

A Regional Perspective on the Innovative Development of Light Chairs

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The main intention of this study is to identify original decorative finishes applied to 'light' chairs attributable to workshops in north-west England, and to evaluate the iconography integral to such decorative effects. Much of this symbolism is associated with botanical, neo-Classical and Chinoiserie-related ideas and concepts which had evolved from the early eighteenth century and may reflect a customer preference.

This is a preliminary study involving paint analysis of chairs which can be matched to maker's records or designs. For example, late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century records of firms such as Gillows of Lancaster, in the form of their *Colour Pattern Book* (1775–1800) and their various *Estimate Sketch Books*, provide an insight into the type of 'light' chairs that were to be japanned or painted. Ackermann's *Repository of Arts* of August 1814 refers to the use or purpose served by light chairs as being for best bedrooms, secondary drawing rooms and routs.¹ A four-seater settee version of the rush-seated 'Feather top rail' chair (Figure 27) has been recorded suggesting its use, probably together with side chairs, in a secondary drawing room or hall.

Other purposes for which light chairs were made are indicated by illustrations such as the engraving of Lady Milner seated within a garden, by William Henderson in the manner of George Romney; an oil painting of 'Londoners Gypsing' in a rural location by Charles Robert Leslie (1820), and 'Life at the Seaside (Ramsgate Sands)' by William Powell Frith (1854). However, the decorative detail included in Gillow's *Colour Pattern Book* (Figure 12) is sparse and seldom appears to match surviving examples. Likewise the *Estimate Sketch Books* occasionally include drawings of light chairs and Windsor chairs accompanied by costings, sub-divided into making, painting and materials, etc.

Typical examples are to be found on a page from the *Estimate Sketch Book* of 1802,² which includes a basic cost for the painting by George Hutton of the 'Ellis Pattern' chair (4s.), the 'Feather top rail Pattern' chair (3s. 6d.), and the 'Denison Pattern' chair (4s. 6d.). Entries for other categories of chairs, such as the drawing-room chairs for John Shaw Stewart, briefly describe the decorative finish to be applied as 'Rosewood, Gold with Flowers in top Rail'. The cost of painting was estimated at 11 shillings on 26 February 1803.³

In the same year, painting and varnishing of a 'Whitewood Chair' was described as follows: 'The tablet with lightly finished groups of variegated flower colours to nature upon a dark ground etc.'. The cost of gilding was £1 6s. 3d. and the painting was 7s.⁴

My aim is to unravel and determine some of the original decorative schemes which often comprised groundwork followed by one or more layers of pigmented oils or varnishes. Sometimes it is worth questioning whether the paint scheme which is visible

¹ Ackermann (August) 1814.

² 344/98, fol. 1703.

³ 344/98, fol. 1662.

⁴ Ibid.

today counts as an after-thought applied to a rush-seated light chair which one would normally expect to be stained and sold at the cheaper end of the market.⁵ For example, Gillows' *Estimate Sketch Book* of 1801 indicates a cost of 6d. for 'Staining Wax Sprigs' on a version of the rush-seated 'Liverpool Chair Stained'.⁶ This compares with a painting cost by George Hutton of 3s. 6d. for a single 'Feather top rail' chair designed in 1802. The total cost was 9s. 6d. Only paint analysis can reveal more about the previous history of surface treatment in this respect. Analysis of this kind was particularly useful when applied to a painted Dales rush-seated chair (Figure 37).

A Cheshire workshop ledger dating from 1821 to 1849 provides an indication of the diversity of decorative schemes applied to various cane- and rush-seated light chairs and Windsor chairs as listed on page 10 of the ledger, titled 'Prices of Chairs Painted' (Figure 1).

Various types of Grecian-back chairs with cane seats, common cane chairs, single bow backs, twist backs and gallery backs could be supplied with a painted bamboo finish. Chairs that were also listed included fan backs painted shaded green, ladder backs painted without ribs and a few ornaments, tablet backs painted black and yellow and Windsor chairs painted green. Other categories of furniture in the ledger included a 'deal loby [sic] chest painted bamboo' and various painted wash stands and matching dressing tables (Appendix 1), which were no doubt intended to be compatible or match some of the painted chairs within an interior setting.

The diversity of decorative schemes applied to light chairs emanating from just one workshop in the 1820s suggests the scale of activity which might be expected in other workshops (Appendix 2) supplying painted chairs elsewhere in the north-west region, during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

The ledger referred to above, forming part of the Arderne family papers in the Chester Record Office, not only includes 'Prices of Chairs Painted', dated 22 March 1822, but pages 11 and 12 list under separate headings 'Prices of Stained Chairs' and 'Prices of Chairs Common'.⁷ The Ardernes were hereditary Chief Foresters of the Delamere Forest, Cheshire, and their estates centred on Tarporley.

