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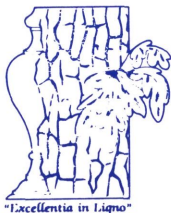


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ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

All general correspondence including Advertising, Membership Subscriptions and Requests for Back Issues to be sent to:

The Hon. Secretary,
Australiana Society,
25 Terry Street,
Blakehurst NSW 2221

All editorial correspondence including the submission of material for publication in *Australiana* to be sent to:

The Editor,
Australiana Society,
PO Box 322,
Roseville NSW 2069
Fax (02) 416 7143

Committee 1993/94:

President: Kenneth Cavill
Vice-Presidents: Michel Reymond,
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Editor: Kevin Fahy

Members: Caressa Crouch
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Cover: Cedar long-case clock by James Oatley, Sydney, circa 1822. (Photo courtesy J.R. Lawson Pty Ltd)

THE AUSTRALIANA SOCIETY

PO BOX 322 ROSEVILLE 2069



— SOCIETY PROGRAMME —

MEETINGS — 1993-4

THURSDAY,
2 DECEMBER

CHRISTMAS PARTY
"SHOW and TELL"

Please bring along your treasured items of Australiana for discussion and a few 'nibbles'.

THURSDAY,
24 FEBRUARY

First meeting of the Society for 1994

1994

WEDNESDAY,
26 JANUARY

AUSTRALIA DAY CELEBRATION

The Australiana Society will hold its annual Australia Day Celebration at the Mint Museum, Macquarie Street, Sydney. A buffet dinner will be preceded by a viewing of its collection of Australian decorative arts with a noted GUEST SPEAKER, Margaret Betteridge, who was its first Curator. This is a unique and final opportunity to visit the Mint which is closing at the end of January for a complete refurbishment and is not due to re-open until March 1995. Bookings essential. Full particulars in enclosure.

Society meetings are held at 7.30pm at the Glover Cottage Hall,
124 Kent Street, Sydney. Convenient street parking.
Drinks served 7.30 - 8.00 pm, followed by Australiana Showcase
(bring your Australian treasures for general discussion).
Lectures will commence at 8.30 pm.

Special Announcement

The Australiana Society and the Powerhouse Museum announce their joint promotion of a Literary Award sponsored by Simpsons Antiques.

The Award will be called **THE POWERHOUSE PRIZE FOR "AUSTRALIANA"**.

Articles to be eligible must relate to Australiana and been published or submitted to "AUSTRALIANA" prior to 1st December, 1993. Members and Non-Members of the Society are invited to submit entries.

The prize of \$250 will be presented at the AUSTRALIA DAY DINNER 1994. Further information and conditions applicable may be obtained from the Secretary, Australiana Society.

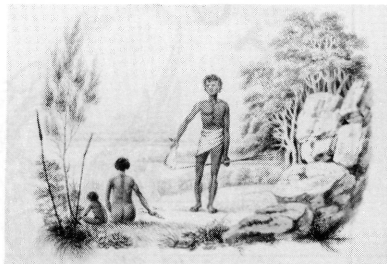
Rules for Literary Award Prize

1. All entries are to be typed in double spacing; must reach the Editor no later than 1st December 1993, and can be submitted by members and non-members (other than judges).
2. To be eligible all entries must be on a subject relating to Australiana and preferably be an item of original research. All illustrations for articles are to be supplied.
3. The authors for all articles submitted for the prize agree that the Society can publish those articles in the Society's journal whether or not a prize is awarded.
4. Articles previously published other than in the Society's journal during 1993, will not be considered.
5. The winning article will receive a prize of \$250 to be presented at the Society's Australia Day Dinner in 1994.
6. The judges will be appointed by the Society's Committee.
7. The judges' decision will be final and no correspondence will be entered into. The judges reserve the right not to award the prize if in their opinion the entries are not of a sufficiently high standard.
8. Articles received after 1st December 1993 will be eligible for the 1994 award.

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A watercolour by the convict artist Joseph Lycett. Circa 1820. 11 x 14.5cm.

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A Successful Enterprise of the Early 20th Century: The Phoenix Manufacturing Company, Silversmiths and Electroplaters

Kenneth Cavill

From the time of the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, when electroplated silverware was displayed to the world, to the close of the Edwardian era, the vast majority of the electroplated silverware sold in Australia came from Great Britain. Electroplated wares were also imported from the United States of America and Europe. Silverware produced by long established manufacturers notably, by Elkington and Company or James Dixon and Sons in England, by the Meriden Britannia Company or Reed and Barton in the United States, and by Christofle in France was readily available in Australia. With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, supplies from overseas were soon interrupted – Australian makers took up the challenge.

A select number of local makers were producing trophies, items of Australiana and speciality goods such as watch cases from the 1870s, however much of their business was that of replating and repairing silverware. Stokes and Sons of Melbourne, founded by Thomas Stokes in 1856, was the well known maker of electroplated silverware on a commercial scale.¹ In 1911, Stokes and Sons introduced their “Boomerang brand electroplated nickel silver (EPNS) wares.

The Phoenix Manufacturing Company Pty Ltd was established in 1916. From modest beginnings their manufacturing activities were to grow through the latter years of the First World War to the extent that, a decade later, the company was one of the largest manufactur-

ers of electroplated and sterling silverware in Australia. Their trade mark: a “Phoenix”, is to be found on sterling and electroplated silverware produced by the company (see Plate 1). To quote from their 1928 catalogue: “Phoenix silverware is manufactured from the finest 20% nickel silver of heavy gauge: the majority of these articles are seamless drawn, they are fashioned by skilled craftsmen, and heavily plated with pure Broken Hill silver.”² Electroplated nickel silver wares comprised the bulk of their output with the capital letters: EPNS stamped adjacent to the “Phoenix” mark.

The company was founded by A.I. Ward, A.E. Bennett and J. Sharp. Albert I. Ward became the

managing director and his son, Albert S. Ward, works manager. A.I. Ward's background was that of a designer and art metal worker. The Phoenix Manufacturing Company acquired a small electroplating business located at 181 Little Collins Street, Melbourne. This firm, started in 1906, was essentially a replater and repairer of EPNS wares, in addition job lots were made to order. Economic circumstances in Australia continued to favour local production of silverwares and by 1919, the Phoenix Manufacturing Company had outgrown their original factory in the heart of Melbourne.³

In 1920, they moved to a large new factory at 459-461 Punt Road, Richmond. The company as then



Plate 1.

PHOENIX *Electro-Plated* SILVERWARE



"Phoenix Patent Spout"

(Pat. No. 3620)

This improved Spout ensures resistance against damage and always provides perfect pouring facilities for the Tea or Coffee



We manufacture a comprehensive range of these goods embodying many patterns and sizes.

Prices on application.



No. 157

TEA AND COFFEE SET



Cafe, Hotel and Steamship Tea and Coffee Services
Strongly Made, Hard Soldered, Heavily Plated

Plate 2.

employing over 125 staff. By 1928, they had doubled the size of their premises with manufactory, show-rooms and offices listed at 447-459 Punt Road, Richmond, Victoria. These premises were reported to be

the largest manufacturing silverware factory in the Southern Hemisphere.

All designs were Australian, as were the machinery and dies used in the manufacture of "Phoenix"

products. They made a vast range of table silverware including salvers, entree dishes and covers, tea and coffee services, water jugs and ice buckets, tumblers, goblets and tankards, cruets and condiment

sets, butter and jam dishes, compo-
ports, fruit bowls, tiered cake stands
and baskets. Most of these wares
were intended for household use.²

By 1920, there was increasing
competition not only from overseas
but also from local manufacturers,
eager to supply the considerable
quantity of electroplated tablewares
used by hotels, restaurants, institu-
tions and by Australian shipping
lines. The Phoenix Manufacturing
Company designed plain, heavy
gauge EPNS tea and coffee services
for commercial use. In addition
they patented an improved spout
for their hard-wearing tea and cof-
fee pots (plate 2).

Challenge and trophy cups of
very high quality were produced for
presentation at sporting and other
events. Two of these cups are
shown in plate 3. The first was a
cricket trophy for the 1925-26 sea-



Plate 4.

