pottery promptly were of the same kind as that of china painting. He certainly began experimenting at this time, in all probability with the help of Eunice Reid, his teaching assistant.²⁶ Not until September 1919 did Astley have the opportunity of visiting the Central Technical College to observe their methods of pottery instruction.

When an instructor attempts to set up a new class, problems with the supply of clay²⁷ and glazes,²⁸ and even more importantly with learning how to fire the kiln, would have been frustrating. Astley would have had very little practical help from Brisbane, as L.J. Harvey was going through a similar process. Supply of gas and a potter's wheel was not approved until mid-1919. Until then, the unfired pieces were shipped to James Campbell & Sons pottery in Brisbane; the risk of transporting must have been very high.²⁹ It seems Astley was still having problems with the kiln early next year, as he was still sending pieces to Campbell's Pottery for firing and glazing, as this shipping list indicates.

- 3 square teapots & lids in blue
- 1 jug & lid in blue
- 7 jars and lids in blue
- 2 teapots & lids in red
- 1 small oblong vase
- 2 long square vases

2 square vases
1 tray in blue³⁰

The descriptions suggest they were the work of students. By early 1920 the classes had become popular enough for Astley to propose discontinuing the Killarney Branch Art Classes so that he could devote himself to the new venture.³¹

The Minister for Public Instruction, Mr Huxham, visited Warwick Technical College and was sufficiently impressed by Astley's work to grant him approval for a visit to the china painting and pottery section of East Sydney Technical College on 21-30 May 1921. Huxham encouraged Astley to exhibit the works at the Queensland National Agricultural and Industrial Association annual exhibition in Brisbane during August. With this recommendation, Astley lobbied the Department of Public Instruction strenuously³² to send about 250 items of pottery and china painting to establish recognition of his classes in the capital, but the Department refused this venture because of cost.³³ Astley countered with a request to display the work in a shop window in Brisbane but this was probably not effected either, as just over two weeks later, on 25 July 1921, an exhibition of pottery and china painting 'the outcome of the study and attention given over the last six months' at Warwick Technical College was given to 'an interested audience among whom ladies predominated.' In reviewing the exhibition, strong regret was expressed that the Department did not permit the Warwick display to be seen in Brisbane.

The exhibition was given in one of the well lighted classrooms, and a long row of covered benches was entirely covered with dozens of beautiful products of the potter's wheel. It is interesting to note that some of the best clays are obtained from Mr. Henriksen's property at Sladevale and from Rosenthal. It undoubtedly contains the nucleus of a local industry. All parts of the art were shown from the white articles without glaze, known as biscuit ware, to the elaborately finished afternoon tea set, mounted in pure gold and with original scenes – one on the Condamine – 'blazed' into the plates or other articles. The second stage is really the fine glazing, which is so familiar in all good articles, and in this the local school showed excellent results. Incised work in designs impressed into the soft clay were shown, and in underglaze colour or lustre work. A fine example of this was a cup which, on the inside, had all the prismatic beauty of mother of pearl. A further development which greatly interested the visitors was the painting of white china, and in this some wonderfully beautiful articles were shown, such as, for instance, original designs in afternoon tea sets in fragile China, imitation of Japanese enamel, and original designs of all kinds, from Mr. Hamilton's monogram on a cup to the College badge mounted in silver. There is one point in these articles which commends itself to most people, that in all cases the designs are original. It was essential that these should be seen to be appreciated, and there are few who have any idea of the rapid advances that have been made in the work under the direction of Mr Astley, who is that happiest of all individuals, one who finds his hobbies in his daily duties.³⁴

Although enthusiastic and appreciative, the reviewer was obviously confused about what he was describing. Any potter will tell you that throwing is not an easily acquired skill and there is very little evidence of 'dozens of beautiful products of the potter's wheel' – even if a student is shown attempting to



9. D. Corrigan, Vase, 1928, ht 25 cm, Private collection. The shape suggests it may be by one of Astley's students. (Compare the vase on the right on plate 15).

throw in the accompanying photographs. Plaster moulds are evident on the display table but just as evidently the bulk of pottery items displayed are simple slab-built – very similar indeed to the early Harvey School exercises. Neither is 'incised work' impressed into the soft clay but rather carved into the leather-hard body. 'Underglaze colour' is linked with pottery but the example of lustre work with 'the prismatic beauty of mother of pearl' was of china painting. Underlying this quotation is the assumption that there is a progression from 'biscuit ware' culminating in the 'pure gold' mounting of the china painted service whereas they are really distinct crafts. In all, china painting is a much simpler craft to execute.

The reviewer's enthusiasm was aroused by the 'fine china' which was almost certainly the work of Astley and his assistant Eunice Reid; and in comparison to the unpretentious pieces of pottery, displayed much more sophistication. The work of other students in china painting is yet to be located. The success of the exhibition in Warwick prompted Astley to write to Jeanette Sheldon, proprietor of the only commercial art gallery in Brisbane, advising that a photograph of his china painting would appear in *The Queenslander* in about two weeks, with the suggestion 'I'm sure there is good business to be done.'³⁶ The Sheldon Gallery did display craft work, especially pottery from time to time, but no evidence has been located that Astley's work ever appeared there.

Astley was aware of the greater appeal of fine china and, to further his experiments with local clays, ordered calcined bone dust in an attempt to produce bone china.³⁵ No doubt his experiments resulted in failure, but they were typical of many ventures of the period which aspired to develop local industry. The Department of Public Instruction regarded his efforts favourably and, 'in view of the measure of success of Mr Astley's efforts', approval was given for purchase of a gas burner³⁷ which was installed for the last term in 1922. At that time Astley was teaching pottery, china painting, design, freehand drawing, commercial art, woodcarving and 'the new American art of parchment painting for lamp shades', and was trying to obtain tools for leather work.

Astley arranged for prizes to be awarded at the next showing of



10. Photo of pot pourri jar and presentation casket 1927 by Poulsen & White Studio, Brisbane. Photo courtesy of Mrs E. Turner.



11. Photograph of Warwick Technical College Staff taken outside St Andrew's Church, Warwick in 1912. (Left to right) Mr E.L. Diery (Instructor in woodwork), Mrs Cooper (Domestic science), Mr H.G.T. Williams (Commercial Subjects), Mr George (Headmaster), Mr Rahman, Mr C.E. Astley (Art subjects) and Mr McKilligan. Photograph of courtesy Mrs E. Turner.

his student's work in Warwick and suggested that L.J. Harvey write to the secretary for a list '...as it would be nice to have keen competition.' But it appears the challenge was ignored, as the newspaper review records no Brisbane pottery students when the display took place in February 1923. As in the earlier review the setting was detailed:

The pottery and china were artistically displayed, with due regard to the colour scheme, which was carried out in tones of blue, maroon and white. At intervals were placed tall vases bearing choice flowers in these colourings, while here and there a lamp softly glowed, and incense burners shed a subtle fragrance around.

The description continued:

... there were examples of incised work, carving in high and low relief, pierced work, and designs in underglaze. Carved electric and kerosene lamps with parchment shade decoration, together with incense burners, ornaments of every conceivable kind, vases, bowls etc. were among many of the things admired in the display.

Particularly lovely were the colourings of the different articles, which are glazed in Warwick, and which compare so favourably with those in our big cities. *Sang-de-boeuf* and mulberry glaze were combined and produced a beautiful effect. The first named glaze has just been imported from England and is used a great deal for rouge flambé works there. It is therefore quite new in Australia.

In china decoration examples were shown of fruit plates, tea cups and monochrome work. Beakers, coffee cups, coupe dishes, egg cups and lustre work were also shown.³⁸

This review also identified Astley's best students. Mrs A.L. Flower took the prizes in the three pottery sections while Miss Fell showed an incense bowl 'which was probably the best exhibited in the competition'. In china painting Mrs R. Grieve received prizes for a painted bowl and a cup and saucer.³⁹

By 1923, ten students were enrolled in painting, two in china painting, 24 in pottery (four classes were held 2.30-4.30 and

7.30-9.30 on Tuesday and Thursday) and 15 in drawing and design, while a further 91 high school students receive instructions in drawing. This was probably near the peak of popularity of the pottery classes as *The Condaminian* stated that the substantial number of 378 pieces had been fired in the College kilns by October.⁴⁰ The Technical College Inspector reported:

The work of the Pottery Classes reflects great credit on the teachers. Much experimenting has been done particularly on the work of glazing, with some excellent results, samples of pottery being turned out even by students which are of very high value. To obviate the tediousness of building up in clay, since students have not reached the stage when they will be able to use the wheel, a system of moulding has been introduced which enables the clay to be shaped to the desired form very rapidly so that the student is able to devote his or her time almost entirely to decoration and design. The decorations are generally based on typical Australian objects. These classes represent a unique development of home art, which if adopted generally throughout the Colleges of the State, would have a far-reaching effect on the improvement of art in Queensland, and on the artistic and decorative sense of its public.⁴¹

Pottery students

Apart from Mrs Flower (whose work has not yet been identified), Gladys and Maud Fell and his student teacher Eunice Reid, only two of Astley's other pottery students are known, Miriam Kohler and Margaret Kinder. Kinder studied with him in 1924 and advised that Astley obtained clay from Yangan and processed it himself.⁴² In mid-1926, Astley had 26 pupils for pottery and hoped to have 30 by the end of the year, so a considerable quantity of his students' pottery must survive, even if it did not reach the level of Astley's own work.⁴³ When it comes to china painting we have evidence of the work of Eunice Reid and a record of that of Mrs Grieve. It has been suggested that Noreen Kidner, Barbara Kruce, Judith Smythe and Mabel Newcombe were china-painting students.⁴⁴

Astley clearly produced a considerable quantity of china



1. Exhibit of China and Pottery at the College last

12. Exhibition of students' work at Warwick Technical College, August 1921 from *The Queenslander*. Photograph courtesy of the John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

painting in his time in Warwick and there must be much more about. Astley's grand-daughter, the author Thea Astley, recalled a pair of jardinières decorated in yellow and black in an Art Deco style (one of which she broke when a child) and a coffee set in a strong mauve and black. But these no longer survive. The colours of Astley's and Reid's china-painting is rather striking, and very distinctive with the use of the black outline to emphasise further the vibrancy of the colours, as evident in the Queensland Art Gallery's *Beaker* 1923.

Warwick was one of the Queensland Technical Colleges that contributed to the display intended for the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Park, London in 1924. Mr H.W. Mobsby was the state organiser of the display held at the time of the QNA&IA Exhibition in 1923. The reviewer in *The Telegraph* mentioned an improvement in 'delft ware' which is quite unlikely.⁴⁵ The Warwick display included work of the two students who provided most of the exhibits, Mrs A. Flower and Miss G. Fell. Notable items were a carved 'kookaburra' vase glazed in *sang de boeuf* and mulberry, a float bowl carved with small kookaburras (the work of Gladys Fell), a vase carved with gum leaves and nuts, and a small bust of W.M. Hughes which was the work of Miss Reid.⁴⁶ Warwick Technical College received a medal for the display at Wembley.⁴⁷

As the Inspector's Report noted, the output of Warwick Technical College was distinguished from that the Central Technical College by use of press moulding. In contrast to the practices at the Central Technical College, Brisbane, Astley did not consider the laborious hand-building process fostered by L.J. Harvey to be inherently 'artistic'. Although 'Optimum Pati' in *The Queenslander* for August 1924 equated 'moulded' with 'commercial', there was considerable commonsense in the students in Warwick applying their artistry to the decoration of press moulded pieces.