Although the name of the workshop remains uncertain, previous research by Nicholas Moore into the customer base and the names of the journeymen employed, suggests that the workshop was situated in Chester.⁸

Some of the terminology used is at times obscure, but illustrations attached to the list of Stained Chairs on page 11, provide an occasional clue to terms such as 'Gothick backs' and 'Greacen Back Chairs ... with 5 uprights' (Figure 2). The term 'uprights' is used in the Arderne ledger to describe the equivalent of decoratively turned spindles. The term 'spindle' contained in the text relating to the first, third and fourth illustrations appears to be a contemporary term for chair stretchers. For example, the text attached to the first illustration refers to a 'Greacen Back Chair with cane seat turned feet and spindles Stained black this splat with twisted or straight reeds at ...'. The use

⁵ Cotton (1990), pp. 310–429.











⁶ 344/98, fol. 1620.

⁷ Cheshire Record Office, DAR/J/15.

⁸ Moore (1987), pp. 71–78.

1822
March-(10)
Prices of Chairs Painted

Double Gothic backs painted bamboo
 the Best way 6/9 & 7/3 if Booked
 Gallery backs with Broad top rails
 painted bamboo at 6/6 & 7/0 if Booked
 Gallery backs paint. bamboo at 6/0 & 6/6
 Plain bent rails painted bamboo
 at 5/0 and 5/6 if Booked
 Spencer backs stained black with
 painted bottoms 5/0 & 5/6 if Booked
 Tablet backs black & yellow painted
 at 6/6 & 7/0 if Booked.
 Saddle back painted without ribs. a
 few Ornaments 4/6 & 4/9
 Common cane chairs painted bamboo
 at 5/6 & 6/0
 Bow back Grecian Chairs painted
 bamboo with cane seat at
 Windsor Chairs Green at
 Grecian Gothic back painted bamboo
 with cane seat at
 Fan Back painted shaded green
 at
 Grecian back cane framed baraboo
 with cane seat at
 Grecian back with bows & Rose painted
 bamboo with cane seat at
 Twist Back bamboo at 6/6 & 7/0
 Grecian back cane seat & cuprights
 bamboo with cane seat at
 Cluster Back Bamboo at 6/2 & 7/3
 Scroll shell Grecian back with cane seat
 and broad top Rail
 single Bow back bamboo 7/0 & 7/6

1822 Prices of Stained Chairs	
March. Greacen Back Chair with cane seat turned feet and spindles stained black this flat with twisted or straight reed at	
See Box 64 Greacen Back Chair with cane seat hollow backs & legs rounded with twisted & turned top rail at	
Greacen Back Chair with cane seat and turned feet & spindles stained black with turned top rail at	
Leases Patron Chair with cane seat turned feet & spindles stained black at	
Greacen back Chair with cane seat and turned top rail stained black at	
Greacen Back Chair with cane seat board top, rail & 5 Uprights stained black at	
Greacen Back Chair with cane seat & board top, rail turned feet & spindles stained black at	
Greacen Back Chair with cane seat and hollow seat twisted in the backs & top rail stained black at	
Greacen back Chair with rush seat turned feet stained black at	
Gothick backs with cane seats and sweep backs turned in bolts stained black at	

stained black 24/6
 400 Rose wood 25/6
 Greacen in moreen
 if a cane seat 40
 top price.



3 Faux bamboo 'Square-back' chair, from Gillows' *Colour Pattern Book*, 1775–1800. Westminster City Archives, 735/1



4 Faux bamboo 'square-back' armchair with round cane seat, attributed to Gillows, c. 1775–1800. Private collection

of the term spindle is more akin to terminology used in the textile industry with respect to the plain spindle shaft housing a bobbin on the flyer mechanism of a spinning wheel.⁹

Examples of light chairs have also been found with rush and cane seats which match illustrations in Gillows' *Colour Pattern Book* (1775–1800). In the first part of this *Pattern Book*, a dark coloured 'Square Back' or bar-top single chair with 3 faux bamboo turned uprights and gilt or yellow bamboo nodals is illustrated (Figure 3) which matches the basic configuration of the cane-seated armchair (Figure 4) and is stamped c/reverse c. In the late eighteenth century, Gillows also described 'Square Back' chairs as 'upright splat chairs' with three or four such uprights.¹⁰

⁹ Baines (1982), p. 77.

¹⁰ 344/95, fol. 613; Stuart (2008), I, p. 187.