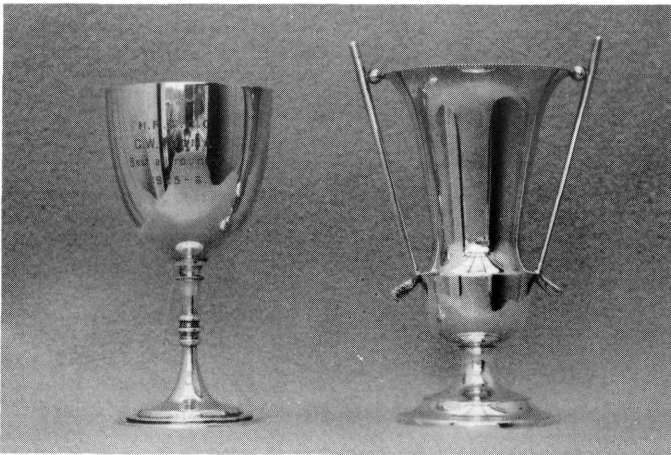


Plate 3.

son, the second was a typical golf
trophy of the late 1930s. Emblems
for trophy cups, paper weights and
care mascots were also produced.
Most were Australiana or sporting
figures. The car mascots including a
kangaroo, emu, kookaburra and a
Scotch thistle! All mascots were
fitted with a strong bolt and nut.
These radiator mascots would now
be considered a safety hazard –

should they survive today's sou-
venir hunters.

The Phoenix Company pro-
duced decorative vases and vase
stands (plate 4). A novel range of
rose bowls, fruit dishes, compo-
ports and vases were also made in
nickel silver with an oxidised finish.
They were decorated with an embossed
band of waratahs and gum leaves
(plate 5). Their Australiana ink-

stands with mounted glass inkwells
made useful presentation pieces.
They have become collectors'
items.

Through the 1920s, many classes
of Australian made goods were fac-
ing substantial competition from
imports. During 1925 and 1926, the
"Great White Train" with the slog-
an: BUY AUSTRALIAN MADE
emblazoned on the sides of the car-
riages toured the country areas pro-
moting Australian manufactures.⁴
Its fifteen covered vans displayed
the products of some thirty
Australian firms. Not surprisingly,
"Phoenix Plate" of this period was
stamped: MADE IN AUSTRALIA.

By 1928, Albert S. Ward had
become managing director. The
production of electroplated silver-
ware was at its zenith. The Phoenix
Manufacturing Company's 68 page
catalogue then contained some 600
illustrations of their EPNS wares.
Items were available in sterling sil-
ver to order. "Phoenix" silverware
was distributed by Arthur Cocks
and Company Ltd throughout
Australia and New Zealand. Their
co-distributor in New South Wales
and Queensland was E.W. Culver.

PHOENIX *Electro-Plated* SILVERWARE



No. 4003 — 8½ IN. DIAMETER

OXIDIZED FINISH



No. 4001 — 12 IN. HIGH



No. 4002 8½ IN. HIGH



No. 4005 — 6½ IN. DIAMETER

THE CHASED DESIGN IS OF
AUSTRALIAN GUM
AND WARATAHS



No. 4004

Cake Dish - Fruit Compot - Vase - Rose Bowls

Plate 5.

Both were long established wholesale jewellery merchants. Pieces of Phoenix Plate have been found with the initials "E C" stamped below the characteristic "Phoenix" trade mark. Presumably these wares were distributed by Edward Culver.⁵

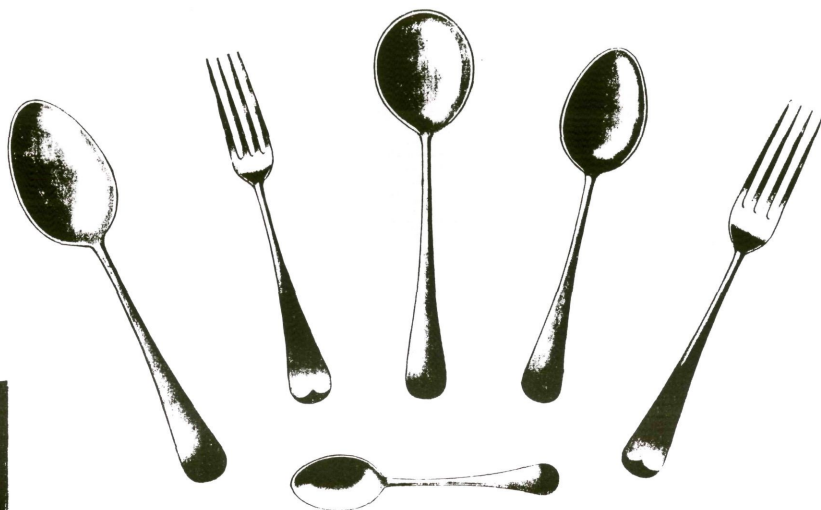
Spoons and forks in the "Old English" pattern were manufactured at least from 1928. At that time the company advertised: "Phoenix spoons and forks which are wholly produced in our

Richmond factory, are the only wholly Australian made spoons and forks on the market, and we are proud to place these artistic quality goods before you, knowing that they are indeed the world's 'longest wearing' products." (See plate 6.) This was a significant undertaking for an Australian manufacturer. These wares although produced on a relatively small scale,⁶ were in direct competition with spoons and forks then regularly imported by

Australian merchants from the long established Birmingham and Sheffield makers.

With the onset of the Great Depression, many silverware manufacturers diversified. Their workshops and factories were well suited to produce metalwares other than table silverware. K.G. Luke, Phoenix Manufacturing Company, Platers Pty Ltd — makers of "Heckworth" Plate, G. & E. Rodd, Stokes and Sons, and Tilbury and Lewis were

PHOENIX *Electro-Plated* SILVERWARE



No. 316

WE WISH to especially emphasize the high-grade finish and solidity of every article in this "Phoenix" series, as well as pointing out the unique and attractive manner in which each line is being distributed—in dainty and attractive crocodile leatherette boxes, each box containing half-dozen pieces, with an exception in respect of Table Spoons, when they contain one-third dozen. "Phoenix" Spoons and Forks, which are wholly produced in our Richmond Factory, are the only wholly Australian-made Spoons and Forks on the market, and we are proud to place these artistic "quality" goods before you, knowing that they are indeed the world's "longest-wearing" productions.



GIFT BOX
OPEN
SHOWING CONTENTS



GIFT BOX
CLOSED
AS DISTRIBUTED

Spoons and Forks — "PHOENIX QUALITY"—Old English Design

Plate 6.

prominent Melbourne manufacturers of EPNS wares who weathered the Depression years.

In 1932, Stokes and Sons decided to replace their well known "Boomerang" Plate by "Georgian Silverware".¹ Soon afterwards the Phoenix Manufacturing Company introduced their "Imperial" brand EPNS tablewares. This range of domestic silverware included many of the items listed in the earlier "Phoenix" catalogue, together with new and popular Art Deco styled

goods. "Imperial" silverware was made in 18% nickel silver. Its quality is evidenced by the many pieces of domestic silverware bearing the "Imperial" EPNS trade mark (plate 8) that are seen in antique and old wares shops throughout Australia. Arthur Cocks and Company were sold distributors of "Imperial" Plate.⁷

The use of the terms: "Georgian" by Stokes, and "Imperial" by Phoenix, emphasises the continuing competition with imported goods, especially from Great

Britain. Moreover, some prejudice against Australian made electroplated and sterling silverware still persisted.

Following on the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, labour controls were put into place and the production of non-essential goods, including silverware, ceased. The large, well equipped metalware manufactories and their highly skills work force were soon engaged in war-time production. By 1946, the Phoenix Manufacturing Com-

Imperial Silverware

A "PHOENIX" Product

SALVERS AND CHILD'S MUGS OF IMPOSING DESIGNS



No. 5208. CHILD'S MUG
Gilt Inside



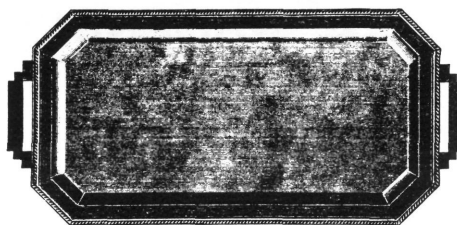
No. 667. CHILD'S MUG
Bright Gilt Inside



No. 5010. CHILD'S MUG
Gilt Inside



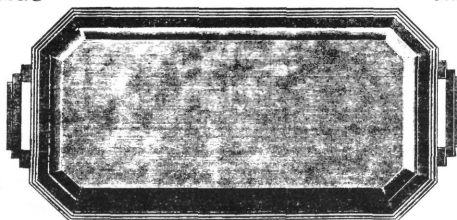
No. 5353. CHILD'S MUG
Gilt Inside



No. 681
OBLONG SALVER (Hand Mounted)
Length, 24" Overall



No. 5351. CHILD'S MUG
Gilt Inside



No. 684
OBLONG SALVER (Hand Mounted)
Length, 24" Overall



No. 5355. CHILD'S MUG
Large
Bright Gilt Inside



No. 5354. CHILD'S MUG
Gilt Inside



No. 5027. CHILD'S MUG
Gilt Inside

PRESENTING A FINE CHOICE FOR VERY IMPORTANT OCCASIONS

pany were again producing electro-plated silverware. The company re-introduced an extensive range of "Imperial" brand goods. By this time, stainless steel tableware was well in evidence in hotels, restaurants and institutions, and was gaining acceptance for general household use.