Astley's activity at Warwick Technical College gained some recognition locally. When the Warwick Citizen's Horticultural Society was established at a meeting on 19 August 1926 the words 'and Industrial' were incorporated as it was '...deemed necessary to provide for the various forms of women's and children's handiwork.' However, Astley's increasing ill health meant his teaching at the College was beginning to lose its impetus, and during 1925 he spent six months in Rockhampton



2. One of the pottery classes at work

13. Charles Astley with a pottery class Warwick Technical College, August 1921 from *The Queenslander*. Photograph courtesy of the John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

setting up the art department at the local technical college.⁴⁸

Apart from the presentation of *Rose of evening* to the Queensland Art Gallery in 1926, Astley's reputation received a fillip when he designed the potpourri container presented to Princess Elizabeth on behalf of the children of Queensland. It was made at Warwick Technical College for presentation to the Duchess of York (the late Queen Mother) on her visit to Queensland in 1927⁴⁹ and described comprehensively in *The Condominium*, the school paper:

The Pot Pourri jar was designed and executed by Mr. C.E. Astley, Art Master, Technical College, Warwick, and the whole of the firing and glazing was done in the College kiln. The jar is 13 inches high and stands on a wooden base of black bean. The lid is carved in relief with gum leaves falling from the centre and a kangaroo sits on top in its usual attitude on its hind legs. The background of the lid is done in 'punched' work, thus showing up the carving. Around the top of the jar are incised the words 'Laugh and the world laughs with you', and surrounding the body of the jar are kookaburras carved in relief, with mouths open carolling the words carved above. The birds stand on a branch of a gum tree from which leaves and berries [sic] are hanging. The whole of the design is in gold, while the background is glazed in crimson. The casket is made of Queensland woods, polished in natural colour and is the work of Mr. E.L. Diery, Instructor in Woodwork at the College. It is lined in blue silk and has silver fittings. The cabinet proper is silky oak and maple, the four small pedestals emu-apple...On the lid is inscribed in letters of gold 'To Princess Elizabeth from the children of Queensland.' This was executed by Mr. H. Eizenberg, formerly a pupil of the College Art Classes.⁵⁰

Astley's assistant Miss Eunice Reid was transferred to Rockhampton in 1926, but it was not until April 1928 that Miss Alma Irving was transferred to the relieving position of assistant teacher of art subjects, as Astley had suffered a stroke. Miss Irving was a capable potter who had been trained by L.J. Harvey, but by this time only three ladies were interested in pottery and the class soon terminated.⁵¹ Astley died the following year.



3. A Teaset design

14. China painted part tea-set by Charles Astley at Warwick Technical College display, August 1921 from *The Queenslander*.

Photograph courtesy of the John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

THE QUEENSLANDER FIRST EXHIBITION NUMBER



SOME OF THE POTTERY SPECIMENS EXHIBITED BY THE WARWICK TECHNICAL COLLEGE

15. Exhibition of pottery from Warwick Technical College at the Queensland National Agricultural and Industrial Association Exhibition, August 1923 from *The Queenslander*. Photograph courtesy of the John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

Without the sustaining enthusiasm of Charles Astley, interest in pottery fell away. Warwick's population of 6,000 could not sustain the classes. But it was still a remarkable venture if we consider that a large institution such as the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology did not have a course in pottery until 1931.

Astley's painting *Rose of Evening* in the Queensland Art Gallery was his last claim for recognition from the capital. In contrast to the implied optimism of the 'bloom' of the title, this was essentially the close of his career. Although this has not been discussed in this article, Astley constantly sought to establish his credibility in the Department of Public Instruction and was constantly blocked, so that Astley's profile is inseparable from his standing in Warwick, but not in a wider field. His painting and his woodcarving are creditable achievements, but his promotion of pottery and china painting, which was seeded, bloomed and died in less than a decade, is remarkable.

Glenn R. Cooke is Research Curator, Queensland Heritage at the Queensland Art Gallery.

Notes

1 This is problematic. The Goldsmiths' College was founded only in 1891 with Frank Marriott the founding principal by which time Charles Astley was supposed to be in Australia. It is possible that there was an initial art department within the Technical and Recreational Institute which

preceded it and that Frank Marriott was involved with the earlier institution as well. (Letter from Peter Cresswell, Dean Faculty of Arts, Goldsmiths' College, University of London, 26/7/1989).

It is possible that Astley studied *antique and life drawing* (mentioned when *Rose of Evening* was presented to the Queensland Art Gallery in 1926 (*Daily Telegraph* 28/8/1926) under Frank Marriott when he returned to England in 1908, as Marriott taught at the College until 1925. This may have been on an informal basis as Astley is not mentioned in College records.

2 *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 20/9/1902.

3 *The Queenslander*, 13/10/1906 p. 20.

4 'Art section second notice', *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 10/11/1903.

5 *Brisbane Courier*, 5/11/1904, p. 5.

6 Art section opened by Mr V.C. Redwood, *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 9/11/1905, p. 3.

7 'The Austral fourth festival the exhibits' *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 6/11/1906, p. 3.

8 Mr J.S. Hay was noted as his 'successor' in a review of 'The Austral the fifth festival opened yesterday' *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 5/11/1907, p.8.

9 R. Godfrey Rivers awarded Astley first prizes for landscape painting in oils and watercolour from nature at the Toowoomba show *The Queenslander*, 12/8/1905.

10 'Art in Toowoomba to teachers of drawing etc.' *Queensland Educational Journal*, 1 July 1905, p. 72. He gave a talk to the Darling Downs Teachers Association which was later published in the *Queensland Educational Journal*.

11 Studies from life, still life, casts, design and brushwork Queensland State Archives, EDUA/16450 Toowoomba Technical College papers, 6/5/1905.

12 Queensland State Archives, EDU/A, Warwick Technical College, Teachers employed in 1905.

13 Bob Dansie, 'Toowoomba's yesterdays', *The Chronicle*, Toowoomba, 22/4/1992.

14 *Rose of evening gift for Art Gallery*, *The Queenslander*, 11/9/1926, p. 11.

15 Freehand & arm drawing, Model drawing, light and shade, geometrical drawing, perspective, black & white, painting and modelling, 3/8/1908. Miss Robinson visiting from Toowoomba – to teach carving.

16 Queensland State Archives, EDU A/16492, notice dated 9/12/1909.

17 Queensland State Archives, EDU A/16492, letter to Mrs A.C. Crichton, Warwick from the Department of Education, Brisbane 29/3/1977.

18 Letter to Mrs A. C. Crichton, Warwick from the Department of Education, Brisbane 29/3/1977.

19 He later sat for Design Stage III and Modelling Stage III in 1919.

20 Queensland State Archives, EDU A/ 16497, letter dated 5/12/1910.

21 Queensland State Archives, EDU A/16497, 'Annual Inspection of the Warwick Technical College', 10-12/1917.

22 *The A. & B. Journal of Queensland* 10/8/1929 p.44. The building was constructed about 1913.

23 Queensland State Archives, letter 7/11/1917.

24 *Warwick Examiner*, Jan. 1918. Education Dept, Press Cutting Book.

25 Queensland State Archives, EDU A/16492, letter from Robert C. Hamilton, Acting Principal 15/7/1914.

26 It was noted at the display at Warwick Technical College in 1921 that 'For the past three years Mr Astley and his students have been experimenting.' 'Art Pottery exhibition, a creditable display, Technical College enters prize' *Warwick Daily News*, 26/7/1921, p. 2.

27 Queensland State Archives, 20/12/1920 Urgent request for clay, three classes operating.

28 Crimson, dark green, light blue, and white glazes were ordered from James Campbell & Sons, Albion while clay was ordered from Stone's Pottery, Queensland State Archives, 28/3/19.

29 Queensland State Archives EDU A/ Campbell's sent 'a parcel of glazed earthenware articles' to Astley 1/9/1919.

30 Queensland State Archives, EDU A/ Bill from James Campbell & Sons dated 16/4/1920.

31 Queensland State Archives, EDU A/ letter 23/2/1920.

32 Queensland State Archives, 16/5/1921 Letter from Astley reserving a space 15 x 15 ft for pottery and china painting exhibits at the Exhibition.

33 Queensland State Archives, Department of Public Instruction memo, 30/6/1921.

34 'Art Pottery exhibition, a creditable display, Technical College enters

- prize' *Warwick Daily News*, 26/7/1921, p. 2.
- 35 Sheldon Papers, John Oxley Library, letter dated 28/7/1921.
- 36 Queensland State Archives, Warwick Technical College, letter 27/8/23.
- 37 Queensland State Archives, DPI letter 22/12/1921.
- 38 Queensland State Archives, letter to Mr Morris from C.E. Astley, 28/7/1922 and *Warwick Daily News* 15/2/1923.
- 39 *ibid.* Potters will know that *sang-de-loaif* and *rouge flambe* are both names for a reduced copper glaze. The technique for producing this glaze is very much more complicated than Astley would have been able to achieve in his kilns. Here it simply means a bright red glaze.
- 40 Vol. 5, no. 3, December 1923, p. 19.
- 41 Queensland State Archives, Inspection of Warwick Technical College, 5-9/11/1923, A/16500.
- 42 Telephone conversation with Margaret Corrigan née Kinder, 28/4/1987.
- 43 Interview with Mrs E.W. Whitehouse née Kinder, 21/4/1987.
- 44 Queensland State Archives, Warwick Technical College files, letter 23/6/24. Further he ordered a large supply of glazes from Wegner's, England for the 1925 school year: 50 lb Red mulberry and Plum violet

- and 25 lb Electric blue, Sage green, Cobalt, Jade green, Bronze brown, Crimson and Orange.
- 45 *The Telegraph*, 7/8/1923. Delft is tin glazed earthenware, the production at Warwick was lead glazed earthenware.
- 46 *The Queenslander*, 25/8/1923, p. 17 and *Warwick Daily News*, 15/2/1923.
- 47 Queensland State Archives A/16500, Inspection of Warwick Technical College, 5-9/11/1923.
- 48 *The Condaminian*, Dec 1924, p. 7.
- 49 Queensland State Archives, letter 19/4/1924. Astley requested transfer from Warwick after 16 years because of ill health. He was transferred to Toowoomba temporarily.
- 50 *The Queenslander*, 21/4/1927, p. 33.
- 51 'Fine piece of work'. *The Condaminian*, Warwick, Vol. 8, no. 1, July, 1927, p. 10.
- 52 Interview with Mrs Alma Petrie, Brisbane, 13/12/1988. She remained at Warwick Technical College for ten years and returned to the Central Technical College to take over from L. J. Harvey who had retired.

HALLSTAND: Flanders Field

Astley's most significant carving is a *Hallstand* which was made for the Callow family of Warwick in the early 1920s. The use of mirror carving in the floral details places the hallstand within the influence of Edith Robinson's teaching of wood carving at Toowoomba Technical College. As Astley's artistic practice was based on 19th century English models, he would have been familiar with the tradition in art of the language of flowers. Using a poppy as a symbol of sleep or death has been common since Classical times and was re-emphasised during the historicising revivals of the Victorian era. The poppy motif may be regarded simply as a decorative device, but as it has been reiterated in the eleven carved panels of the hallstand it is most likely a symbolic reference to its time. The mass bereavement created by the impact of World War I required an appropriate iconography and the poppy became the emblem used to express the sense of personal and communal loss.