5 Faux bamboo 'square-back' side chair with round rush seat, attributed to Gillows, c. 1775–1800. *Private collection*



6 Faux bamboo 'square-back' side chair with a square frame, rush seat and rounded knees to front legs, attributed to Gillows, c. 1800. *Private collection*

Although the cane-seated armchair (Figure 4) referred to above (with its surviving squab cushion) displays a yellow ochre finish today, paint analysis has revealed that the original paint scheme had a japanned finish made up of a dark brown/black varnish. The varnish had been pigmented with lampblack in association with an organic brown stain applied to unstained wood. The second scheme comprised two coats of a red/brown iron oxide in an unknown medium, followed by a varnish tinted with particles of the same red/brown oxide. The third scheme, which is apparent today, is a buff-colour oil paint based on lead white, yellow ochre and a few particles of black. On top of the buff oil paint, a thin layer of brown varnish or glaze has been applied.

A round rush-seated single 'Square Back' chair (Figure 5) with a yellow ochre finish was also examined. Paint analysis revealed that the chair was originally given a ground coat of gesso followed by a cream-coloured oil paint and then a varnish layer. Earlier layers were particularly difficult to analyse because they showed evidence of being sanded down and subsequently fragmented. Certain fragments resting on the white gesso reveal a coat of cream-coloured oil paint. On other fragments, clearly visible on



7 Typical nineteenth-century
Dales rounded knee feature
integral to plain front legs.
Private collection

the faux bamboo uprights, small patches of blue are revealed which are made up of lead white and Prussian blue. The original finish may have been cream or blue, or cream mixed with blue. The most recent scheme comprises lead white followed by a thick layer of varnish, which was probably clear originally but has discoloured to a yellowish brown with age.

The chair illustrated in figure 6 has many similarities to the previous rush-seated chair in terms of its use of a faux bamboo 'Square Back', incorporating three faux bamboo turned uprights, except for the square seat frame supporting the rushwork, which generally replaced the round seat frame version (Figure 5) by the early nineteenth century, despite a much later revival by William Morris in the second half of the nineteenth century; for example, the 'Rosetti' Sussex chair. The use of a rounded knee feature on the front legs at seat level is a typical detail to be found on stained light chairs made in north-west England and particularly in the Dales throughout the nineteenth century (Figure 7). However the unusual set-back arm supports applied to the armchair version of figure 6 introduces a device which is used on figures 8 and 9, suggesting a similar workshop origin.

A further two versions of the 1790s 'Square Back' chair design incorporating three uprights have been recorded (Figures 10 and 11). The oval cane-seated version, stamped twice S H, is very similar to a Gillows design from page 30 of their *Colour Pattern*



8 Detail of underarm supports to a cane-seated armchair version of figure 6. *Private collection*



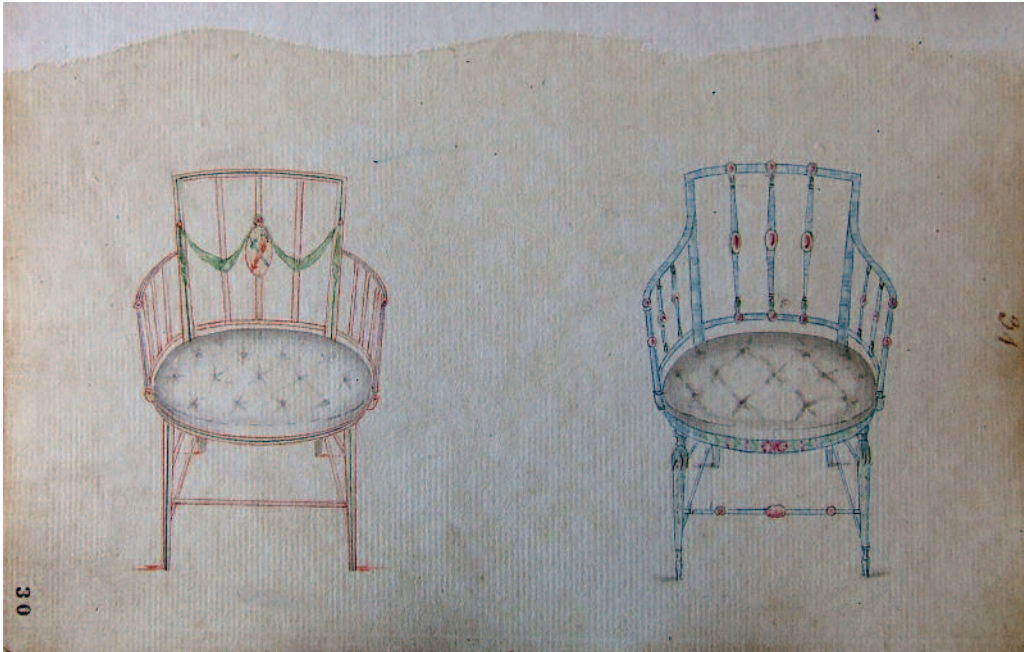
9 Detail of a similar underarm support applied to a multiple rib rush-seated armchair. *Private collection*