Several of the well established Melbourne makers were then involved in the manufacturer of reproduction old Sheffield plate. This quality reproduction plate, made from Australian cold rolled copper sheet and heavily silver plated, was designed for the luxury market. Platers Pty Ltd, the manufacturer of "Heckworth" EPNS wares had issued a catalogue introducing "Heckworth" Sheffield Reproduction Silverware just as the war broke out.⁸ In 1946, Rodd (Australia) Ltd acquired "Heckworth" Plate from the original maker. Stokes and Sons were then manufacturing their equally well known "Old Sheffield Reproduction: silverware," and continued to do so until the late 1960s. The Phoenix Manufacturing Company does not appear to have entered this market.

The Commonwealth Government, in 1950, doubled the maximum sales tax on "luxury" goods from 33% to 66%! This increase applied to jewellery, imitation jewellery, cut glass, ornaments and vases, plated wares and other items. Evidently, the government's intention was to slow down the production of non-essential goods in Australia. Of course imported goods were subject to duty and sales tax. The sales tax on plated wares was subsequently reduced, but the effect on silverware manufacturers and, in particular, on those who had not diversified was immense.

The Phoenix Company maintained its production of quality EPNS wares throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. Their "Imperial" catalogue of 1955 (35 pages) dis-



Plate 8.

played over 300 items.⁷ Domestic silverware was predominant, together with a selection of trophy cups and giftwares (see plate 7). Modernistic designs with a minimum of applied decoration had been introduced, while many of the Australian pieces shown in the earlier "Phoenix" catalogue were no longer illustrated. The foreword to the 1955 catalogue contained the following comment: "... In common with all secondary industries our manufacturing costs have risen steadily over the years. We claim, however, that as a result of long-experience and up-to-date methods of manufacturing our prices are more than competitive ..."

Even though the Phoenix Manufacturing Company Pty Ltd had acquired an enviable reputation as silversmiths and makers of electroplated silverware, producing fine tablewares for close on half a century, they were to close their factory in the mid-1960s.⁹ Arthur Cocks and Company explored the possibility of another maker taking over the production of "Imperial" EPNS wares, but this did not eventuate.

References and Footnotes

1. Kenneth Cavill, "The Silverware of Stokes and Sons", *Australiana*, 1986, 8 (2), pp37-41.
2. Catalogue: "Phoenix Electro-Plated Silverware", 1928, Phoenix Manufacturing Company Pty Ltd, Richmond, Victoria.
3. Anonymous, "Electroplate and Silverware - Manufacture in Australia", *Commonwealth Jeweller and Watchmaker*, 2 May, 1927, pp33-34.
4. "The Railways of New South Wales, 1855-1955", 1955, p286. (The Department of Railways, NSW.)
5. The stamp: "E C" is attributed to the wholesale jewellery business of Edward W. Culver; it has also been found on silverware of the period bearing the distinctive sterling silver mark of E.J. Mole of Brisbane.
6. In the 1930s, Myttons Ltd and G. & E. Rodd Pty Ltd became the major makers of spoons and forks in Australia.
7. Catalogue: "Phoenix Imperial Electro-Plated Silverware", 1955, Phoenix Manufacturing Company Pty Ltd, Richmond, Victoria.
8. Catalogue: "Heckworth Sheffield Reproduction Silverware", 1940, Platers Pty Ltd, Melbourne.
9. The trade marks of the Phoenix Manufacturing Company: "Phoenix" and "Imperial" were removed from the Commonwealth Register in 1977 and 1978, respectively.

Recent Museum Acquisitions of Australiana

David Dolan

J.D. Mackey and the Co-operative Flint Glass Company of Balmain

According to a newspaper obituary, Joseph David Mackey was born at Bendigo, and learnt glassmaking at the Australian Flint Glass Company in South Melbourne. If his Irish Catholic family was not wealthy, his generation was certainly ambitious: his brother John went into politics, became a minister, and was knighted. In 1883 Joseph D. Mackey moved to Sydney and established a glassworks on a co-operative basis at Rozelle Bay. This was the genesis of the Co-operative Flint Glass Company of Balmain, of which he became manager and then part-owner.

These details, which increase our knowledge of this almost-forgotten leader of the glass industry in Sydney, are derived from a collection of papers presented to the Powerhouse by Mackey's descendants. They made this gift after the Museum purchased a selection of Mackey's experimental pieces when Alison McSweeney auctioned the estate of J.D. Mackey's longest-surviving child Lilian Veronica Mackey, on 19 September 1993.

In addition to the obituary, the documents include trade cards and advertisements, a reference for a workman, correspondence with suppliers of machinery, solicitations from foreign glass manufacturers seeking import agents in Australia, Mackey's own copy of *Recipes for Flint Glass Making* (printed for the publishers of *The Pottery Gazette*, London 1900), and a formal studio portrait of J.D. Mackey himself (reproduced here). Together with provenanced examples of the Balmain works' products, this



J.D. Mackey c. 1905

material obviously has huge research potential.

Earlier research by Marjorie Graham has shown that J.D. Mackey, occupation "glassblower" was living in Foucart Street, Balmain, in 1886. In 1908 he bought a new house in Drummoyne. It remained in his family for exactly three quarters of a century, and until sold in 1993 almost all the original furniture and fittings (even the lights mounted on wall brackets) were still in situ.

Those who inspected the Mackey home prior to the auction will always remember it as a remarkably intact Edwardian interior. The massive sideboards were, not surprisingly, crammed with glassware. Some of this was imported, and much of it unmarked, but there were a number of pieces which family tradition and circumstantial evidence identified as Mackey's

own or at least the product of his Balmain works. Of these, the Powerhouse obtained a number of variously engraved tumblers, a small ruby glass oil decanter (one of a pair) with the handle just visibly out of line, and some experiments with ruby glass.

The Co-operative Flint Glass Company of Balmain was bought out by the Australian Glass Manufacturing Company, Waterloo, in 1926. It was eventually absorbed into ACI; and the works in Abbattoir Road, Balmain were closed down. J.D. Mackey retired and concentrated on his religious interests and the Australian Jockey Club. In 1933 he was hit by another vehicle when getting off a tram; he never really recovered and died some months later at the age of 72. His photograph in the newspaper was captioned "Pioneer of glass manufacture in New South Wales".

A 'Champion' Table

Anne Watson

Several years ago an elegant, mid-19th century pedestal table made of Tasmanian muskwood surfaced on the local antiques market. Featuring prominently in a Sydney dealer's 1988 catalogue, it was confidently identified as the muskwood table by William Champion, sent from Tasmania to London for inclusion in the 1851 Great Exhibition and described in the 'Van Diemen's Land' section of the exhibition's official catalogue.

Well, why not? The table was made of muskwood, could be said to be of exhibition quality and had been found in London. It conveniently fitted the 1851 catalogue description – "12. Table of muskwood, 'Eurybia argophyla' of Tasmania. Round turnover table, with brasswork and springs of Tasmanian

manufacture. Exhibited for the beauty of the wood." – but lacked the one vital element on which such a confident attribution could be based, any reference to William Champion! Not surprisingly the appearance in 1991 of another table claiming to be the 1851 table by Champion caused a few exasperated mutters. This time, however, it was all there – the provenance, the W. Champion stamps and the stencilled No. 12 (the catalogue number) (Figures 1-4).

Acquired by the Powerhouse Museum in 1992 this table is quite a different affair to the muskwood table offered in 1988. Though elegant and well made it is more modest in scale and decoration and does not look much like the elaborate extravagances we have come

to expect of 19th century international exhibitions. Its provenance and various marks, however, combine to provide indisputable evidence of its participation in the 1851 exhibition.

The table was submitted to auction in Launceston in 1991 by the executors of the estate of Mrs N.R. Briggs. Mrs Briggs had inherited the table from her mother, Mrs A.C. Rule (née Bowden, b. 1968, Launceston) who had herself inherited it from her parents who, according to family history, had been involved in the return of the table to Tasmania after its exhibition in London.