The *Hallstand* came to be known by the Callow family as 'Flanders Field', after the famous poem written by a young British doctor, John McCrae, in 1915. McCrae used the motif of the red poppies which grew in the wastes of 'no-man's land', on the battlefields of Belgium and France, as a symbol for the thousands of men who had died fighting for Britain.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between crosses, row on row,
That mark our place ...
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, through poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

In the course of the Great War, 59,342 Australian servicemen, aged between 18 and 45 years, died and 166,819 were injured. Although Astley was not directly linked to the war because of his age and health, he was closely involved with the communities that filled the ranks of Queensland's 25th Battalion. This battalion fought in Egypt, Palestine, France and Gallipoli. Of the 5,000 men that filled the ranks of the 25th Battalion, 1,000 were killed and 2,500 injured, while at the battle of Pozieres on the Somme only one officer and 29 men survived. Warwick, with a population of only 6,000, shared this loss. The bodies of the dead were never

returned to their families as they were buried where they fell on the battlefields of Europe and the Middle East. In place of their graves, war memorials carved with the names of the dead were erected in many towns.¹

This connection is emphasised when we consider that Stanthorpe, an adjoining town, was a focus for soldier-settler farms in the immediate post-war years. Many of the holdings were named after the important battlefields in France and one survives in the settlement of Amiens, 15 km outside the town. In recent years a field outside Stanthorpe has been sown with Flanders poppies which, in Australia, bloom at Armistice Day. The underlying impact of Astley's social environment clearly affected his choice of motif when he produced the *Hallstand*. By interpreting 'Flanders Field' as a private memorial, Astley's work transcends its intended function as an example of Arts and Crafts furniture and becomes a significant means of exploring the social and artistic context of its period.

Statistics from Elizabeth O'Neal, 'Charles Astley: Hall stand: Flanders Field' Artwork of the month, QAG, January, 1996



16. Charles Astley (Australia 1869-1929), *Hall-stand: Flanders Field* c. 1920. Cedar panels, carved and set in maple frames with oval mirror, 205 x 128.5 x 37 cm. Queensland Art Gallery, purchased 1990. Andrew and Lillian Pedersen Trust Acc. 1990.475



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Coming to the surface – lost arts and popular crafts

JOHN McPHEE

Among the many items made of cedar are chip-carvings and frames, shaped or carved by amateur craftworkers from scrap timber or cigar boxes

While curating *Red cedar in Australia*, an exhibition at the Museum of Sydney, I came across a whole category of craftwork, most often ignored by historians and curators, because these objects are unassuming and belong more to a folk art than fine art tradition. By including several of these objects in the exhibition I hope to make visitors, curators and cultural historians aware of a range of the more humble works of art that are part of the history and development of Australian decorative arts.

Many of these overlooked objects are made from scraps of wood, particularly cedar, and recycled cigar boxes. While most collectors know that the painters of the Heidelberg School frequently made use of cigar box panels to paint on, few have noticed how often 19th century craftworkers made use of cigar boxes as a source of material for their work. Numerous objects were made using cigar boxes or the wood from them, and some of them are remarkable examples of Australian popular art. Of these, the so-called puzzle or crown-of-thorns work objects are among the most extraordinary.

Puzzle frames appear in the collections of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, and the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, has two similar objects, a model of a church, reputedly the church at the Port Arthur penal settlement, and a 'rattle'. Both of these came from the Beattie Collection and had been displayed in J.W. Beattie's private museum of convict memorabilia before the Museum acquired them in the 1920s. They are therefore closely associated with convictism and prison crafts. However, there is no evidence to support the common assumption that this type of work was exclusively the province of prisoners. Others in the community had sufficient time on their hands to make such detailed objects.

Time-consuming crafts, like scrimshaw, have often been associated with sailors and whalers, as well as prisoners. French seamen and convicts of the 18th and 19th century were well known for the intricate models they carved from whalebone, as well as leftover bones from meals, and scraps of timber. They made working models of the guillotine, and model ships. A model ship supported on a sea made up of puzzle pieces is in a French museum.

Two more recently discovered examples suggest that non-institutionalised 19th-century amateur craftworkers made puzzle frames. One of these, from Portland, Victoria, contains a cabinet photograph of about 1890 showing a recently married couple in their wedding dress. This frame has been made from intricately cut pieces of cedar – perhaps from a cigar box or similar packing case. It is simply finished with a coating of varnish.

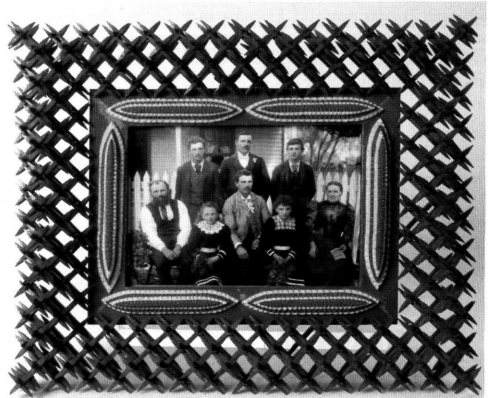


Plate 1. J.A. Dohnt, Shepparton, Victoria, Frame, 1898. Cedar, painted wood, pine, glass, 37.5 x 46.0 x 8.5 cm, photograph of the Dohnt family taken in 1902. Private collection.

The other frame (plate 1) is much more elaborate and more is known about it. Made in 1898, it is an unusual combination of a chip-carved frame painted in Indian red and white, surrounded by a varnished puzzle frame. It frames a family portrait photograph of the Dohnt family of Shepparton, Victoria, taken in 1902. On the far left of the group is J.A. Dohnt, the maker of the frame, who has dutifully, but not accurately, recorded the number of pieces that make-up the frame on its reverse as, '368 single pieces, 100 double, 440 treble, 972 total'.

The branded marks from cigar boxes can be distinguished on several pieces in this puzzle frame. However, while confirming the source of the wood used, all are so fragmentary that it is impossible to identify the brand of cigar they once contained. The timber cannot be identified specifically as Australian red cedar, but as Australia produced and boxed many cigars in the 19th century, it may be that these frames are made of Australian cedar.

While puzzle-work frames appear to be rare survivors, there are many more examples of chip-carving, sometimes known as diaper work, and, in America, as 'tramp art' objects. The American term reputedly indicates that tramps and itinerant workers practised this craft, although the size of some pieces suggests that this definition is inappropriate. The inner frame of

Mr Dohnt's piece is a good example of this work in which layers of wood with chip-carved edges are pieced together to create an elaborate effect. Sometimes alternating layers of pine and cedar endow the work with the additional effect of simple colour contrast. The painting of this example adds a greater complexity to the work. However, most chip-carved objects are rather simple, and sometimes crude, in execution. Only occasionally, as in this example, are they indicative of the great skill that an amateur might attain.

Like most craft activities of the 19th century, the skill to make puzzle-work objects was probably handed down within families. This suggests a tradition the origins of which I have been unable to determine, although there is some evidence to suggest that the skill is more frequently associated with craftworkers with a middle European background. It also implies that as a popular craft there must be explanations and patterns published in one of the numerous 19th-century hobby and craft magazines and journals that offered the enthusiast help and encouragement. So far no such explanations or guides have come to light. It may in fact relate to other more utilitarian arts like boatbuilding or engineering model making.

Eclipse Sheet of Chip Carving Designs.

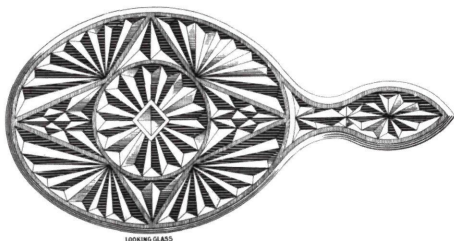


Plate 2. Design from *The Eclipse Book of Chip Carving Designs*, England, about 1910. Courtesy of Historic Houses Trust of NSW Research Library.



Plate 3. Design from Set of Designs for Wood Carving, *Sheffield and Munich*, about 1890. Courtesy of Historic Houses Trust of NSW Research Library.

There are numerous published 'how to' guides and patterns for a seemingly endless variety of objects that can be decorated with chip-carving. Most date from the last years of the 19th or the first of the 20th century. Examples published in England and Germany include patterns for photo frames, dressing table sets, including mirror backs and handkerchief boxes, desk sets, clock fronts, candlesticks and even cupboard doors and footstools. Most of these published patterns are examples of full-blown Victorian taste (plate 2), but some contain examples in the fashionable Art Nouveau style (plate 3).

Two boxes both dating from about 1900, are excellent examples showing different approaches to chip carving. One is a chip-carved cigar box (plate 4). Its brand inside the lid, *The Monarch*, is easily visible. The chip-carving obviously derives from some of the many simple patterns published in popular guides to the craft. They rely on simple repeat motifs and the craftworker has decorated each surface with a different example. The other box has been especially made from Australian red cedar and decorated with a more subtly integrated design featuring a star (plate 5). This box suggests that the craftworker was probably more skilled in carpentry, carving and design.

Plate 4. New South Wales, Box, about 1900. Cedar (?) cigar box, 11.0 x 13.5 x 13.5 cm. Private collection.



Plate 5. Australia, Box, about 1900. Cedar, 7.5 x 20.0 x 16.0 cm. Private collection.





Plate 6.
T. Porschoest,
Australia, Frame,
about 1900. Cedar,
53.4 x 42.8 cm.
Private collection.



Plate 7. Australia, Group of shell decorated objects, late 19th & mid 20th century. Cedar, pine, various shells, *ht of largest frame 32.5 cm.* Private collection.

Many of these chip-carved objects are the result of the so-called *sloyd* system. 'Sloyd' poorly translates from the Swedish as 'hand education'. The *sloyd* system of teaching traditional handicrafts, especially woodcarving, was developed by Uno Cygnaeus (1810-1888). The aim was to revive rural folk crafts that could be practised by people restricted to indoor work during the long northern winters, and provide a way of supplementing meagre and irregular incomes from farming.

In 1874 a private *sloyd* school was opened at Naas, near Göteborg, specialising in teacher training and its summer schools were popular with British teachers eager to follow the arts and crafts ideals of William Morris. By 1891 the British *Sloyd* Association had been established with the aim of encouraging the teaching of handiwork in schools. The Scandinavian origins of the movement may account for the strong similarities the chip-carved patterns frequently have with Viking carved decoration, although lace patterns are said to have inspired similar French examples.

In Australia, the *sloyd* method grew in popularity in the late 19th century and was firmly entrenched in school curricula by the early 20th century. It was especially popular as a way of developing accuracy and skill in woodwork and was commonly practised in schools and hobby classes. While the original *sloyd* designs were decorated with traditional designs cut with the aid of a *sloyd* knife, in Australia many of the exercises degenerated into the ubiquitous and unimaginative footstool with turned legs or octagonal copper poker, the making of which scarred many Australian schoolboys. Today these set exercises regularly turn-up in second hand shops.

A large frame (plate 6) offers a more sophisticated example of chip-carving. Signed by the otherwise unknown T. Porschoest, it is an example of late 19th or early 20th century craftwork at its best. The thick slab of Australian red cedar has been chip-carved in circles and triangles, filled with diaper-cut patterns, contrasting with areas that have been very finely punched to produce a smooth, stippled surface. The overall effect reflects late 19th-century taste for elaborately decorated surfaces. However, it exhibits an awareness of the refined Japonism of the Aesthetic Movement, a style not commonly found in Australian

decorative arts. The frame is a fine example of both the maker's unusual awareness of a sophisticated late 19th century fashion and the more common eclectic taste that combines a mixture of styles and typifies the decorative arts of the period.