10 Oval cane-seated 'square-back' armchair, attributed to Gillows, c. 1775–1800. *Private collection*



11 Square frame rush-seated 'square-back' armchair, attributed to Gillows, c. 1775–1800. *Private collection*



12 Designs for chairs, Gillows' *Colour Pattern Book*, 1775–1800. Westminster City Archives, 735/1, fol. 31.

Book (Figure 12).¹¹ Paint analysis revealed that there was no sealing or ground coat applied to the clean wood surface. A brown/black paint comprising carbon black and umber particles was applied directly to the original wood surface. This oil paint had a fairly dense consistency as it did not soak into the wood fibres but formed a layer on the surface. It is uncertain as to whether the brown was deliberately added to the black to affect the colour or to act as a catalyst to stabilise the paint and speed up the drying process. The final layer was a coat of clear varnish which appears to have discoloured to a dark brown colour since it does not contain any pigment.

The rushwork on the other version (Figure 11) is supported by a square seat frame, a familiar device during the nineteenth century. The paint is now a dark green colour which maybe the result of an oxidation of the original surface finish.¹²

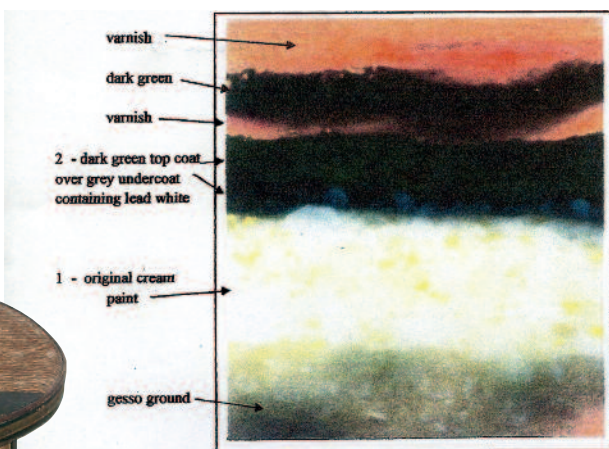
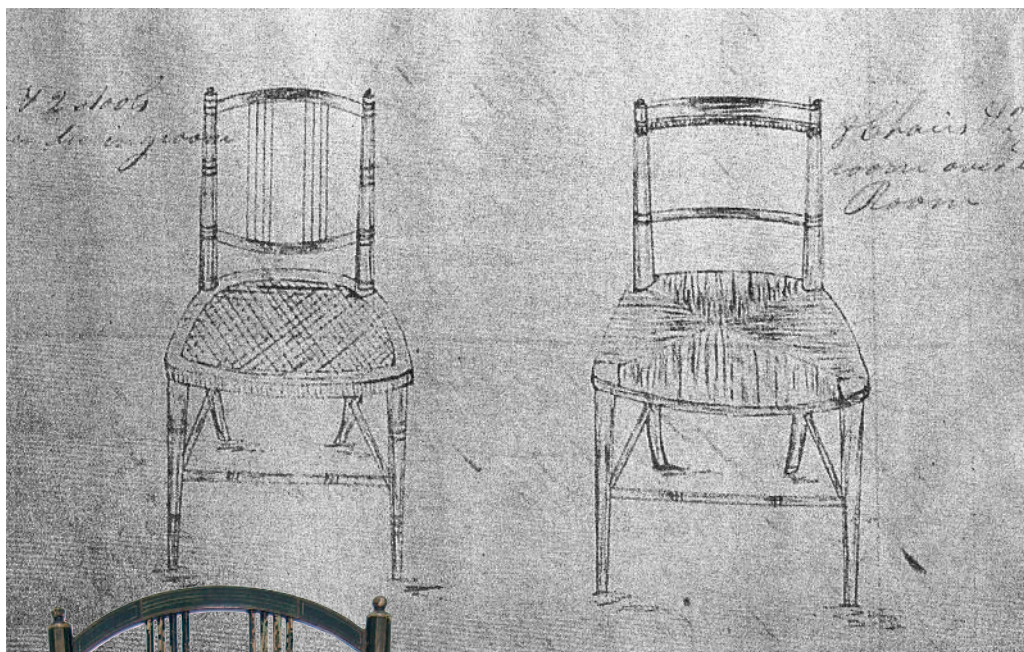
By 1800 Gillows had created three different designs for the bedrooms of Mr Henry Sudell's house in Blackburn (Figure 13). It has been possible to match two of these designs to surviving examples. The annotation relating to the left-hand drawing reads '8 chairs and 2 stools for room over dining room'.¹³

Analysis of the rush-seated single chair (Figure 14) reveals that the finish that we see today is in fact the surface of the third decorative scheme (Figure 15). The original scheme comprised a gesso coat applied to the wood surface followed by a cream-coloured oil paint which had been tinted with particles of yellow ochre and carbon

¹¹ 735/1.