The table is stamped and marked in various places. It bears no less than three 'W. Champion' impress stamps – one on the red cedar car-



Figure 1.

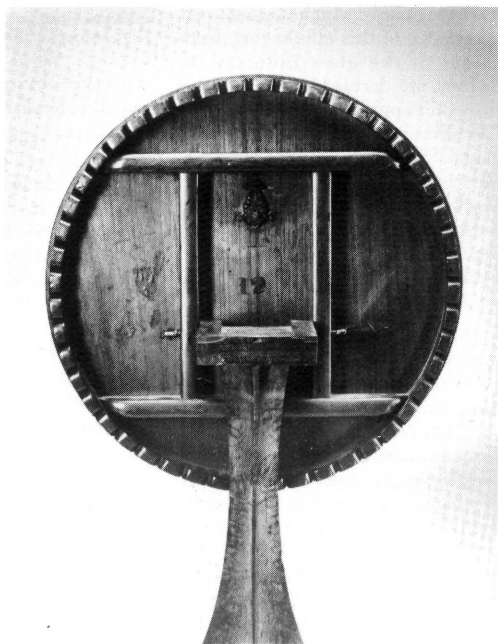


Figure 2.



Figure 3.

case of the table's tilt top, just below its brass catch, and two on the underside of the triangular base. The number '12' is stencilled on the top and base undersides. In addition the underside of the base has a handwritten paper label tacked to it inscribed "No 12/Table/Muskwood/Champion fecit" and an indecipherable signature. The underside of the top also shows evidence of tack holes and the outline of a former label – perhaps another label pertaining to the Great Exhibition, as on the base. Presumably the necessity for stamping the table in two places arose because it was shipped with its tilt top and base dismantled.

However, perhaps the removed label on the top was, in fact, the maker's label for it seems that, contrary to general opinion, W. Champion was not a cabinetmaker. Indeed, the only W. Champion, one William, resident in Hobart in the 1840s and '50s was a brewer and innkeeper. This William Champion arrived in Hobart as a convict on the *Asia* in 1824 aged 23. He came from Gloucestershire and had been sentenced to 14 years imprisonment for receiving stolen goods. A hatmaker by trade he was reputed to have made the first 'beaver' hat (from rabbit skins) in the colony: "We have much



Figure 4.

pleasure in stating that MR KING's silver-haired rabbit skins are in such requisition in the Colony, that hats are now manufactured from them by MR WILLIAM CHAMPION, equal to a great many imported from England, and at very reduced prices."² After committing a few minor offences (such as not being present for church muster) Champion was granted a conditional pardon on 30 March 1833 and a free certificate in 1837.

Some time during the late 1830s Champion discontinued his hat-making business and established a brewery and inn, aptly named the "Jolly Hatter's", in Melville Street, Hobart. In 1852 he advertised thus:

*William Champion, "Jolly Hatter's" Inn ... Malster (sic) and Brewer, continues to Manufacture on the most Approved Principles, Soda Water, Lemonade, Ginger Beer, and Cordials of all Description ... Travellers and others will find every convenience, combined with Moderate Charges ...*³

The inn seems to have been a successful business and popular Hobart watering hole and Champion a well known local identity, as his rather picturesque obituary in the *Hobart Mercury*, 26 September 1871, suggests:

THE LATE MR CHAMPION ... so well known throughout the

Colony, died yesterday morning at his residence in Burnett Street, in the forty-eighth year of his sojourn in this Island, and in the 71st year of his age. The deceased was a useful colonist in his day, and it may be interesting to mention that he produced, from his own hands, the first hat that was made in this colony, starting business in his trade shortly after he landed in the year 1824 in a small stuccoed cottage, up two or three steps, just opposite the Elephant and Castle in Bathurst Street. There, on the 6th August in the year aforesaid, the first Tasmanian beaver hat was sent into the sunshine on the head, strange to say, of one who still survives in Mr Isaac Froud, of the Native Corners. The article in question, and now beyond all question we suppose, was formed of wool, and the hair of the silver-grey rabbits, which animals had only been (set at liberty) and a year or two before introduced to the Colony on Betsy's now called Franklin Island, by one Captain King,, who, for some time afterwards, made money on the skins in the China market. The hat trade failing, Mr Champion commenced business as an hotel-keeper, and for a long, long time, the Jolly Hatter's in Melville Street was the home of the most opulent settlers when they visited the metropolis. The good old man's success in life enabled him to afford spirited and benevolent assistance on many occasions, and,



Figure 5.

although he never mentioned the matter himself, we happen to be aware that the Trinity bells, which chime so sweetly over the city on gala days, owe to his liberality something like one hundred and twenty-five pounds, that sum having been contributed by Mr Champion towards the expenses of their suspension and never repair to this day. He died of the desay (sic) of nature, and without a pang or a struggle.

As is evident from his obituary Champion was not a professional cabinetmaker. And as the standard of work in the muskwood table suggests the hand of a highly skilled craftsman, it is doubtful we can attribute the table to this hotelier and former hatter.⁴ Why then the unusual practice of stamping his possessions? Perhaps he felt it was a necessary identification measure when the table was accepted for forwarding to the Great Exhibition. What then of a fine mid-19th century cedar bookcase with an identical stamp that, as far as we know, did not travel?⁵ Perhaps theft was common and the presence of a stamp deterred potential thieves or aided later identification (if deterrence was unsuccessful). Or perhaps the stamping of his furniture simply gave this former transported

convict a sense of permanency and importance in the colony. We can only speculate.

If William Champion did not make the table then who are the likely contenders? In 1847, about the time the table was made, Hobart had approximately 20 directory-listed cabinetmaking firms including most prominently those of Joseph William Woolley, John McLoughlin, Leonard Pearson and William Hamilton. Of these only Hamilton's furniture is documented in any quantity from surviving labelled pieces. Given the scarcity of surviving examples from a range of furniture workshops it is perhaps tenuous to draw comparisons between the William Champion-owned table and work by Hamilton. Nevertheless, in this context, it is worth documenting the close stylistic and constructional similarities between the Champion table and another tilt-top table with a Hamilton label in the Powerhouse collection (Figure 5).

This table is of huon pine and, like the Champion table, is expertly veneered. Both tables are the same height (72cm), the Champion table slightly narrower in diameter

(64cm), and both table tops are of well-matched octagonally segmented veneers with a distinctive petal-carved frieze. Each table is of pedestal construction supported on three scrolling feet. The labelled Hamilton table has a quite elaborate turned and carved pedestal, giving it a very mid-Victorian look, while the elegant veneered triform pedestal and base of the Champion table are more reminiscent of Regency styles suggesting a date possibly as early as 1840. Both tables feature stylistic elements similar to those found in tables from at least two popular pattern books of the period – Thomas King's *Cabinet Maker's Sketchbook*, 1835 and William Smee and Sons' *Design for Furniture*, 1850-55⁶ – but neither table has been directly copied from either source.

In terms of construction, the tables have much in common, particularly the table tops. In each case treatment of the underside cross members or buttresses is almost identical, both being well finished, similarly recessed and with similarly placed wooden plugs to the screw holes, each plug cut from end grain timbers and following the grain of the buttresses. The petal-carved friezes of both are built up from tiny 'bricks' of wood secured with cross-grain plugs. The blocks at the top of each pedestal are again of similar construction, the Hamilton example including an unusual fine beading strip on its inner recessed edges. The Champion table shows evidence of a similar finishing device having once existed on its pedestal block. Finally the carving of both tables is of the same high quality, both showing the crisp, deeply undercut technique of an expert and confident craftsman.⁷ Given the similarities between the two tables it is indeed tempting to suggest a William Hamilton attribution for the William Champion-owned table.

As the only surviving documented example of Australian-made fur-

niture sent to the 1851 Exhibition the Champion table invites questions as to the rationale for and method of its selection and, more generally, the organisational details of the Tasmanian contribution. Clearly the overriding concern of the Tasmanian organisers was to present and promote a representative range of the colony's natural and manufactured products. The 'Van Diemen's Land' section of the official catalogue to the 1851 exhibition lists an eclectic range of objects (350 entries) including native timbers, furniture, dried fruits, various grain specimens, 'opossum fur' products, minerals, wool samples and whale products.

By far the greatest proportion of the exhibits were timber samples with muskwood, in one form or another, figuring most prominently: "The musk-wood of this colony ... is mentioned as valued for ornamental purposes, of a close and fine grain, and variously veined and dotted", commented the introductory notes to the Tasmanian section of the official catalogue.⁸ The introduction also drew special attention to the furniture exhibits, noting that "Some interesting and attractive articles of furniture, formed out of richly marked woods, are presented notice, and may prove instrumental in directing the attention of decorative furniture makers to the capabilities of the materials for the construction of furniture in England."