Craftworkers used pieces of wood and recycled cigar boxes as the base for the popular hobby of decorating utilitarian objects with shells (plate 7). Examples of shell-work frequently turn-up in junk and 'antique' shops, some more skilled than others. All exemplify the popular enthusiasm, which reached its peak in the late 19th century, for collecting and decorating objects with natural found materials. Like scrimshaw, and possibly puzzle-frame making, sailors often made shell work as a pastime or for sale to supplement their low incomes. Professionals produced more elaborate shell pictures for sale as souvenirs and curiosities. The exotic shells used to make these often help to identify their origin. Like chip-carving, many 19th-century hobbyist publications contain suggestions and descriptions for and about shell-work.

These modest examples of Australian craft, the labour of hobbyists and amateurs, are part of a rich, but still little known tradition. Many make use of natural and recycled materials, in particular cigar boxes and scraps of wood and transform them into useful and decorative objects. While we concentrate on collecting and preserving craft from a studio and fine art tradition, we should not forget a more humble, but no less interesting range of objects that deserve a place in the history of Australian art.

Red Cedar in Australia is on display from 8 May – 15 August 2004 at the Museum of Sydney, Bridge Street, Sydney.

John McPhee has been Curator of Art at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Senior Curator at the National Gallery of Australia, Deputy Director at the National Gallery of Victoria, exhibition critic at the *Sydney Morning Herald* and now writes a collecting column for *The Bullain*. As well as many articles, he has written books on John Glover and Australian decorative arts. ■

Neil Douglas and the Murrumbreena Pottery

MARVIN HURNALL

The tradition of studio pottery in Australia changed drastically in 1944. 'Open Country', the Murrumbreena home of Merric and Doris Boyd, their five children and assorted artists and friends, had become the teaching ground for a new generation of ceramicists.

John Perceval, then living with the Boyds, Arthur Boyd and Peter Herbst, a good friend and philosophy student at the University of Melbourne, decided to become partners in a

pottery. As Perceval and Boyd needed time to pursue their painting and Herbst his study, a three-way partnership in a tradition that two of them knew a little about, was ideal.

Hatton Beck had married Lucy Boyd, Arthur's eldest sister, and the two of them had created a pottery works out of the dilapidated butcher's shop opposite the Murrumbreena station. With Beck's knowledge, they were able to make a kiln from the salvaged parts of Merric's kiln, which had burnt down. Arthur Boyd, Perceval and Herbst bought this business from the Becks with the hope of producing utilitarian ware, complying with wartime decrees, and to experiment with the ceramic medium.

Earthenware glazes offered a bright, transparent, vibrant and solid colour that allowed the lyrical and whimsical narrative of the 'Arthur Merric Boyd' (AMB) studio potters to come through. As Boyd, Perceval and Herbst continued to use the studio as a place to create and not just manufacture, other artists began working there on a casual basis. Friends, neighbours and fellow artists such as Dorothy Meyer, Carl Cooper, Neil Douglas, Charles Blackman, Albert Tucker, David and Hermia Boyd, Tom Sanders, Margot Knox, Ethel Whiteside (née Cousts) and John (Richard) Howley.

When Peter Herbst left for Oxford in 1950, his share in the works was taken over by Neil Douglas, whose depictions of native flora and fauna were to heavily influence the other artists in the studio. Douglas' lyrical works of forests, ferny groves, lyrebirds and kangaroos contrasted heavily against the Brueghel-like work done by Boyd and Perceval at the time. This new influence flowed through into the works of all at the studio, presenting a more Australian theme. The combination



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), two coffee pots, each painted with lyrebirds and ferns, signed, h 24 and 18 cm



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), deep bowl titled 'Early Morning Mt Moliaque, the Mallee, Australia', signed, h 7 d 25 cm



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), deep bowl painted with lyrebirds in a ferny dell, signed and dated 1947, h 10 d 32 cm



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), large platter painted with kangaroos and grass trees, signed and dated, d 35 cm



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), platter with three kangaroo peeping out of a bush bower, signed and dated, d 20 cm



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), deep bowl painted with kangaroos and gum leaves and flowers, signed and dated 1950, h 8 d 38 cm



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), deep bowl painted with two lyrebirds in a rainforest clearing, signed, d 33 cm



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), pair of beakers painted with kangaroos in landscapes, signed h 11 d 9 cm

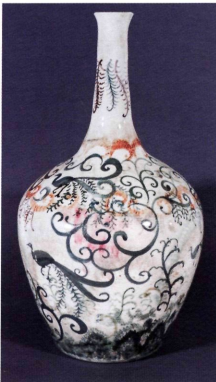
of a clear, bold palette in a medium that was still to be fully explored meant that the AMB Studio was not only at the vanguard then, but is as fresh and as vibrant today.

The Arthur Merric Boyd Studio, and particularly the painted and ceramic works of Neil Douglas, have gone largely unrecognised for their great artistic merit, which has left a large

hole in the understanding of Australian artistic and cultural heritage. This dearth in our knowledge was recognised by the National Gallery of Victoria in 1982-83, when it exhibited *The Painter as Potter, Decorated ceramics of the Murrumbidgee circle*. This exhibition on the Arthur Merric Boyd Studio focused on the ceramic works of the now famous Arthur Boyd, John Perceval, and the lesser known Neil Douglas, among others.

Since 1983, little has been displayed of the studio's work. Horsham Regional Art Gallery in August 1997 held an important retrospective of Neil Douglas' works and selections of this were later shown at Hamilton and Sale. Hurnall's in June 1998 held a special Sale and Exhibition titled *The Murrumbidgee Story and Beyond*, highlighting the ceramic works of many of the AMB potters. An exhibition of selected pottery items and paintings was held at Heide Museum of Modern Art from July to October 2003.

Neil Douglas died at Nhill, Victoria on 25 October 2003. He was the last survivor of the dynamic ceramics and painting years at Murrumbidgee (AMB) Potteries alongside Arthur Boyd and John Perceval. He was also the last surviving artist associated with Heide in the 1940s, home of John and Sunday Reid. In 1975 he received an MBE for his services to both the Arts and his well-documented achievements for conservation.



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), wine carafe painted with lyrebirds in a rainforest, signed and dated, h 33 d 18 cm



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), covered biscuit barrel, titled 'In the scrub', painted with kangaroos and grass trees, signed, h 31 d 24 cm



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), covered jar painted with boney-eaters and native flora, signed, h 17 d 15 cm



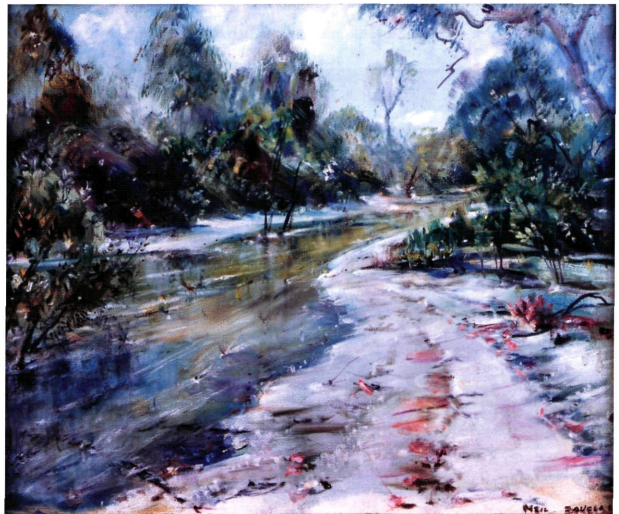
Neil Douglas (1911-2003), vase painted with kangaroos and emus in the bush.



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), 'Milk Maids and Chocolate Flowers', oil on board, 37.5 x 43 cm

Hurnall's Decorative Arts Gallery's **Autumn 2004 Sale and Exhibition** includes a special tribute to 'Murrumbidgee Potteries', acknowledging the work produced by the Arthur Merric Boyd Studio. Particular focus is on Neil Douglas' painted ceramics, depicting seasonal Australian landscapes, including many examples of our unique flora and fauna. The exhibition will include 13 paintings by Neil Douglas from the private collections of his partner Abbie Heathcote and stepdaughter Bridget.

Leanne Willis, Director of the Shepparton Art Gallery, will open the exhibition at Hurnall's Antiques & Decorative Arts, 691 High Street, East Prahran, Vic. 3181, at 6.30 pm on Friday 26 March 2004. Enquiries Marvin Hurnall 03 9510 3754.



Neil Douglas (1911-2003), 'The Silver Light Sand, Lake Hindmarsh, The Mallee', oil on board, 45 x 55 cm

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Cleaning and waxing furniture

CHRISTIAN DA SILVA

Cleaning

Repeat after me, 'Do not over-clean!'

One of the most common mistakes we see is cleaning to the point of devaluation. Most collectors, and certainly all museums, would reject a piece with a new finish. 'Cleaning' does not mean, 'remove century-old patina and make it look new'. Always keep in mind that it is better to remove less than to strip off patina. Ensure that you work in small sections at a time to avoid getting carried away. You can always take off a little bit more, but you can never put it back.

Firstly, remove all loose dust from the piece. This includes carving and small details. A soft-bristle toothbrush or paintbrush works wonders in tight, small places.

If you require a light clean only, get a barely damp cloth with a small amount of dishwashing liquid. It is important not to have the cloth too wet, as excess moisture can damage the existing finish. Work in small areas with the grain and dry the damp area as you go with a soft cloth. Use this method on a warm and sunny day to hasten the drying process.

You may find that this method does not achieve the desired result. An alternative is a commercial cleaner. Numerous furniture-cleaning products are on the market now, so make an informed choice. Always select a cleaner with no oil content. Products with high oil content produce apparently fabulous results, but can cause problems later. Initially, the oil in these products seeps into surface scratches and dents and makes them look like they have disappeared. However, the oil is drawn through the polish and stains the timber underneath. The oil stains are difficult to remove without damaging the existing finish.

If you cannot find a product that meets this requirement, ask your restorer or conservator what they use. Most furniture specialists have a variety of their own secret recipes for use on specific finishes and timbers.

Never apply any cleaning solution directly to the piece of furniture. Always apply to a soft cloth, which enables better control. Work in small sections along the grain and dry each section with a clean, soft cloth. Each section must be worked evenly to avoid a patchy result.

After cleaning your piece by either method, you may find the treated areas appear a little dull. Restore the shine with a good paste wax.

Waxing

Antique furniture requires a good wax at least once a year. Working surfaces such as dining tables need a wax every six months or so. Wax provides a protective coating and can be rubbed to a soft, attractive sheen.

Many commercial waxes are available: clear, coloured, hard, soft...you name it. The best wax to use is one of a harder consistency that contains carnauba wax. It is more difficult to apply, but produces the best results. Expect aching muscles the following day!

Use a cloth for application. For carved or detailed areas, use a stiff brush or the trusty toothbrush. Apply in a tight, circular motion, then finish in a straight line following the grain. Work one panel at a time.



Clockwise from top left: original condition, washed method, cleaning solution, and cleaning solution followed by a good wax.

Once the application is complete, leave it overnight to harden, then buff with a soft, lint-free cloth.

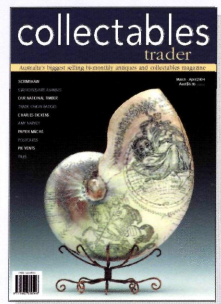
Don't bite off more than you can chew! If you are a novice, try cleaning a small item first and always in an inconspicuous spot. If you are still unsure or if the piece is too large to handle, contact your restorer or conservator for advice.

Christian Da Silva of Da Silva Restorations specialises in Australian Colonial furniture and traditional upholstery. Da Silva Restorations can be found at 30 Sydenham Road, Brookvale NSW, telephone 02 9905 4404.