¹² Swan (2008), pp. 103–04.

¹³ 344/98, fol. 1581.



13 (top) Bedroom chair designs for Mr Sudell of Blackburn, by Gillows, 1800. *Westminster City Archives*, 344/98, fol. 1581.

14 (left) Rush-seated, Sudell pattern bedroom chair, with a $\frac{4}{4}$ spindle distribution, attributed to Gillows, c. 1800. *Private collection*

15 (right) Magnified section through paint finishes on the Sudell pattern chair in figure 14. *Catherine Hassall*



16 Cane-seated Sudell pattern bedroom armchair with a 4/4 spindle distribution, attributed to Gillows, c. 1800. *Private collection*



17 Rush-seated cross splat or ladder back Sudell pattern bedroom chair, attributed to Gillows, c. 1800. *Private collection*

black without any evidence of a subsequent coat of varnish. The second scheme appears to have been sanded down in parts because some of the original scheme is now missing. This scheme used a grey undercoat of lead white and carbon black particles followed by a dark green top coat combining a mixture of Prussian blue and chrome yellow, followed by a coat of varnish. Since chrome yellow was first used in 1818 the second scheme post-dates Gillows' design by at least eighteen years. The third scheme also used a mix of Prussian blue and chrome yellow followed by a coat of varnish.

Paint analysis of a cane-seated 'Sudell' armchair (Figure 16) revealed that an off-white oil paint rests on clean wood. The paint comprises lead white with a few particles of black and yellow ochre in the upper part of this layer. The grey finish which we see today, to which floral decoration has been applied, appears to be original. Except for the application of a gesso groundwork on the previous example (Figure 14), the original oil paint finish on both chairs appears to be similar.

The Sudell ladder back or cross-splat back chair illustrated on the right of the *Estimate Sketch Book* drawing (Figure 13) appears to be very similar to figure 17, incorporating two curved cross splats and pronounced multiple ring turnings at



18 (left) Rush-seated side chair with a $\frac{4}{4}$ spindle distribution, attributed to a north-west workshop, c. 1800. *Private collection*

19 (right) Design for a chair by Gillows, 1775–1800, integrating blocks or cubes into the seat rails of a rush-seated chair, 1775–1800. *Westminster City Archives, 344/98, fol. 29.*

intervals on the front stretcher and legs combined with a simulated paint affect on the back posts. The annotation to the drawing reads ‘8 chairs and 2 stools for room over drawing room’.

Another painted chair (Figure 18) with a $\frac{4}{4}$ vertical spindle distribution similar to the Sudell spindle back chair incorporates a lower front stretcher configuration displaying an awareness of early nineteenth-century Thames Valley light chair making traditions.¹⁴ Although the cube shape tops to the front legs are unusual, they had been included in a late eighteenth-century design by Gillows (Figure 19). This block or cube feature at seat level was also used on the back uprights of two-row spindle back chairs made in the Salford warehouse of J. & D. Bancroft between 1808 and 1815 (Figure 20). Such a chair (Figure 18) probably had been made in one of the other north-west workshops listed in the trade directories of Liverpool or Manchester in the early nineteenth century (Appendix 2).

¹⁴ Boram (2010).



20 Stained rush-seated chair, stamped 'J.&D. BANCROFT', Chapel Street, Salford (1808–1815). *Private collection*



21 Rush-seated chair with a 3/4/3 spindle distribution, similar to Gillows' Winfred pattern, c. 1801. *Private collection*

A further painted chair (Figure 21) has also been attributed to the Gillows workshop on the basis of its use of long vertical spindles in a 3/4/3 distribution as well as a flat seat frame construction similar to a Gillows drawing in the 1801 *Estimate Sketch Book* of the 'Winfred pattern' chair.¹⁵ Paint analysis reveals that the wood was originally primed with a very thin coat of white oil paint and then painted with a thick coat of dull yellow or buff-coloured oil paint mixed with lead white and ochre. The final coat comprises a brownish varnish, excluding any pigments, which suggests that there has been discolouration which can be attributed to the aging process.

A set of painted and turned faux bamboo rush-seated chairs (Figure 22) displayed at Blackwell, Bowness on Windermere, incorporates a single row of elongated spindles or uprights in a 3/3 distribution very similar to the individual rows illustrated in figure 25. Significant regional features also include rounded knees and square chamfered back legs.

¹⁵ 344/98, fol. 1645.