Like the William Champion table, the thirteen other items of furniture exhibited were generally modest in scale and design – unlike the elaborately decorated overstatements of many of the European contributors. Presumably this uncommon (for an international exhibition) restraint was dictated by shipping space restrictions and the inclusion of the furniture primarily for its demonstration of the potential of native timbers rather than the virtuoso cabinetmaking skills of individual local craftsmen.

Details of the process of organising the Tasmanian contribution to the London exhibition survive in the records of the Royal Society of Tasmania and contemporary newspaper accounts. Minutes to the society's council meeting of 4 July 1850 record that "conversation ensued on the propriety of forwarding to the Great Exhibition ... such of the productions of Van Diemen's Land as many seem likely to prove useful to the Colony."⁹ And by November potential contributors to the London exhibition were invited to submit their entries to a special exhibition in the ballroom at Government House (19-23 November).¹⁰ Selection from these entries was made by a committee established from members of the Royal Society. The exhibition was reported regularly in the press, several reports drawing attention to the timber and furniture exhibits: "The different descriptions of wood, in our opinion, were by far the most beautiful part of the Exhibition ... Nothing can excel the Huon Pine, Dog, or Musk woods for beauty, lightness and durability. We have no doubt that the tables, chairs and sideboards made of them, will realise high prices in London, no less from their novelty than general appearance."¹¹ However, the *Colonial Times* and *Tasmanian* also saw fit to take the opportunity to criticise the use in some of the furniture of "two descriptions of woods ... nothing can be more offensive to the eye. This false taste was also displayed conspicuously in a native cat skin rug, in which some common house cat skins were interspersed."¹²

Despite the newspaper report's confidence that the furniture "would realise high prices in London", the Tasmanian commissioner in London, Charles McLachlan, wrote in January 1852, "Not being able to get any offer for the furniture sent, I have returned it to the parties with the exception of a small loo table which only brought 5 pounds."¹³ Disappointing though it must have been not to be able to attract pur-

chasers for the furniture in London, we can take some comfort from the knowledge that Tasmanian pieces from the Great Exhibition probably still survive somewhere in Australia. The likelihood of their identification is another matter!

Notes

1. *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations 1851. Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue*, London, Vol 2, p993.
2. *Colonial Times*, 28 August 1829, p2.
3. *Hobart Town Courier*, 22 August 1852.
4. Despite the fact that the Great Exhibition paper label attributes the making ('fecit') of the table to Champion the catalogue does not actually list him as a cabinetmaker. The presence of the Champion stamps on the table could easily have misled exhibition officials identifying contributions.
5. See K. Fahy & A. & S. Simpson, *Nineteenth Century Australian Furniture*, David Ell, Sydney, 1985, Pl.57 and Fig.122.
6. In 1969 a copy of *Designs for Furniture* with "William Hamilton & Sons" inscribed on the fly leaf was found in Sydney. *Ibid.*, p125.
7. A William Briggs, who began working for William Hamilton about 1848, achieved a reputation later in Hobart as a carver of skill and ability. *Ibid.*, p126.
8. *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry ...*, *op. cit.*, p992.
9. Council of the Royal Society of Tasmania Quarterly General Meeting, 4 July 1850, Royal Society of Tasmania Library, Hobart.
10. Royal Society of Tasmania Committee Meeting, 11 November 1850.
11. *Colonial Times* and *Tasmanian*, 29 November 1850.
12. *Colonial Times* and *Tasmanian*, 22 November 1850.
13. Archives Office of Tasmania, Hobart, ref. CS024/173/5015. This table, No. 148, was submitted by Governor Denison.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Julian Bickersteth, International Conservation Services, Sydney for assistance with construction analysis of the two tables and to the following Hobart institutions for their invaluable research – Royal Society of Tasmania Library, State Library of Tasmania and the Archives Office of Tasmania.

Purchase of Staffordshire Figurines by the Australiana Fund

Margaret Betteridge

The Australiana Fund successfully acquired at Christies South Kensington auction in London on 10 June 1993 a number of Staffordshire figures from the Shockledge collection. The figures include Sir John and Lady Franklin, William Smith O'Brien and Mrs O'Brien and Arthur Orton. They are of considerable Australian historical importance, the only other known examples in Australia being in a private Sydney collection and all are listed and illustrated in Pugh's book on Staffordshire Figures.

1. Sir John and Lady Franklin (Figure 1)

Made by the Alpha Factory, Staffordshire circa 1845-47, the figures are described as very rare. Sir John Franklin (Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land 1837-1843) stands erect in naval uniform, holding a telescope in both hands. The likeness to images of Sir John Franklin is excellent. Lady Franklin is portrayed wearing a wreath around her head and is dressed in a bodice with puffed sleeves and a full skirt, and a shawl draped over her arms. Both figures are inscribed on the base and stand 26.5cm tall. It is probably that these figures were made about the time that Sir John Franklin was invited to lead the expedition to find the North West Passage and his subsequent disappearance.

2. William Smith O'Brien and Mrs O'Brien (Figure 2)

Made by the Alpha Factory, Staffordshire circa 1848, these figures commemorate Young Ireland party member William Smith O'Brien's participation in the insurrection of 1848. He and his fellow party members were convicted of high treason



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

and received death sentences which were commuted to transportation to Van Diemen's Land for life. The prisoners were offered a ticket-of-leave if they agreed to sign a parole. All accepted except O'Brien who was sent first to Maria Island and later to Port Arthur where he remained until 1854 when he was conditionally pardoned provided he did not return to Ireland. William Smith O'Brien (17cm) is seated, bareheaded, wearing a long coat, jacket, trousers and shoes, his hands manacled. The figure of his wife, the rarer of the two, is depicted arising from a chair. She is wearing a lace collar, bell sleeves and a wide flounced skirt and a shawl over her head (19cm). Both figures and inscribed on the base.

3. Arthur Orton (Figure 3)

Made by Sampson Smith, Staffordshire, circa 1873, this figure stands 37.5cm tall. The subject is standing, with a bird in his left hand, a gun in his right hand. He is wearing a beaver hat, overcoat, coat, cravat, trousers strapped under the instep, and black pumps. The figure is inscribed on the base "Sir R. Tichbourne", the name Orton used in his fraudulent claims to secure

title to a baronetcy and land following the drowning at sea of Robert Charles Tichbourne. The date of this figure coincides with the opening of his trial in April 1873 in London against a background of public support for Orton. Orton settled in Australia in 1852. From 1864 to 1866, under the name of Thomas Castro, he was employed as a butcher in Wagga Wagga, NSW.

The "Alpha Factory" was named by Thomas Balston to identify the makers of "an important group of figures (of white porcelainous clay), all sitting or standing, which can be recognised as emanating from one factory" was active between 1845-1851.

The acquisition of these figures is a significant coup for the Fund. I am indebted to Alan Landis who brought them to the Fund's attention and acted on our behalf. It is worth noting that the price paid for these figures, which was well below Christie's top estimate compare very favourably with the Staffordshire figure of Captain Cook purchased by the Fund in 1988. Another Staffordshire figure in the Fund's collection is of the Australian bushranger Frank Gardiner.

Treasures from Private Collections

This exhibition in September 1993 by the National Gallery (Victoria) Women's Association, Melbourne included a wealth of Australiana lent by private collectors from Victoria NSW, Canberra and Queensland.

Its display of over some 500 items included about 200 examples of early Australian jewellery from many sources providing a unique opportunity to study and compare a large

body of this work, believed to be the largest collection of Australian colonial jewellery ever assembled. Highlights were two "Charlotte Medals", one dated January 20 1788, predating the accepted date of European settlement at Sydney Cove. Another was an elaborate gold brooch presented to Lola Montez, the "Bijou of Ballarat" in 1855.

Apart from English and European antiques of note the exhibi-

tion included a wide variety of Australiana, including early furniture, silver, paintings and watercolours, ceramics, needlework, wood carving and scrimshaw. The catalogue also includes an important essay by Terence Lane "Antiques in Victoria: Collectors and Collections" and is still available at a modest price from the above Association, 180 St Kilda Road, Melbourne.

Book Reviews

Kevin Fahy

Early Australian Samplers 1831-1940, Embroiderers Guild Victoria, 170 Wattleree Road, Malvern, Vic. 3144, 1989, soft cover, 36 pages (r.r.p. \$5 plus \$1.10 postage).