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The Sydney Cove Map

BEV ATKINSON

The Sydney Cove Map in First Fleet Park shows the layout of the first European settlement in Australia after its first 20 years

There were clues to the appearance of Old Sydney, but no researched layout of it, until a pencil sketch was prepared by students of architecture under the direction of Bob Irving, architect and historian. Their aim was to reconstruct the ground plan of the Sydney Cove convict settlement as it was in 1800, using paintings and surveys of the time. Most of the ground around Circular Quay has seen rebuilding many times over, and important archaeological excavations had yet to be started.

The NSW Government initiated a special project, an artwork to mark the original entry of the Tank Stream into Sydney Cove at a point in First Fleet Park, Circular Quay for the Bicentenary. Funded by Caltex, and realised by the architects Conybeare Morrison and Partners, the Sydney Cove Map was opened in 1988. Since the sad closure of Old Sydney Town near Gosford, it remains as the only public artwork showing the layout of the convict settlement.

An important survey had been carried out in 1807, and this data helped determine a cut-off date of 1808 for the Sydney Cove map. Before then, over the first 20 years, many artists had captured the new colony for the people back home. Bob Irving supplied historical background and guidance through the Royal Australian Historical Society.

The Map was translated into terrazzo and brass, in the form of a disc with a stone seat around it at the same level. George Proudman's NSW Government stonemasons prepared the Kent Street sandstone for the seating sections. Corrosion-resistant bronze collar pieces framing the disc of the map were lished and engraved with quotations from Governor Phillip and John White, Surgeon, as well as the names of the contributing early artists and surveyors.

Set on concrete piers, the base slab designed by Ove Arup engineers is heavily reinforced to avoid distortion of its decorative surface. It was cast and finished in Alexandria, by Terazzo & Co.'s Remo Raffin, using brass elements made by David St Julian.

The terrazzo surface is about 18 mm thick, created by pouring different coloured mixes of cement, pigment and aggregate into spaces formed by brass and polystyrene formwork. White marble chips, the 'rocks', were set in first, before brass detail and formwork. Some elements were made separately, some were added later to the wet terrazzo. Brass outlined each building, which was coloured according to its roof type as seen in paintings.

Not all techniques were traditional, and some developed during the building process. Many secret skills and techniques had died with the artisans who achieved the floors in the Mitchell Library foyer, and in St Mary's Crypt. They had created





works now world renowned but little recognised by Australians. There is a great need for apprenticeship in the field of fine terrazzo, lest it finally be lost as an art in Australia.

After grinding and polishing, lettering was sandblasted into the surface, along with shadows defining roof shapes, and the sails of the ships in the Cove. Pigmented epoxy filling was then ground off and polished, leaving the completed surface jewel-like, its brass gleaming, ready for a protective coating.



The Governor of NSW, Sir James Rowland, officially opened the map on 15 May 1988, amid considerable celebration. Its ownership passed with First Fleet Park from Sydney City Council to the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority.

The public enjoyed the Sydney Cove Map from the first day. It quickly became a target for heritage-focused tour groups and school history lessons. It is usual to see dozens of uniformed schoolchildren standing up on the stone seats, exploring the map, while another group waits its turn. Postcards of the map quickly sold out, yet so far, nothing has replaced them. Marks from skateboards, birds and chewing gum are dealt with regularly. A spotlight highlights the surface at night.

Terrazzo comprises cement, pigment and aggregate; blue pigment can quickly fade. To minimise this potential problem, blue French glass was added to the sea as aggregate, giving a richness and transparency. In the exposed, polluted conditions however, an alkali-silica reaction arose between the glass and the cement. The sea area consequently deteriorated. In 1996, this zone was repaired on site, involving replacement of the glass with grey marble aggregate by the original construction team.

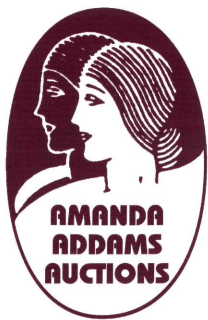
This outdoor demonstration of intricate terrazzo skills proved a popular public entertainment. Some of the strongest interest came from members of the Women's Pioneer Society of Australasia, which has taken a leading role in encouraging maintenance and promotion of the map ever since. Currently it is joining with the SHFA in providing signage; strollers around the Quay's promenade can easily miss the Map.

In 2001, the State Library of NSW organised a formal photograph of the Map's surface, and the Library now holds the basic construction drawings and data. Eco restoration Pty Ltd is undertaking the ongoing maintenance program.

With the main constant at Circular Quay being change, it can only be hoped that the Sydney Cove Map will remain in the area for as long, and in at least as good a condition, as the ancient terrazzo floors of Pompeii.

Bev Atkinson has a Bachelor of Architecture. ■





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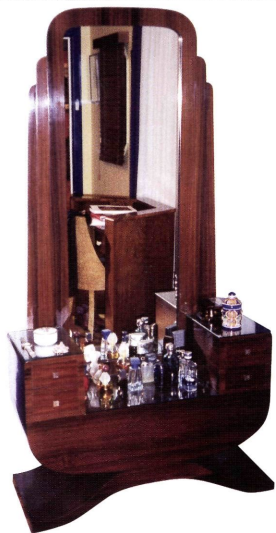
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A Master Craftsman: Lewis John Godfrey

HELEN FOOTE

The name of Lewis John Godfrey is all but lost today, although he was highly regarded for the beauty, the variety and the remarkable quality of his carving in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Decorative carvers have historically held a unique position among craft workers, and at times their extraordinary mastery of the intricate shaping of their material, be it wood or stone, elevated their work to an art form.

Work of this calibre should not be lost, for it illustrates what incredible skill and infinite patience can achieve, and may act as an inspiration for future generations. The Geelong Gallery has decided to hold an exhibition of Godfrey's carvings, *The Hand and the Chisel*.

Godfrey was born in Chelsea, London in 1834. His father Thomas Godfrey was a carver and silver chaser and his mother an embroiderer. He served his apprenticeship as a woodcarver in London, then at the age of 18 came to Victoria for the first time; the exact duration of his stay on this occasion, before his return to England, is unknown. In 1857 he married Emma Johnson at St Luke's Church, Chelsea.

At the 1862 International Exhibition, London, he entered a carved pear wood clock frame, that he brought to Australia in 1863. After a short time he shifted to Dunedin, NZ and established himself there, working in both stone and wood. He exhibited a pigeon carving at the Intercolonial Exhibition, Melbourne, in 1866-67. After more than 20 years he returned to England briefly, then came south again and settled in Melbourne. A few years after his arrival he became the Instructor of Woodcarving at the Working Men's College (now

RMIT), and held that position for 17 years. He died in 1919.

Godfrey's major architectural stone carving is in Dunedin. Until he worked on the Dunedin Post Office (later the Stock Exchange, now demolished) not long after his arrival, it is not known if he had ever worked in stone. Thereafter he mastered the art of stone carving, and fine examples of his work can be found on commercial, ecclesiastical and private buildings.

Godfrey's rich decorative carving can be seen on the Presbyterian First Church, and on St Joseph's Cathedral, Dunedin, where it enhances both the inside and the outside of each building. His representation of fruit, flowers, ferns and foliage in the mouldings, the columns and friezes reflect nature itself, with small creatures, in particular birds, hidden among the leaves. The depth and variety of the carving and the sense of movement he achieves is remarkable.

His love of birds is evident on the pulpit of First Church, where small birds with outstretched wings have been carved at the base of the small arches, and below the bible stand, a dove holds an olive branch. The capitals on either side of the altar feature birds, one feeding its young, representing life, and the other about to kill a butterfly, representing death. Similar motifs can be found on the porch columns of St Joseph's Cathedral, which has probably the greatest volume of Godfrey's decorative carving. By the time he was working on St Joseph's, his sons were assisting him.

In the commercial area, Godfrey carved the masks, garlands and floral reliefs on the façade of the Grand Hotel, Dunedin. He worked concurrently on the Bank of New Zealand, and one of the carved



delights is a roundel over the main entrance depicting the native kiwi among native flora. In the private area he carved both stone and wood, although the smaller wooden pieces described in contemporary newspapers are now missing.

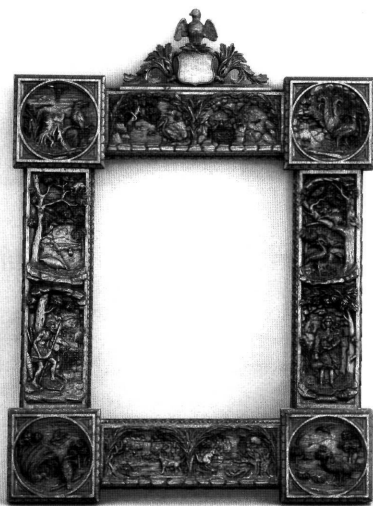
Godfrey's portable woodcarvings vary in style across the full spectrum, from traditional to rustic. Two examples of his carved dead game birds, an image so prevalent in the 19th century, have been found, and these along with his 'British Spring' and 'British Summer', are remarkable renderings of nature studies.

Godfrey advocated using nature as the ideal model to work from, but as a means to an end, pictorial sources had their place. His carved panel, 'The Holy Family', which is derived from a painting of the same name by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Godfrey's working method was first to draw, then to work the whole sculptured piece from a single block of wood. Many tools were needed to carve not only the surface, but to undercut behind the individual sections to gain a sense of depth.

Not long after he settled in Melbourne, Godfrey was commissioned to carve a frame for an illuminated address to be presented to the pioneer settler, John Lang Currie (1818-1898) to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Currie's settlement at Lara in Victoria's Western District. The oak frame is made up of cameo images of Aborigines, native birds and animals and on the bottom border, an image of the original buildings and farm activities around 1844 at Lara station. In other indigenous pieces, Godfrey moved the images forward or into the background, depending on what he wished to emphasise. Godfrey held a solo exhibition in Collins Street in 1893, exhibiting 'British Spring' and 'British Summer'.

Where then does Godfrey fit in as an artist-craftsman? Should he be called a carver, art worker, art carver or sculptor, all classifications that he gave himself at different times? Perhaps he can be seen as a bridge between the traditional English styles he was trained in and the Australian style.



Geelong Gallery will mount an exhibition *The Hand and the Chisel – the woodcarvings of Lewis John Godfrey*, from 17 April to 27 June 2004. A book about Godfrey and his work, *The Hand and the Chisel – the life and work of Lewis John Godfrey*, by Helen Foote will be published in April by Melbourne Publishing Group, RRP \$35.95.

Helen Foote is a great grand-daughter of Lewis Godfrey, and has devoted years of research to rediscovering his story and his works. ■

Letters to the Editors

DEAR SIRs,

'Brass Galleries on early Australian Sideboards' (*Australiana*, November 2003) was a fascinating discussion and survey of what appears to be all of the so far known 1800-1850 six- and eight-legged colonial sideboards, particularly the pre-1820 ones.

In looking at the illustrations, what was interesting was the remarkable similarity between the decoration shown on the Irish sideboard (plate 1) and that on the Australian sideboards attributed to the Irish convict cabinet maker Laurence Butler (plates 2 to 6). In considering the absence of brass galleries, might it be a distinct possibility – indeed more likely – that the 'screw holes' found on the Australian sideboard (plates 2 to 6) were dowel holes for a wooden splash board, very similar to that illustrated on the Irish sideboard in plate 1?