THIS PAGE

22 Faux bamboo rush-seated chair with a single row of spindles in a $3/3$ distribution, c. 1816. *Blackwell, Bowness on Windermere*: photo B. D. Cotton

OPPOSITE PAGE

23 (top left) Rush-seated rocking chair with two rows of plain spindles in a $3/3$ distribution, attributed to John Robinson, Preston (fl. 1816–1848). *Penrith Farmers and Kidd*

24 (top right) Rush-seated rocking chair with two rows of spindles in a $3/3$ distribution, stamped I. ROBINSON MAKER' (fl. 1816–48). *G. Poulter and B. D. Cotton*

25 (bottom left) Rush-seated rocking chair with a simulated rosewood finish, attributed to John Robinson, Preston (fl. 1816–1848). *Private collection*

26 (bottom right) Rush-seated rocking chair, with a yellow ochre finish, attributed to John Robinson, Preston (fl. 1816–1848). *Private collection*

Vertical spindles or plain uprights applied to the chair back of a two-row spindle back rush-seated rocking chair (Figure 23), which incorporates six spindles to each row in a $3/3$ distribution, is very similar configuration to a chair (Figure 24) made in the John Robinson workshop in Preston (1816–48) which had been stamped I. ROBINSON PRESTON.¹⁶ Two further examples, (Figures 25 and 26) also incorporate a similar number of spindles to each row, involving faux bamboo turnery and finishes in simulated rosewood and yellow ochre.

The 'Feather top rail' pattern chair (Figure 27) an innovative design by Gillows in 1802 and variants (Figures 28 and 29) often included botanical or neo-Classical detail applied over black surface finishes. Such chairs appear to incorporate Chinoiserie-style columns flanking a simulated splat device made up of a diagonal arrangement of tapering spindles intersecting at a central decorated boss. Chinoiserie details in the form of

¹⁶ Cotton & Poulter (2001).





27 Rush-seated 'Feather top rail' armchair,
attributed to Gillows, c. 1802.
Private collection



28 Variant of the 'Feather top rail' armchair,
attributed to Gillows, c. 1802.
Private collection

elongated columns with bulbous bases and capitals are typical of the painted columns used to support roof structures of Chinese pavilions.¹⁷ John Crace's design for the Glass Passage at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton (c. 1801–04) incorporates such columns which still survive in the South Galleries at the Pavilion.^{18, 19}

Paint analysis of the black surface finish of figure 27 reveals that alternate layers had been applied, made up of solid carbon black (perhaps vine black) followed by semi-translucent layers of varnish (or shellac) mixed with very fine particles of lamp black. A further check confirmed that the first application of a carbon black layer did not involve a stain but a solid coating which had not soaked into the wood fibres.

Mahogany armchairs supplied to the Liverpool Athenaeum Club, which had been founded in 1797, prior to the completion of the Club building and library by 1800, include similar Chinoiserie-style columns flanking a fretted lozenge splat (Figure 30) which in essence comprises a duplicate set of linked diagonals intersecting at their respective bosses.

¹⁷ Junzhen (2002), pp. 78–86.

¹⁸ Aldrich (1990), p. 17.

¹⁹ Morley (1993), p. 332.



29 (left) Variant of the 'Feather top rail' chair, attributed to Gillows, c. 1802. *Private collection*

30 (right) Upholstered club chair, attributed to Gillows, c. 1800. *The Athenaeum, Liverpool*

Both the fretted lozenge splat and the curved overshot arm-rests were illustrated in *The London Chair-Makers' and Carvers' Book of prices for Workmanship*, dated 1802.²⁰ The back supports, made up of relatively thick columns, can be traced to an earlier design by Gillows known as the Garforth pattern of 1798.²¹

The turned medial stretcher on the Club chairs is a familiar arrangement used on a number of north-west nineteenth-century stained chairs made by firms such as John and David Bancroft of Chapel Street, Salford, Lancashire, to strengthen the under-frames.²²

Although sharing certain features which suggest a Gillows origin, the differences between the light and upholstered chairs display the application of distinct types of creative skills and imagination of north-west chair-makers.

Five rush-seated chairs in the Sun Parlour at Dunham Massey, Cheshire (Figure 31), incorporate a number of Empire features such as the Grecian-back and the roll top rail as illustrated on Plate 3, figure 6 of the 1802 *The London Chair-Makers' and Carvers' Book of Prices and Workmanship* and the Gillows' *Estimate Sketch Book* design of

²⁰ Anon (1802), pls 1 and 6.

²¹ 344/97, fol. 1434; Stuart (2008), I, pp. 193–95.

²² Cotton (1990), pp. 351–52.