This excellent publication illustrates 34 samplers selected from the exhibition "Early Australian Samplers" held by the Embroiderers Guild of Victoria in 1988 as part of the Bicentenary Celebrations. The history and development of Australian society and embroidery is documented in these samplers. The ages of the workers vary greatly as does the quality of workmanship. Largely the work of teenage girls, an early example was worked by a six-year-old boy! While, as to be expected, the subjects are stereotype, a sampler by Janet Barr aged 17 dated 1858, depicts in fine detail her house and garden at Kangaroo Ground which is still

extant.

An important record of our domestic crafts history this booklet deserves a place in the reference library of all Australiana collectors.

Legacy in Sculptured Wood: An Appreciation of the Work of John Kendrick Blogg, 1851-1936, by Marjorie Morgan, Marjorie Morgan Publications, PO Box 300, Blackburn, Vic 3130, 1993, soft cover, 102 pages (r.r.p. \$25 plus \$3 postage).

Canadian born John Kendrick Blogg came to Melbourne in 1877. A successful industrial chemist, his business specialised in a wide range of pharmaceutical products which included cordials and perfumery of imported but largely local origin. He possessed considerable literary, particularly poetic, talent, but they are completely overshadowed by his wood

carving skill.

Between 1901 and 1932 he produced a variety of wood carving both in panel form and as carved furniture. Varying in size, shape and complexity of subject, most were to feature Australiana flora carved in native timbers.

Despite a prodigious output for family, friends, official and ecclesiastical commission (the latter included Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist churches in Melbourne and Adelaide) few examples of his work are to be found in public collections.

His life-like wafer thin carvings of gum leaves and gumnuts assure him a premier place in the history of Australian craftsmanship. The author of this publication has served her subject well. It includes Blogg's essay on "The Art of Woodcarving" (1929) and his own list of some 300 examples of his work.

From the Editor's Desk

The Editor, on behalf of the Society, would like to acknowledge the contributions of three former committee members who have recently resigned.

John Houstone has been an active and valued member for many years. He has been an important contributor to our Journal and undertook the tedious task of compiling its published Index, Vols 6-12 and its yet to be published Volumes 13-15. He has greatly increased the value of the Journal as a research source for all Australiana collectors. He has also enlivened many of our meetings by sharing with his fellow members items from his own collection, as I am sure he will continue to do in the future. Dr David Bedford, our former Editor, is to be congratulated

on his recent appointment as Director of the Royal Tasmanian Botanic Gardens, Hobart. Our loss is certainly Tasmania's gain, but David will no doubt keep us all informed of current Australiana discoveries in Van Diemen's Land.

Les Carlisle has also been an active member of our Committee and a former vice-president. He gave considerable support to his fellow committee members. His absence will be greatly missed.

I would like to take this opportunity of welcoming Kevin Skelsey and Caressa Crouch to our Committee as their replacements.

The Australiana Society's Committee has suffered a further loss, with the resignation of its secretary Graham Cocks. He has tirelessly

performed this onerous task for eight years. The success of our Society has been due in no small way to his efforts, together with Ann Cocks. They have organised and catered for our meetings at Glover Cottage as well as having arranged various outings and inspections for the Society. Graham (and Ann's) contribution to the editing and despatch of our journal has been considerable. Thank God they are prepared to continue this role. They are this Editor's left and right hands.

Our new Secretary is Kevin Skelsey. His introduction of Judy Birmingham as a guest speaker for our last lecture resulted in a large and receptive audience and promises well for our future.

Archaeology & Australiana

The last meeting of the Australiana Society was addressed by Judy Birmingham, Associate Professor and head of the Prehistory and Archaeology, School of Archaeology, University of Sydney. Her subject was "Collectables in Context: Sir John Jamison's Tableware Down the Regentville Drain".

Regentville, near Penrith NSW, was built between 1823 and 1825 for Sir John Jamison on his inherited and additionally acquired estate which was said to encompass 9,000 acres. Built by "almost the richest man in the colony" and described as "the finest thing of its kind in New South Wales", it was substantially of stone, containing an entrance hall and 15 rooms with extensive service and outbuildings.

It contained a circular staircase of stone, cedar joinery and mantelpieces of colonial marble. The exterior featured a 'tasteful' Colonnade to the front elevation and on each side surmounted by a balcony of imported cast iron. The architect is said to have been the Knight of Regentville himself but may well have been Francis Greenway.

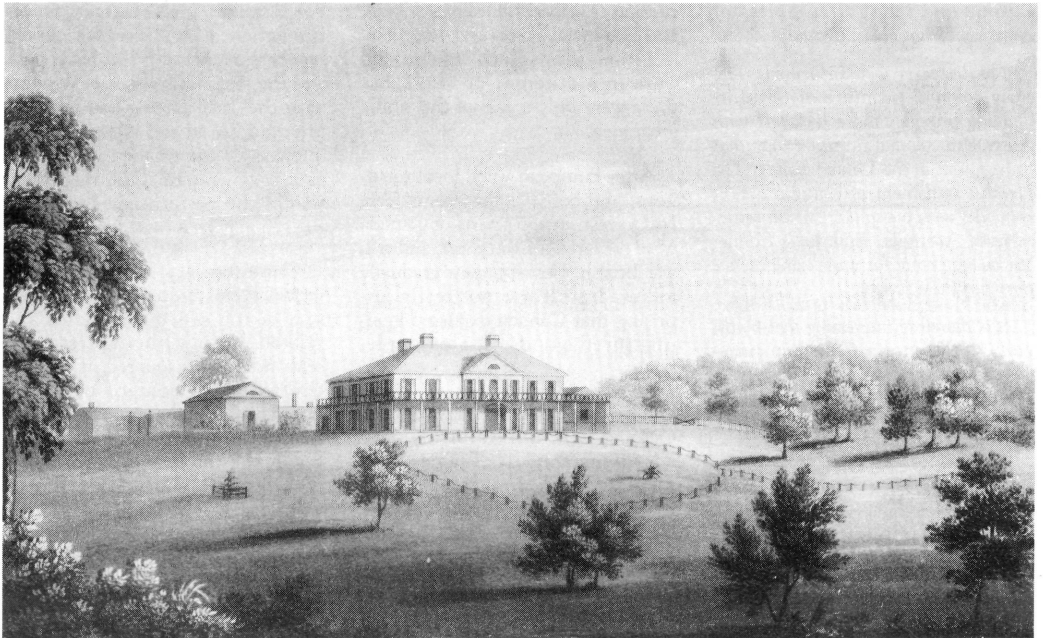
At the time of his death in 1844 Sir John Jamison was in reduced circumstances. His family sold the property in 1847. It briefly served as a private lunatic asylum and later as a hotel. It burnt down under suspicious circumstances in 1869.

Over time, the site was looted for its building materials. Its stone blocks enriched several buildings in

Penrith. As late as 1937 the Red Cow Inn, Penrith, was said to boast of a stained glass window from the chapel (?) at Regentville as well as 'some splendid cedar doors and some really magnificent bow-shaped cupboards'.

Of its original furnishings and fittings nothing is known. Sir John Jamison was noted for his lavish hospitality, even prior to the construction of his mansion. In 1819 French visitors were to visit his then residence built by his father and were to comment on their dinner 'served with a wealth of silver which we little expected to meet in these lately wild regions'. In 1835, it is said he gave a ball to 300 guests that cost him about £800.

The archaeological finds in



Regent Villa, an engraving by J. Clark from *Lt Breton's Excursions in New South Wales, Western Australia and Van Diemen's Land ...* (London 1833). A similar colonial engraving by J. Wilson was published in Sydney 1835, 1838 and 1839.

recent years (largely from a privy or W.C.) corroborate his lifestyle. Fragments of significant domestic ceramics and glassware of contemporary English origin span the Jamison period and later.

Of other artefacts discovered, the most telling is a single gilt brass button with the Jamison crest and motto. The use of such buttons for the livery of household servants was an affectation not unknown among the colonial gentry.

Regentville is a major archaeological site. Artefacts excavated there provide us with firm evidence of the lifestyle of the Knight of Regentville and that of those who worked on his estate. They also extend beyond the period of the Jamison family occupancy of the site. While of imported origin they are Australian in that they provide firm evidence of the designs and styles as well as manufacturers of those goods that were present and used by our colonial forebears

during the early 19th century.