Michel B. Reynold

KEITH OKEY REPLIES:

The point raised, whether a wooden gallery was the cause for the repair on the Australian sideboard, is a valid point which I considered and thought unlikely due to lack of evidence.

The main points considered were:

1. The wooden gallery on the Irish mahogany sideboard is situated inside the narrow cross-banding and pine stringing, while the repair marks on the Australian sideboard are 1-1.5 cm from the edge and the cross-banding is 5.5 cm wide; it had been replaced

in part, but is considered original. The repairs were not consistent with a wooden gallery.

2. A wooden gallery would be fixed by means of a rebate or groove in the top of the sideboard, which could have been covered by wider cross-banding, but would leave a telltale groove seen at the back edge of the top. This was not present, and there was no evidence of repair or plugging. A centimetre of cross-banding was missing at the back of the left side so the undersurface of the top was visible, and no repair was seen.

3. The back of the top of the sideboard was without nail or screw holes, but these could have been removed by the same method mentioned in the text.

One can only surmise that perhaps the Scot working in the Australian-Irish workshop of Lawrence Butler may have fitted the brass gallery.¹ Including the Irish sideboard (plate 1) may have 'put the cat among the pigeons' with regard to the gallery, but the similarity of the inlay of the front legs of the Irish and the Australian sideboards leaves no doubt as to the Irish origin of the cabinetmaker.

While brass galleries were in demand from the larger workshops in the main cities, I should have mentioned that wooden galleries were more common on provincial or rural sideboards in the UK.

Keith Okey

¹ See J.B. Hawkins, 'Australian decorative arts in the Clyde Bank collection', *Australiana* May 2003 vol 25 no.2 p. 57.

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‘Only the best – Second best not being good enough’

ALAN PERRY

Former R&T cabinetmaker Alan Perry details the history of Ricketts & Thorp Pty Ltd, Furniture Manufacturers from 1912–1977, based in the southern Sydney suburb of Rockdale

The beginnings

In 1911, Gilbert S. Ricketts arrived from England with ten shillings in his pocket. He came from a family of ten from Yeovil, Somerset. His father owned a glove factory. Aged 27, Gilbert went to work at Beard Watson & Co (established in 1889 by Enoch Beard and James Henry Watson as a carpet warehouse, later, in 1900, becoming a cabinetmaking manufacturer at 27 Moorgate Street, Sydney). The foreman at Beard Watsons, George Thorp, was sympathetic to English migrants and offered Gilbert lodgings. Gilbert became friends with George's son Fred, who also worked at Beard Watson. Gilbert soon realised the opportunities available in the cabinetmaking business and set himself up in 1912 in a shed at the back of the Thorp home in Herbert Street, Rockdale; Fred Thorp joined him six months later.

Orders began to trickle in but the work of these two men was its own recommendation and more space and labour was needed to meet increasing demand. A small factory was built at Kimpton Street, Rockdale, near Banksia Railway Station. One of the first things the young partners made was a hand-cart for delivering their furniture orders. However, this soon gave way to a horse and cart driven by Gilbert's father-in-law, Mr R Gillard, who at that time had a dairy in Rockdale.

The business soon expanded and eventually took up the whole block bordered by the railway line, Princes Highway,

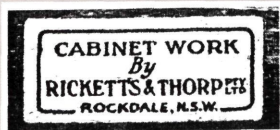


The factory in 1975

Kimpton Street and Rockdale Street. This extensive area included workshops, storage sheds and timber yards. In the early 1930s extensions were carried out to add 6,000 square feet. The late 1940s saw the addition of a second floor to part of the factory, adding a polishing shop and electric goods lift. In 1936 about 300 employees worked in the factory; in the 1950s about 180, down to about 80 in 1977.

By the 1950s the business included timber drying racks, timber and plywood store in Rockdale Street and timber racks and upholstery shop in Kimpton Street. Large stacks of Australian cedar, Queensland maple, Queensland walnut, silky oak, Tasmanian blackwood and imported English and Japanese oak, mahogany, beech, European walnut, etc. were air dried for several years before being kiln dried in a factory-built kiln.

The Kimpton Street (later Hattersley Street) entrances to the offices, factory and showroom with two loading docks filled the busy little street with trucks and parked cars. The second floor addition housed the main polishing shop with spray booths, drying oven, fuming cupboards for finishing the main domestic range and a number of production items. The basement or ground floor had the veneer preparation room with extensive veneer storage (out of the sunlight), of exquisite Australian and imported veneers such as Italian walnut, sycamore, English birch, butt maple, English oak, etc. This floor accommodated a machine shop, small cabinet shop, veneer guillotines, jointing, taping machines and vacuum tables used in producing shaped plywood components, showroom, small specialist polishing



Metal stamps were used to impress three numbers on furniture – the factory registration number (Regd. No 440), a four-digit job number (jobs were numbered 1000-9999) and a cabinetmaker's number (tradesmen were allowed to stamp their number on the piece of furniture)

FURNITURE LABELS AND STAMPS

Ricketts & Thorp furniture can be identified by a metal label 'Manufactured by Ricketts & Thorp' or a paper label 'Cabinetwork by Ricketts & Thorp Pty Ltd, Rockdale, NSW'

shop and fitting-up and despatch.

The main floor housed:

Main furniture cabinet shop with up to 30 cabinetmakers and a production assembly shop with many mechanical cramping aids and about 60 cabinetmakers

Chair making section with hundreds of chair patterns and templates hanging from the ceiling

Veneer pressing room with multi-daylight presses and radio frequency transmitter and associated presses

Wood machining section with detail saws, spindle moulders, sanding machines, multiple boring machines and dovetailers, etc.

Timber preparation area receiving rough cut timber from the store and machining to cutting list sizes

Main office and drawing office producing presentation drawings, factory drawings and cutting lists for all orders placed in the factory.

Ricketts & Thorp had some unique machinery that was rare in furniture factories around Sydney, some was imported from England and Germany, some was purpose built. The Surfacing Machine was a large rotating jointer blade set in a metal bench where the timber is fed across without excess pressure to plane/face of the board straight and true.

The Cabriole leg shaping machine produced cabriole legs from a cast iron original. The timber is held between two centres and a metal follower travelling horizontally to copy the shape and cut the timber to shape with a revolving cone cutter. Other machines were specially built sanding machines for chairwork; early design speed sander; radio frequency gluing transmitter and gluing presses; and automatic spindle moulders.

Gilbert Ricketts died in 1952. Gilbert had one daughter, Mary and five sons, Stan, Lawrence, John, Frank, who was working in the office, and Brian, who had joined the company as an apprentice at 17. Brian and Frank took over their father's interest. Frank, after retiring from the Army, became Company Secretary

and Brian, who had joined the Air Force and on his return worked in the drawing office, later became Factory Manager. Frank and Brian were with the company at its closing in 1977.

Fred Thorp had two daughters, Barbara and Yvonne, who were both Directors of the company. A son-in-law, Ross Cox, worked as a salesman with the firm for a few years. Fred passed away on 14 August 1968.

Fred Thorp's brother Jack had an automatic wood turning business a little further up Princes Highway in Banksia and was a regular visitor to Ricketts & Thorp. Jack engineered many ingenious wood turning lathes and finishing machines, turning out thousands of knobs, handles, balls and light fittings etc, in fact anything that is round and made out of timber. J.E. Thorp Woodturning made stamped wooden lottery balls to exact specifications for many years. The factory closed in the late 1980s.

Fred's two other brothers George and Frank were partners in Peddle, Thorp and Walker Architects in Sydney; his other brother Arthur worked for the Pick Me Up Company.

Training of top class tradespersons – the 'Old Firm'

Ricketts & Thorp had always been proud of the high standards of its employees and the apprentices it trained, and of the relations which existed between management and staff. Without the skill and dedication of these men and women, the firm's success would not have been possible.

Along with Beard Watsons, Ricketts & Thorp was considered the ultimate place to be trained. It was always popularly accepted that Ricketts & Thorp was a major training ground for furniture tradesmen. Ex-employees are to be found in successful, diverse occupations in many parts of Australia, some in management positions; others in their own businesses. Some of these include Bowman & Rodgers, Duncan & Whelan, Ron Locke Pty Ltd, Nelson & Johnston, Franklin & Smith and many more.

In its 66 years, hundreds gave 20 years or more faithful service, while there were seven employees with 50 years or more service. One employee, on being given his notice said 'After 53 years service, a week's notice! If I'd known the job wasn't going to be permanent, I wouldn't have started.' They were always rewarded with good conditions, generous payment of unused sick pay, a Christmas hamper, and consideration in the pay packet in times of absence due to family illness or bereavement. The Ricketts and Thorp families owned six houses in and around Banksia and these were let to employees at generous rent.

To work at the 'old firm' bought memories of a vibrant social life, attending theatre parties to the Tivoli and other musicals, Saturday cricket teams and a golf club, with annual picnics and harbour cruises to Neilsen Park and many harbour beaches, children's Christmas parties, annual cabarets at Rockdale Town Hall. Many employees played competition tennis, cycling and other sports together at weekends.

The lunchtime cricket matches in Rockdale Street (you were out if the ball landed on Princes Highway or on the timber stacks) were legendary as well as the intense games of cards (500) on a piece of plywood on rubbish tins at lunchtime.

The Employees

The factory at Rockdale provided employment for St George and Sutherland Shire residents and in the 1940s returning



Fred Thorp, c. 1936



Gilbert Ricketts, c. 1945

service personnel took part in the Government Retraining Scheme. The company was involved in the migrant training program, employing many production employees from Europe, in particular the large Italian and Greek community around Rockdale. Many tradesmen came to the company following the completion of the Snowy River Scheme.

With their commitment to training, R&T would always take their full quota of apprentices. Most would stay for several years after completing their time to become valued tradesmen, some becoming specialists in particular techniques and furniture components. A few of these specialties were in extension table construction, Hepplewhite sideboard and chair production, French polishing, lacquer work, solid colour finishing, production machining, belt sanding, veneer matching, veneer laying, shaped component veneering, specialist pattern and jig making, timber preparation, circular saw and spindle operation and many more.

The factory had a full time machine maintenance engineer, saw and tool sharpener (saw doctor), boiler attendant, cleaners, first aid nurse, delivery persons and yardmen.

The office had a staff of about 12 with accountant, despatch & drawing office staff, estimators and sales staff at the factory and at the showroom at North Sydney.

A lot of work was contracted out with two wood turners and two carvers producing components, and companies providing metal components for office desks and special custom-built work, lounge chair frames and upholstery.

Products

Over the years, Ricketts & Thorp became well known for the production of every kind of household, office, church and school furniture. From the 1920s, they kept a full production line, keeping up to 50 employees active and allowing sections of the factory short of work to move tradesmen in and out of the production lines.

The first of these were poultry incubators made for industry under licence to 'Buckeye', an American company, and 'Bluebird' ice chests with fittings imported from the USA until EFCO Manufacturing of Arncliffe started to produce suitable hardware.

In the 1930s, Ricketts & Thorp were a leading supplier of radio cabinets to the manufacturers of radio receiving sets. The development of this section of their business was largely due to what was known as 'The Scullin Tariffs of 1931', which placed a prohibitive duty on the import of complete radio sets which were mostly from America. The effect of these tariffs was to encourage a very important secondary industry, which provided work for many Australians.

During the Second World War, its output was devoted almost entirely to defence production, including a major contribution to the construction of the Mosquito bomber. The factory had two shifts of workers producing parts for Hawker De Havilland who produced the aircraft at Bankstown and Sale in Victoria.