31 Early 19th-century rush-seated chair combining four columns of archaeological inspiration with a 'Grecian' chair back. *National Trust, Dunham Massey, Cheshire*



32 Leg detail of figure 31.

the Denison pattern chair of 1802.²³ Although the maker of the Dunham Massey chairs is unknown, firms such as that of Samuel Davies of Chester (1796–1830) were recorded as having the capacity to make two sets of ten neat painted chairs plus four large painted elbow chairs for the nearby property of Tabley Hall, Knutsford, Cheshire, in January 1798.²⁴

Certain features integrated into the Dunham Massey chairs were also shared with stained rush-seated chairs made in Macclesfield and Lancaster. For example the front legs of the Dunham Massey chairs (Figure 32) are identical to those used on a rush-seated chair stamped LEICESTER.²⁵ This mark was probably applied to chairs made by the Leicester family in the middle of the nineteenth century when, according to the 1841 census, Charles Leicester senior and two of his sons, William (b. 1816) and Charles junior (b. 1818) were working as chairmakers in the Chestergate workshop in

²³ 344/98, fol. 1793.

²⁴ Beard and Gilbert (1986), p. 229.

²⁵ Cotton (1990), p. 429, fig. NW409.



33 Stained rush-seated Empire-style rocking chair, stamped 'R. SIMPSON MAKER' (fl. 1848–87).
Simon Feingold

34 Detail of stamp on figure 33.



Macclesfield, Cheshire.²⁶ Prior to 1838, trade directories only listed a Charles Leicester as a chairmaker.

The longevity of the influence of the Empire tradition on chairmaking in Lancashire throughout the nineteenth century can be traced in a stained rush-seated rocking chair stamped four times R.SIMPSON MAKER (Figures 33 and 34). Robert Simpson's workshop was recorded by trade directories as being in St Nicholas Street, Lancaster between 1848 and 1887.²⁷

Two painted and decorated rush-seated single-row spindle back chairs (Figures 35 and 37) have been discovered displaying typical Dales spindles between horizontal ribs, flat arm rests typical to the north-west region and in one instance the double row front stretchers below the seat level which one associates with the work of John Robinson of Preston (1816–48).²⁸ The Dales tradition of making single row spindle backs is believed to have been sustained throughout most of the nineteenth century.

An example attributed to the Eskdale area (Figure 35) displays a typical ebonised or black finish applied to most rush-seated chairs made in the Dales, which in this case includes an unusual addition of decorative gilt work (Figure 36) which is very reminiscent of the decoration applied to the legs of the eighteenth-century Square Back

²⁶ Ibid., p. 501.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 505.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 327–35.



35 (left) Eskdale rush-seated rocking chair, c. 1800–70. *Private collection*

36 (right) Decorative gilt detail to figure 35. *Private collection*

Chair (Figure 10). Paint analysis was carried out on another Dales chair (Figure 37) to discover whether the paint scheme applied to the chair was an afterthought, added to an original stained version which was the most frequently used finish applied to Dales rush-seated chairs. However, this analysis revealed that the original groundwork was gesso followed by a buff-coloured oil paint. The oil paint comprised lead white and yellow ochre and had a slightly pinkish tone due to the addition of a small amount of red ochre. A thin coat of varnish had then been applied over the buff paint. The second scheme involved a repainting with buff-coloured oil paint similar in tone and shade to



37 Dales rush-seated armchair,
c. 1816, with double front stretchers
and block-shaped tops of front legs.
Private collection

the original scheme. This was also followed by a thin coat of varnish. The third scheme involved a further coating of buff-coloured oil paint based on lead white. A subsequent coat of a brown colourant can be seen on top of the buff paint but it is not clear whether this is part of the third scheme or a later scheme.

The diversity and symbolical significance of the decorative detail applied to the painted and japped light chairs referred to previously has been the subject of further examination and appraisal in more detail (Figures 38a–m). Questions inevitably are raised about whether the choice of symbolic features was determined or influenced by



a



b



c



d

38 Decorative details:

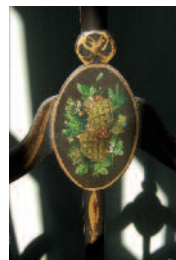
- 38a 'Feather top rail' armchair (Figure 27). The top rail comprises a surround of vine leaves with roses in the centre and a small stylised white flower that could be sandwort or stitchwort. Roses symbolise love and devotion.
- 38b and c 'Feather top rail' armchair (Figure 27). The front legs are naturalistic depictions of leaves and fruits of the *Passiflora suberosa*, a plant introduced into British horticulture in 1759. The leaves are often deeply trilobed and variable in shape. A stylistic version of the passion flower has been applied to the central boss on the front stretcher. The passion flower is symbolic of faith or religious fervour.
- 38d Single 'Feather top rail' chair displaying roses which are again associated with love and devotion.
- 38e Feather top rail armchair. The top rail includes a stylised version of Emmer wheat with its agricultural and archaeological significance.
- 38f Feather top rail armchair. The top rail displays two griffins of archaeological significance.
- 38g The central medallion displays a pair of pine cones a symbol of hope (Figure 10). The surrounding five-petalled flowers could represent the first blossoms of spring.
- 38h The Camellia was generally regarded as a symbol of unpretentious excellence (Figure 31), although in some interpretative systems a red Camellia symbolised a flame in the heart. The surrounding snowdrops were also regarded as symbols of hope. Stylised Campanulas or harebells symbols of gratitude decorate the side supports.
- 38i The white roses often symbolise tranquility and silence (Figure 28).
- 38j, k and l Figures 16, 17 and 25. All are stylised rather than naturalistic; basically aesthetic decorations.
- 38m Stylised passion flowers are painted on a multiplicity of bosses used on the chair. Their significance is related to faith and religious fervour (Figure 39).