Notes

Connah, G. 'Historical Reality: Archaeological Reality. Excavations at Regentville, Penrith, New South Wales 1985', *Australian Journal of Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 4 1986; 'Sir John Jamison' and 'Thomas Jamison', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 2 (Carlton, Vic. 1967); J. Fairfax, *Historic Roads Round Sydney*, (Sydney 1951); G. Mackaness, *Fourteen Journeys Over the Blue Mountains 1813-1841*, (Sydney 1965); D. Dundas, *The Art of Conrad Martens*, (Artarmon 1979) Plate 61.

Canadian Furniture in Australia

A reader of our journal has written to the editor that our quest for seeking sources of furniture in Australia during the 19th and early 20th centuries should extend beyond the British Isles, Europe and the United States of America. What about Canada?

The letter is well informed. The early colonial furniture of (British) Canada provides more parallels with Australian colonial furniture than that to be found in the United States. The Loyalist settlement of Ontario almost coincides with the initial English settlement of Australia. Both were frontier land where basic form took precedence over furniture style.

It is therefore interesting that by the early 20th century Canadian furniture was to find an export market in Australia.

The history of furniture making in Canada, although dating much farther back – his parallels with Australia. Under French, British and American influences, fine furniture was made for clients, and small factories made chairs for the ordinary

people. But, as in Australia, this was not for export. Canada as we know it, did not exist. To many people, Canada was a vast land with iced-up rivers; and so poor communication; a barter economy; and produced skins and furs. The Maritime towns, long established, were in a different position, but these were only a part of the whole great area.

After European wars, local rebellions, and border adjustments were laid to rest, in 1867 parts of Canada were declared a Dominion, and this was British. Development gradually followed, so it was not really surprising that Canada exported manufactured goods: for example, chairs.

The *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 16 October 1909, carried line-illustrated advertisements for two city retailers. James Anderson, Rundle Street, offered 'High backed, Canadian Dining Chairs ... 5/6': Max Swift, Hindley Street, went one better: 'just landed ... Canadian Chairs ... Special Price 5/11 ...'. (Say 55 and 60 cents respectively.) The chairs were not unlike those made by the Mel-

bourne Chair Company, and prices about the same. But looking at the drawings, some of the Canadian models appear to have been more sturdily built than the local ones. For instance, the construction was strengthened by a screwed, curved bracket, connecting the back stays and the seat. This was a weak point with the local chairs, and it is not uncommon to see an angle-iron screwed, or even nailed in position as a rough repair. One might say that if the pattern is a kangaroo, the job may be a little better.

Canadian stylistic variations included steam-pressed patterns on seat or top-rail, turned ends and stretchers, or without stretchers, seats round and squared. If sold "in the white" a coat of paint for kitchen use, and stain and varnish for the dining room, would have given the imports a competitive place in the market. Presently, what we do not know is whether the importation of Canadian chairs continued or not. The makers were certainly trying – bearing in mind shipping costs. However, the press could hardly object to Empire imports, against the long-deplored American.

'The Man from Snowy River'

Sydney Grammar School has recently acquired an Australian cast iron hitching post with a horse's head finial on a floreat capital surmounting a squared column with a circular attachment ring. A brass oval plaque is inscribed 'Presented to Andrew Barton Paterson by the Staff of Sydney Grammar School'. It is also dated 1902(?).

Andrew Barton (Banjo) Paterson (1864-1941), poet and author of Australia's unofficial anthem 'Waltzing Matilda', was a student at Sydney Grammar School 1874-1880.

As a young man he was a keen horseman. He rode to hounds with the Sydney Hunt Club, was a keen polo player and as an amateur rider competed at Randwick and Rose Hill.

This type of hitching post is likely of American derivation. Similar examples have been widely reproduced in America and Australia in cast iron and other metal in recent

years.

An early Australian cast iron hitching post once stood outside the Albion Hotel, Forbes, NSW. The hotel was built in 1861 and rebuilt in 1891. It carried a cast applied plaque of the ironmongers 'W.A. Friend & Co., Sydney', its likely retailer rather than manufacturer. It was sold at Sotheby's Melbourne, 29 June 1987, for \$5,000.

A more unusual example with a finial of a standing boy wearing riding gear, the left arm outstretched holding an iron ring was once prominent in High Street, Maitland, NSW. It was most likely of American origin.

Another, of certain Australian origin, once stood in Bouverie Street, Carlton, Victoria. Surmounted by a beer barrel it carried a cast inscription 'Carlton/Edward Latham/Prize Ales/Brewery'. Edward Latham (1839-1905) was an early proprietor of the Carlton Brewery, Melbourne.



Hitching Post.

Colonial 'Grandfather' Clocks

The most sought-after and of the greatest rarity for Australiana collectors are cedar longcase clocks by James Oatley (c.1770-1839).

"James Oatley & His Long Case Clocks - a list and bibliography" by K. Fahy, *Australiana*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Feb. 1992) notes some two dozen examples of his known and recorded work. Since that publication a further example of his work has been located. It is a shortcased clock, numbered 23 and dated 1822.

The editor has recently sighted No. 51, 1827 which removes its

previously queried number from Reported to Fact.

James R. Lawson sold at auction on 24 November for \$80,000, plus premium, an important undated and unnumbered Oatley longcase clock from the estate of the late Mrs Nina Steele-Park of Merriwa. While included in the above list, it is 240cm in height and should therefore be regarded as a "Tall" rather than a "Short" example. Its domed hood is similar to No. 21, 1822, formerly in the McAlpine Collection. It has lengthy family provenance and was loaned for

exhibition at the Mudgee Antique Fair, 1965.

See cover illustration.

A South Australian Travelling Companion

Explore the Barossa (paperback, 160pp) was recently published by the SA Government Printer at a RRP of \$24.95. It is now available from the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (SA branch) Inc. at \$15 plus \$5 packing and post-

age (c/- State Library of SA, North Terrace, Adelaide, SA 5000).

This publication is a perfect regional guide. An easy read, this volume is loaded with historical fact and practical information essential for any tourist/visitor. It is

a model of tourist literature. Essential reading for every serious Barossa visitor.

Ease of access, comfortable in price, the Barossa offers the Australiana buff an immediate touch of Europe in a local context.

The Future of the Australiana Society

The drop in Society membership by 30% as reported in the latest Secretary's Report and Treasurer's Statement (Australiana, 15 [3], August 1993) has left our Committee with little alternative than to increase membership subscriptions in order to survive and continue the production of our quarterly Journal at its present size, regularity and level of quality. The Secretary invited members to express their opinions. While only two have replied they have made a number of excellent suggestions which will be considered by the Committee.

Alan Landis, also a member of the Wedgwood Society and the Silver Society, writes that the former has some 250 members and attracts about 30 to its 11 meetings per annum; the latter has an attendance of about 50 of its 75 mem-

bers at its bi-monthly meetings. Their subscription rates are \$30 and \$35 respectively. The Wedgwood Society produces 11 sixteen-page newsletters annually and the Silver Society 6 of four pages. The Australiana Society produces a quarterly well illustrated Journal of 28 pages which would seem excellent value to local, country and interstate members. It also meets bi-monthly. Alan's fund raising suggestions include regular 'raffles' at meetings; a full day Australiana Seminar, including lunch and printed information that may attract country and interstate members unable to attend our bi-monthly evening meetings; organised bus tours to visit country antique shops; and that guest speakers provide a copy of their lecture so that a printed text can be made available to country and

interstate members at a nominal charge.

Robin Hunt, an interstate member, writes that the Journal remains his only contact with the Society. He raises the question should we be trying to sell Journal Subscriptions as opposed to Memberships via advertisements in National Trust Newsletters (NSW and Vic.), the Australian Antique Collector, &c., as well as handout membership leaflets in interstate antique shops. Alternatively should we face a drop in quality of the Journal and go to a word processor production, offset printed and stapled format?

The Australiana Society Committee welcomes all the above suggestions. I am disappointed at the poor response from membership to our Secretary's plea. Without your support we will cease to exist.

Contributions Please ...

We require articles urgently for our Australiana journal.

We would appreciate if our members doing research into aspects of Australiana "would put pen to paper and let us have the fruits of your labours for publication".

Please forward your submissions to: The Editor, Australiana, PO Box 322, Roseville NSW 2069.
Fax (02) 416 7143.



Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I must reply to the article on "Furniture Polishing Techniques in NSW before 1840" by R.A. Crosbie, Vol 15, No 3 (August 1993).

While it is true that all wooden goods had some degree of finish on them, it must be understood why. Timber takes in moisture from its surrounding "climate" and it also loses water – it can be termed somewhat of a sponge. At ECM for say Sydney timber will hold a water content of (for average conditions) 10-15%. Trying to hold timber stable using northern hemisphere techniques (be it for building timbers, furniture, kegs or spinning tops) at the time with our harsh sun/high humidity in summer and low humidity in winter would have been a daunting task and certainly educational.