Ricketts & Thorp, together with many other furniture factories in Sydney, produced spars and 300 varied parts for aircraft, using laminated timbers and plywood glued together with urea formaldehyde. They were the first to use this synthetic adhesive with various thicknesses of Canadian spruce and plywoods, and other hard materials such as 'diatex' and 'dialac' made of highly pressed cloth and resin.

Other defence products were Owen gun butts, made out of Queensland maple, jungle knife handles out of jarrah,

ammunition boxes, jettison belly tanks for aircraft and trestle tables for the Army.

During the War a threshold was placed on furniture costs, that made manufacture uneconomical. The only items produced outside of defence supply were shaped plywood mouldings, usually veneered crossgrain, sold to Leopold Barnett's for re-sale to the manufacturers of radio cabinets and dining room suites.

The 1950s saw the company producing many types of radiograms/hi-fi cabinets for HMV (His Master's Voice), AWA and Stromberg-Carlson. These cabinets were fine pieces of furniture made out of matched veneers of European and American walnut and butt maple with lift-up lids and a pull-out record player deck.

Sewing machine cabinets were produced for Bebarfalds Ltd and Pinnocks. The cabinet and table models were made out of Queensland maple in the Swedish style, with tapered rectangular legs and a lift-up top. The sewing machine hinged down inside and the cabinet model was fitted for fabrics and cottons. Probably the most popular model was the portable with a rounded top of plywood and a solid timber machine base.

The introduction of television in 1956 provided work for 100 employees producing 200-300 cabinets per week, from the simple plywood 'box' with tapered, turned legs with brass ferrules, to pieces of furniture built to take TV receivers for HMV, Admiral, Stromberg-Carlson and Kriesler.

The workshop was also kept busy with the manufacturer of interior linings for the automobiles made by the Nuffield Company. Dashboards and door linings for Wolseley and Rover were shaped and veneered in European walnut.

Showing the versatility of the factory, refrigerated bottle cabinets for hotels around NSW, with metal liners, insulation and heavy duty hardware, were a return to the ice chests produced by the company in the 1920s.

With the saturation of the TV market and suppliers importing their own cabinets in the 1960s, the factory turned to producing school furniture, in particular library, science and laboratory furniture for Government-sponsored additions to State and private schools.

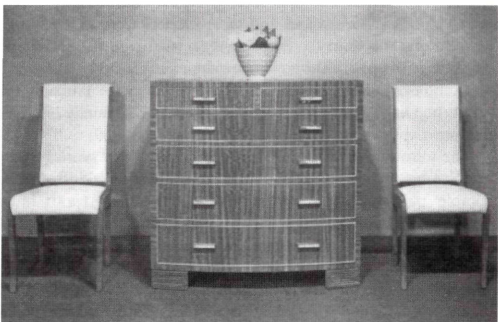
During the last 15 years of the company, with the growth in office space in the city, about 50 desks each week were produced in veneered particle board and solid timber, with laminated plastic tops and metal legs. Queensland black bean and Queensland maple were popular timbers, together with laminated plastic finishes. With so many commercial premises to be furnished, the use of plastic surfacing became particularly popular.

The supply of office desks initiated a lot of extra work for the factory. Desk pedestals were produced in batches of 200 and drawers in batches of 500-600. The tops, desk arrangements, and finishes were manufactured to suit the individual customer's instructions. The sale of general office furniture initiated enquiries to produce special custom-built furniture such as board room tables, executive desks, reception desks, screens, planter boxes, filing cabinets, book cases and complete office fitouts.

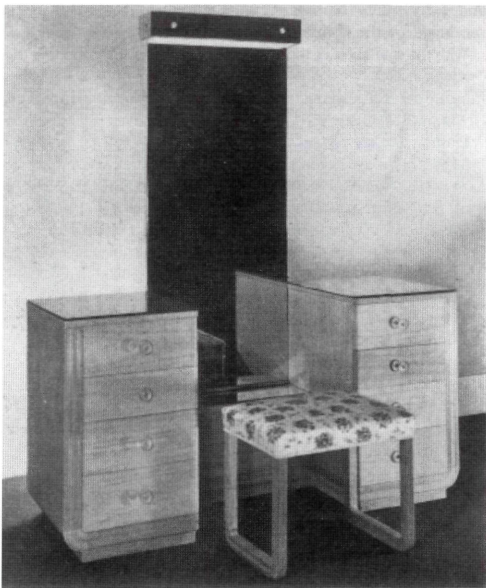
Ricketts & Thorp produced a complete range of household furniture in their early years for Grace Bros, Beard Watson and Bebarfalds. Bebarfalds' 1928 catalogue shows several bedroom suites with names like Windsor, Cheval and Lorna that can be attributed to Ricketts & Thorp manufacture. In association with Beard Watson, they produced furniture for the British Empire Exhibition in London.



Sideboard veneered in Italian burr walnut and Queensland straight-grained walnut. Designed by Molly Grey in collaboration with Ricketts & Thorp, Sydney, 1936



Chest of drawers veneered in Queensland walnut with handles and inlay beads of English birch. The solid walnut chairs are upholstered in cream hide. Designed by Molly Grey in collaboration with Ricketts & Thorp, 1936



Dressing table veneered in limed Queensland maple with handles of transparent composition. A strip of mirror fixed with silver stars conceals the overhead light. Designed by Molly Grey in collaboration with Ricketts & Thorp



Ricketts & Thorp made furniture for retailers Beard Watson and Beharfelds in the 1930s

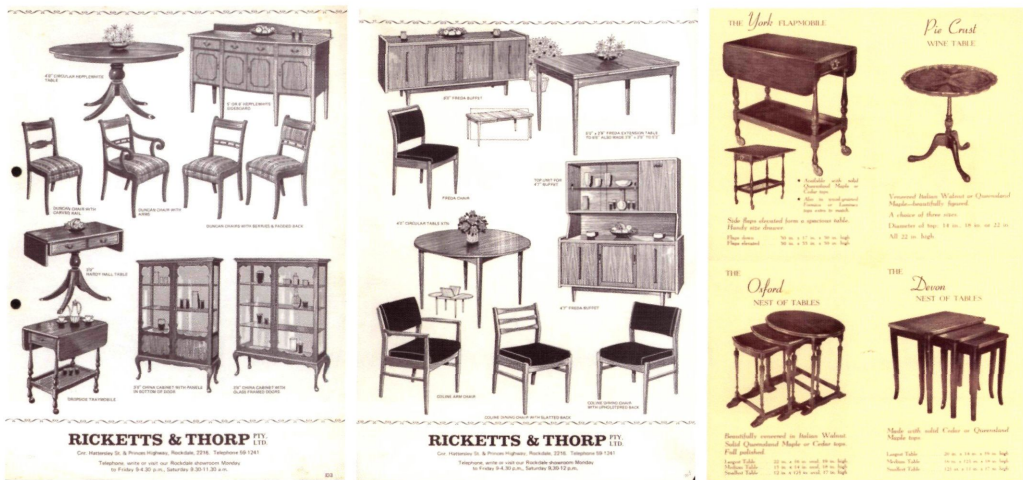
Ricketts & Thorp worked with several furniture designers and architects during the 1930s, most notably Molly Grey and Fowell, McConnel & Mansfield, producing custom-built furniture in many exotic timbers and veneers, such as Italian burr walnut, Queensland walnut and English birch

During the late 1930s, Ricketts & Thorp became involved in a price war supplying furniture to major retailers, and decided to go it alone, opening a showroom at the factory to sell directly to the public, thus by-passing retailers' mark-ups. The showroom displayed the factory-produced bedroom, dining and lounge furniture of contemporary and period design, the best known of these being the Hepplewhite dining room suite of superbly crafted furniture in flame mahogany veneers and Honduras or sapele mahogany solids.

Extension tables on sabre leg pedestals were made to size. Hand finished arm- and side-chairs in the shield back style, a serpentine shaped sideboard with dovetailed drawers with cock beading were all beautifully finished with a dulled lacquer. The Queen Anne style of dining, bedroom and lounge furniture, tables, chairs, china cabinets, sideboards, occasional tables and lounge furniture were also popular.

The showroom had a full range of catalogue furniture including dining and bedroom suites and gift occasional furniture, such as nests of tables, lamp stands, pie crust wine tables, traymobiles and occasional chairs that were very popular around Christmas-time. These items were manufactured in small batch production (6-12-24-30) up to the finishing stage, kept in store until a customer's order and then polished and upholstered as required.

The 1950s saw a thriving company of about 180 employees producing contemporary furniture for the public as well as commercial contracts. This contemporary furniture included Swedish-style household furniture of plain-grained Queensland maple and African pear with tapered legs, rectangular or turned. A design change appeared with the grain being displayed horizontally instead of vertical. Other changes



Catalogues 1960

Gift catalogue with small items

included the use of wooden integral handles and introduction of laminated plastics (Laminex and Formica) on the top surfaces, the edges being bevelled solid timber. A large contract for the Rural and Commonwealth Banks to furnish their managers' residences in branches throughout NSW allowed new materials and processes to be used.

Flat-panel construction, using plywood, solid core and some early forms of chipboard instead of framed construction was used, as framing was very labour intensive. In fact in the latter part of the 50s, labour costs outstripped material costs, and any savings in labour were essential. The use of chipboard saw exciting times as changes in processes, assembly devices and hinges were introduced, older methods proving unsuitable for this new material.

An important part of Ricketts & Thorp's production was their custom-built, one-off furniture. Many of these designs came from interior designers or architect's drawings, or from small sketches, or a visit by sales staff to the client. The drawing office would produce presentation drawings when required and supply quotations. Many designs were submitted for quotation, with estimators assessing material and labour costs based on experience and previous work, sometimes only receiving about 15% of jobs quoted for. However, the work obtained was very high quality for discerning clients and provided new opportunities in design and use of materials.

On receiving the client order, a factory working drawing and cutting list was produced, with the article taking about 6-8 weeks to produce in the factory. This work was most sought after by tradesmen and apprentices, sometimes leading to many days out on site installing the furniture.

One achievement, believe it or not, was a 25 ft x 10 ft. (7.5 m x 3 m) board table for the old AMP building at Circular Quay. Delivery posed a problem as the top was required to be made in one piece, veneered in Queensland walnut, but this was overcome by crating and hoisting it up the outside of the building, then lowering to the 25th floor before the roof went on. As it was irregularly shaped it had to be placed in the correct position. Several months later tradesmen from the firm



Sideboard with superb flame mabogany veneer on the doors.



Cabinetmaker tradesman spoke-shaving the back rail of a 'Glen' dining chair



Working drawings 1966



Louis style 2-seater settee and chairs

assembled the table base on site, unpacked the table-top and the final polish was completed. AMP has since built a new head office but decided to leave the table where it was.

Second and even third generation families (quite a few from the country during Easter Show Week) returning to purchase furniture is another testimony to the quality. One client from the south coast of NSW had a cedar tree on their property felled, and Ricketts & Thorp cut and seasoned the timber and produced a full bedroom suite, still with the family in immaculate condition.

In the 1960s another showroom, especially targeting office furniture, was opened in North Sydney and when Reg Adams from H. Adams & Sons, Cabinetmakers of Leichhardt, joined the firm, the company saw an increase in orders for church and school projects, such as science laboratory benches and furniture and church pews.