So, the first reason for a finish on timber is to seal it from dramatic moisture loss on both the face cuts and end grain. Secondly, the timber (an organic rotting medium) has to be protected from the elements and human contact.

Thirdly, the construction is enhanced by some form of surface coating – oil paint, bitumen, oil, whitewash, wax. Timber finishing in the various trades may dictate many finishing requirements so I will confine my knowledge here to timber in the cabinetmaking trades, to serve this reply the best way possible.

Traditional wood finishes for furniture over the last three hundred years have not altered a great deal. Oak furniture of the Middle Ages responded reasonably well to being daubed with vegetable oils (e.g. cold pressed flax or poppy), tallow or wax, albeit that upon drying and polymerising (slowly), the oils took in dirt and bacteria which invariably sent the furniture black.

This black lustrous finish is now sought after in genuine antique oak furniture.

The need for an oil that dried quicker, flowed easily and gave a better gloss saw the derivation of boiled, pre-polymerised (by sunlight) oil and their mixture with pure turpentine (i.e. vegetable not mineral) resulted in the first of the brushable varnishes.

(I shall dispense with the boring chemistry and chronology for the purpose of this article.)

The minerals of the earth and gums from the forests provided further hardeners, elasticisers and enhancers to the brushable varnishes and so the varnish makers of Europe developed the marvellous long oil varnishes of which we see examples of their lasting qualities, e.g. Stradivarius violins, great inlay/marquetry furniture of Italy and France. Asia had developed by this the BEST timber enhancer/preserver in the world – Chinese lacquer. This finish, the result of a simple process from vegetable origin (purification of sap from a tree similar to the Rhus of which we are all too familiar with in this country – another disagreeable introduction) is still, in my opinion, the best finish for all reasons, in the world.

Now parallel to the varnish developments in Europe, there was always the cheap side (nothing has changed, has it?). Seedlac (the most basic and purest form of shellac, despite some twigs and dead bugs) steeped in an alcohol was the lowest form of spirit varnish. (The refined seedlac produced products known as Flake Shellac, Button Shellac, Ruby, Garnet, White, etc.) Sometimes these products are dissolved in spirits (usually methylated) and labelled "French Polish". I disagree with such labelling, you DO French Polish, you BUY

Shellac solution – however, I shall explain this later. The quick drying qualities of seedlac over the long oil varnishes was recognised as getting a high build onto the show side of the timber within a day or two against months for oil varnish, it was applied by brush and cut and polished between coats with fine abrasive such as tripoli powder. Also all sides of the timber were coated for protection.

Now this process is still used today for general domestic furniture where the manufacturer may desire a natural finish rather than the gun-blown coatings around in modern industry. It requires no skill at all as all brush marks and runs can be levelled out with abrasive. The varnisher and decorator was a separate trade from the 1600s onwards. During all these periods, there was not just clear finishing, objects in wood were decorated in gold, silver, stones, brass, total or partial painting (polychrome) or in combination with gold (parcel gilt) as well as wax over anything. Now wax also has a fantasy following and in my opinion, as far as furniture finishing is concerned, beeswax should *stay with bees*. Carnauba wax on the other hand is another proposition but its preparation is outside the realms of this article.

So while human habitation expanded, empires came and went, forests were denuded, wars, famines and love were all created and destroyed, man went about making goods in wood – a medium easily obtainable and shaped.

And man being basically lazy and looking for the short-cut decided that the brushable long oil varnishes were time consuming. It was the French family Martin, noted carriage builders and varnishers, who took up the existing material shellac, together with other gums and resins, and created the method

of laying it by means of a lubricated pad and this was the late 18th century. The process was very fast, provided a hard bright finish, was cheap but did require skill. It could be produced with any degree of sheen from matt to full gloss and it was the highly decorated pieces or pianos that had a full 'piano' finish laid upon them. This latter process required the use of abrasive throughout and a final compound of acid and powder to pick up any 'feral' oil. The process, for the benefit of this article, need not be fully explained, enough to say it was a French devised process using existing materials – hence French polishing. At the same time of the late 18th century, Sheraton (a dreamer, not perhaps a craftsman), described a method of finishing mahogany, of rubbing linseed oil and red abrasive (Bath brick dust) to build up the 'hand rubbed' oil finish – again a quick and reliable timber finish.

So back to Sydney. The five processes brought here for furniture finishing in the English manner were (1) Long oil varnishing, (2) Hand rubbed oil, (3) Wax finishing, (4) Shellacking, and (5) French

Polishing. Of course, the very best of furniture available was English or indeed English antiques but locally made goods would have the option by demand of the client (or need) or the resultant charge by the manufacturer. It is therefore reasonable to expect that most locally produced furniture would have been 'shellacked' – (in earlier days) brush laid, quick drying, hand cut – out the door – fast. Over the last two hundred years, it would be impossible to pick the difference between the two processes of shellac laying, use and abuse gives rise to that marvellous universal terminology for dirty furniture – patination.

French Polishing the very fast way, that is laid and pulled only from the 'rubber' was certainly known and would have been used in Sydney. The colony was not on another planet and new methods in the arts move quickly around the world and by the 1790s, everyone knew about it, besides any cabinet-maker could only take pride in finishing his work (whether by him or a polisher) after making – the myth that in Sydney, cabinetry was never 'finished' can only be described as

that – a myth. (Stubbornness by a mature worker to change his ways is perhaps a feasible excuse for the great overlapping of methods.)

Wax or oil finishing was not in any culture preferred over a hard or soft timber. Cedar (select) could not be termed soft in cabinet terms (though it does not RATE in world cabinet timbers) nor does varnish (which French polish is) obscure the grain. The hardness of French polishing can only be reflected on the purity of the raw products, shelf life of the made-up solution and the skill of the craftsmen.

Of course, French polishing was widespread by 1836 – there was more furniture made and demand brings faster times and this French method is the fastest, most environmentally friendly finish known yet.

Perhaps the Society would like me to present a lecture/demonstration on simple furniture finishing in the future. I shall react accordingly to the demand.

Yours faithfully,

Paul F. Gregson

Conservator and Director,
Gregson's Conservation, Sydney

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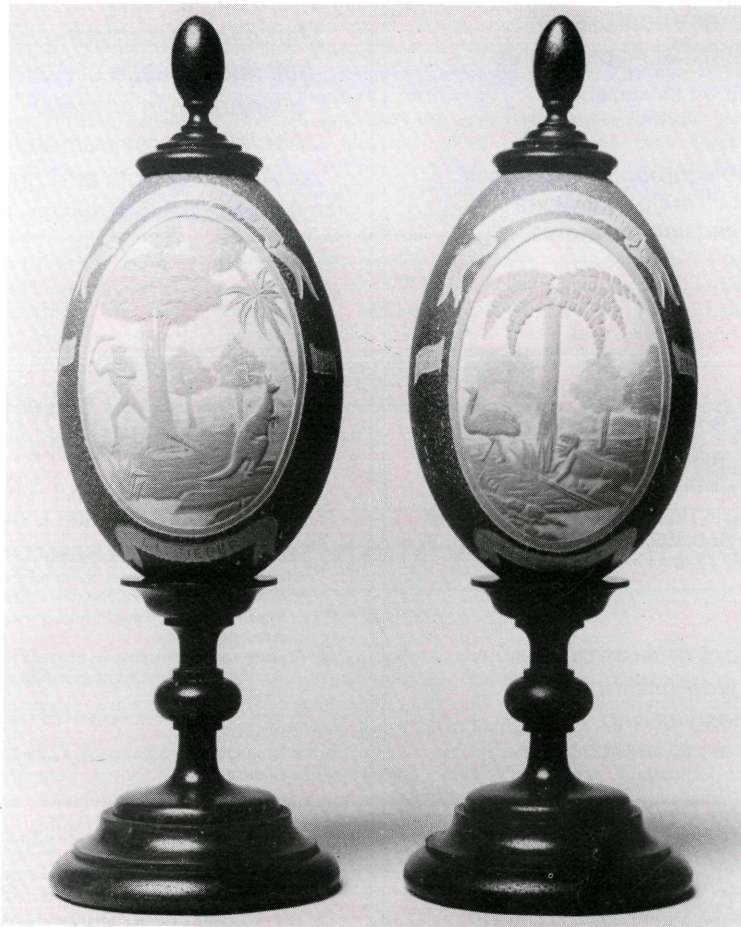


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