A list of a few clients and projects of Ricketts & Thorp shows the community's high regard for the company:

Commonwealth, Rural, Commercial Bank and Reserve Bank offices in Sydney, Canberra and Darwin

National Library Canberra, High Court Canberra, Prime Minister's residences Canberra and Sydney

Government House, Sydney, State Library, Commonwealth and NSW Department of Public Works, NSW Railways

AMP, Mercantile Mutual, CSR, Law Society, NRMA, Ord Minnett, Norwich Union, Unilever, Custom Credit, Australian Club, Sydney University, Knox Grammar School, Sydney Town Hall, Metropole Hotel, Cahill's Restaurants, Norton Smith, Pechiney, Burns Philp

Wollongong Town Hall, many Shire Council Chambers, St Andrew's & St Mary's Cathedrals and many churches in NSW

Designers Marion Hall Best, Artes Studios, Stuart Lowe Furniture Studios, Bill Greenwood, Frederick Ward, Edmund Dykes, Bill Johnstone

Architects Peddle Thorp & Walker, Fowell McConnell, Hirst & Kennedy, Maclurcan & Brown, Kevin Curtin & Mansfield, NSW Government Architect.

What's so special about their furniture?

Furniture manufactured at Ricketts & Thorp since 1912 is still attracting high prices in the antique trade. At a recent auction of furniture, a Ricketts & Thorp Pty Ltd 1954 Hepplewhite

Extension table and carver and five dining chairs in sapele mahogany sold for \$30,000.

Solid timber was carefully selected for furniture made by Ricketts & Thorp. On either side of the main factory, huge stacks of timber were air-dried over several years, then dried to correct moisture content in a kiln. The timber was used only when any chance of such shrinking and cupping was at a minimum. Mahogany, Queensland maple and walnut, black bean, silver ash, Tasmanian oak, English oak, American oak, sycamore, beech, elm, coachwood, blackwood were just some of the timbers.

Wood veneers such as walnut, birch, maple, teak, flame mahogany, European burr, butt walnuts and sycamore, were a feature of many pieces of furniture. The veneers were carefully matched and laid into panels.

Some processes and high-class trade practices are evident in Ricketts & Thorp furniture. Drawers were machined dovetailed front and back. If the backs of the drawers were housed in, triangular glue blocks were added to strengthen the joint. Blocks were also used below the drawer bottom, glued to the sides to hold the bottom rigid and prevent any joints coming loose with constant use.

Hidden or construction rails inside of cabinets were made out of good quality cabinet timber, usually coachwood, of a generous size. The drawer bottoms and cabinet backs of plywood were securely fixed in. Techniques such as rebates and tongue and groove maintained cabinet strength.

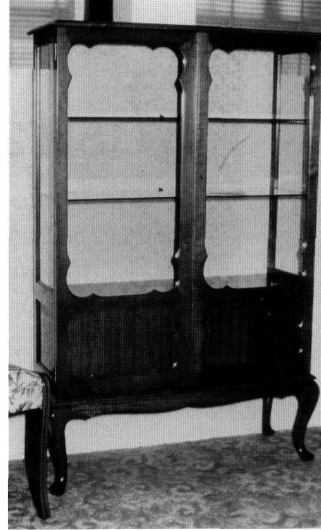
Chairs always had neatly cut, sanded and fitted brackets in the joints between legs and rails, and the underside of chair seats were neatly finished with white or brown calico. Quality control was evident at every stage of the process. One only has to look at the inside or underside of a piece of furniture to see it has been given the same care as the outside. Nitrocellulose lacquer finishes on carefully sanded surfaces provided quality of surface that lasted for years. Only the best hardware, carefully considered for style and finish, and quality brass butt hinges and brass double ball catches were used.

The Closing

With labour costs getting higher it became increasingly difficult to maintain the firm's high standard and the two-family shareholding group reluctantly decided to close. Outstanding orders were nearing



Hepplewhite style sideboard made out of solid mahogany and flame mahogany veneers



Queen Anne cabriole leg cabinet in solid timber usually made in Queensland maple.

completion, and a three-day auction sale was held on 6-8 September 1977 to dispose of furniture, plant and equipment.

As the news of the imminent close-down spread, many customers, ex-employees and friends who came to the auction sale for one last look around expressed regret and gratitude. As one client said 'It's the end of an era.'

During 1978 post and rail furniture moved into part of the premises with a phone company using the Princes Highway frontage. It is now a storage rental company. On 2 February 1996, 180 ex-employees and partners attended a Ricketts & Thorp re-union to relive the days of R&T at Rockdale.

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Acknowledgement

My thanks to Mr Brian Ricketts for his time and assistance in supplying information, photographs and articles.

Alan Perry started at Ricketts & Thorp in 1954 at the age of 15 1/2 years as a 'floor boy' on three months probation. He swept the floor, cleaned the animal glue pots and was a 'gofer' and assistant to the tradesmen. He subsequently became an apprenticed cabinetmaker, one of 180 employees in the factory at Rockdale, earning £1/10/6 per week. Alan worked in the sewing machine cabinet section until graduating to cabinet section. He then became a draughtsman and eventually Furniture Designer, Estimator and Site Supervisor until joining TAFE in 1973 as a Teacher of Cabinetmaking. He has taught all ages of apprentices and tradesmen in colleges in Sydney and a year at London College of Furniture, becoming Head Teacher of Cabinetmaking at Lidcombe TAFE. He retired in 1998.



Custom-built furniture for the Governor's Office, Reserve Bank, Martin Place, Sydney. Designed by Government Architects in collaboration with Frederick Ward, designer, 1960

Recent acquisitions by The Australiana Fund

The Australiana Fund was set up in 1978 to furnish the four official Australian Government residences: Government House and The Lodge in Canberra, Admiralty House and Kirribilli House in Sydney. The Fund's Fine Arts Adviser, Johanna Cole, reports on recent purchases.



Card table, cedar, by Andrew Lenehan c.1848-51 Australian

This elegant fold-over card table is an example of mid-19th century Australian colonial furniture from the workshop of Andrew Lenehan (operating 1841-1873).

Featuring a fold-over top with a circular, baize-covered playing section, it has a carved central column in the manner of Thomas Hope, with applied carving and a quadriform base. Typical of Lenehan's style, the table has carved lion paw feet. The interior bears a red Andrew Lenehan label from the period when his business was located at 287 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, between 1848 and 1851. Andrew Lenehan is acknowledged as one of the finest early colonial furniture makers. He was commissioned to make furniture for Government House, Sydney in 1846 and 1857. Lenehan was very involved with the social and religious life of Sydney as one of the first Sydney City Councillors and a Lay Fellow of St John's College, University of Sydney.

Chinese export porcelain was made to order for Europeans and Americans. By 1820, a flourishing trade between China and Australia had developed. This set of two punch bowls are extremely rare examples of Chinese manufactured objects with a clear Australian connection, as they each bear the entwined monogram of John and Martha Hosking, perhaps



One of two punch bowls, porcelain, c. 1829 China

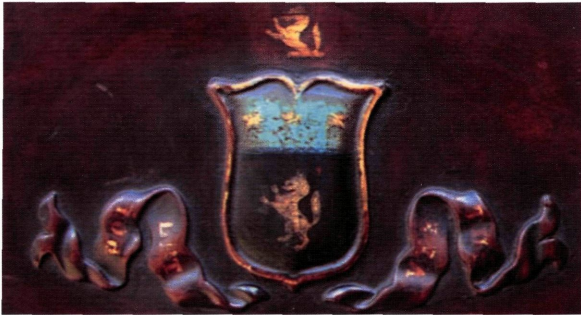


commissioned for their marriage in 1829.

John Hosking (1806-1882) was the first elected Mayor of Sydney in 1842 and a partner in the firm of merchants, Hughes & Hosking. The bowls are decorated with a sacred carp design on the inside and with borders and the exterior featuring the rose medallion pattern which includes alternating sections of groups of birds, flowers and butterflies and groups of Chinese figures in houses. Punch bowls are an English type of bowl originating from the late 17th century, designed to hold a warm alcoholic beverage. These punch bowls are the first Chinese objects The Australiana Fund has acquired.

This pair of Australian cedar hall chairs c.1830 are of exceptional quality of design and craftsmanship, with a rare painted and sculpted family coat of arms. Although hall chairs with a painted coat of arms are not uncommon in English 18th and 19th century furniture, they are extremely rare in Australian colonial furniture.

Rendered with much refinement, this coat of arms applied to each chair back, is in sculptural relief and painted. The coat of arms appears to be related to the Pole/Pooler Family from Fairbairn's Crests of Great Britain and Ireland reference to the gilded motto, *Pollet Virtus* (Virtue Excels). The quality of the carving is especially fine on the back of the chair, including the carved lobes, scroll brackets, the coat of arms and the scroll and leaf decoration surmounted by a round carved finial. Also a testament to the craftsman's skill is the fine carving to the front legs. The rounded shape of the seat is in harmony with the overall sense of decoration and design.



Hall chair, cedar c. 1830 Australian

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IMPORTANT CEDAR BOOKCASE FOR SALE

This South Australian cedar bookcase once belonged to James Richard Fowler, Chairman of one of South Australia's early commercial businesses, D & J Fowler Ltd. David (1826-81) and James Fowler (d. 1859) arrived in Adelaide in the early 1850s and opened a retail grocery business, joined in 1860 by brother George (1839-96). They became wholesale grocers and importers, expanding and diversifying their interests in South Australia, Western Australia and England. A centenary history, *Years to Remember*, was published in 1954.

George's son, James Richard Fowler (1865-1939) gained an MA in Classics at Cambridge. He later became Chairman of D & J Fowler Ltd, a director of the Bank of Adelaide and a large list of companies, and a member of the Adelaide Club. The bookcase graced his two-story Portrush Road home, until the house was sold to Presbyterian Girls College (opened in 1922, renamed Seymour College in 1977).

Before 1932, J.R. Fowler brought the cedar bookcase to the Chairman's office in King William St. After the death of his son, William Murray Fowler, the next incumbent, David Murray Fowler, moved the bookcase to the boardroom of a subsidiary, Australian Independent Distributors Ltd. When their boardroom was refurbished in 1960, the bookcase was sold to the Company secretary for £15. He sold it to the present owner.

**Enquiries to Roger Harrison 07 5448 5201,
mob 0438 524 561, email harrison@email.tc**



Cedar bookcase with frieze, two arched glazed doors flanked by carved corbels, two moulded drawers and cupboard below, c. 1870-80, 2160 h x 1230 w x 480 d.



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Peter R. Walker Pty Ltd, Dealers in Fine Art, generously continue to sponsor a cash award of \$250 for the best article submitted to *Australiana* this year. All articles appearing in *Australiana* Volume 26 are eligible for the 2004 award.

Australiana Encouragement Award

To encourage new writers, an award of \$100 will be given for the best article by a first-time writer or collector published in *Australiana* this year. Dealers, curators and those who earn income from antiques or decorative arts are ineligible.

Articles do not have to be lengthy but should be illustrated. A Style Guide is on the website or available from the editors.

The 2003 awards were given to Robyn Lake for her comprehensive article on George Peck, and to Andrew Morris for his clever detective work on C.H.T. Costantini. Both articles are substantial contributions to *Australiana* scholarship.

PETER R WALKER

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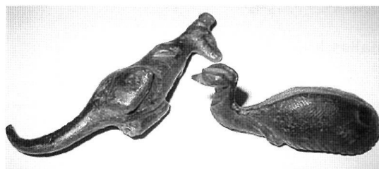
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John Hawkins, book,
19th century Australian Silver, vol. 2,
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A COLLECTION OF TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL SHELL NECKLACES

- 1: A Mariner shell necklace, circa 1880.
- 2: A contemporary rice & Mariner shell necklace made to order in Launceston, 2003.
- 3: A most unusual late nineteenth century shell necklace.