e



f



g



h



i



j



k



l



m

the customer and in effect a bespoke approach, based upon thematic factors such as those relating to the 'language of flowers' which had evolved during the eighteenth century to reach cult proportions in Britain in the nineteenth century.²⁹ This is reflected in the numerous publications on the subject during the second quarter of the nineteenth century and subsequent editions. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, wife of the British Ambassador to Constantinople is credited with introducing this concept into Europe from Turkey in the first quarter of the eighteenth century.³⁰

Questions relating to personal choice of decoration may have become particularly relevant for customers when considering the floral options offered by Gillows in their 'Rigby pattern' chair introduced in 1792.³¹ Potential customers could choose a hyacinth, convulvulus or a lily design for the chair backs. A blue hyacinth symbolised constancy and a white hyacinth loveliness. The convulvulus, a common type of bindweed, represented a bond and a white lily purity. Such detail especially with regard to botanical features often varies between a naturalistic and a stylistic/aesthetic approach associated with the designs of Rudolph Ackermann in the early nineteenth century.³² Their subtle symbolic nature alludes to themes such as faith, religious fervour, hope, love, gratitude, and devotion, purity and excellence. However, occasionally the artistic skills and botanical knowledge applied to chairs such as the 'Feather top rail' chair (Figure 27) is exceptional. Detailing of the leaves and fruits of the *Passiflora suberosa* (passion flower), introduced into British horticulture in 1759, is particularly impressive and displays a well informed approach.

The wheat ears painted on one of the 'Feather top rail' chairs (Figure 38e) could be interpreted as a simplified version of the Emmer wheat illustrated in a garland painting from Pompeii which is now displayed in the Naples Museum. Emmer wheat was a staple cereal of prehistory (dating back to at least 7000 BC); its significance being attributed to the success of early agriculture.

Another 'Feather top rail' chair includes a pair of Griffins, (Figure 38f) which were no doubt inspired by a wider availability and appreciation of archaeological knowledge during the eighteenth century relating to early Greek and Roman cultures.

Carved botanical features, such as wheat ears as applied to a number of chair backs illustrated by Gillows in their *Colour Pattern Book* (1775–1800), the 1780s *Estimate Sketch Books* and the third edition of George Hepplewhite's *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide* in 1794, suggest the use of an alternative approach to applying a similar type of symbolism, even if at times it had been transmitted from remote archaeological sources.³³

The attribution of the armchair in (Figure 39) to a Gillows workshop is not only strengthened by certain decorative and construction details shared with the Feather top rail chair (Figure 27), designed by Gillows in 1802, but the inclusion of a configuration of intersecting spindles (held in place by bosses) both above and below seat level

²⁹ Riley (2008), p. 159; De la Tour (1858), pp. 289–305; Hey (1833), pp. 79–90 and pp. 175–79.

³⁰ Jack (1994), p. 120, letter XLII; Goody (1993), p. 233.

³¹ 344/15, fol. 858; Stuart (208) pp. 191–92.

³² Ackermann (1817).

³³ 735/1; 344/11, fol. 1880; Hepplewhite (1794), pls 3 and 4.



39 Rush-seated armchair, attributed to Gillows, c. 1802. *Moxhams Antiques*

similar to the 'lozenge back' cane-seated arm chair designed by Gillows in 1796 for the Rev. Peddar. This design is illustrated in the November 1796 *Estimate Sketch Book* which essentially incorporates turned spindles making up the lozenge configuration housed in a typical late-eighteenth-century Gillows 'Square back'.³⁴

Paint analysis reveals that most of the original decorative schemes applied to the light chairs included in this study involved the use of pigmented oil paints sometimes applied to a ground work of gesso or a thinned-out oil paint acting as a sealer. However, in some instances there was no evidence of a preliminary ground work or a primer application to the clean wood surface. In one instance a pigmented varnish (brown/black) had been applied to a clean wood surface of a late-eighteenth-century turned faux bamboo 'square-back' chair (Figure 4), attributed to the Gillows workshop. Frequently a clear varnish was used between layers of pigmented oil paints or pigmented varnishes as well as being applied over the final detailed decorative surface. (Figure 15).

It is rare for an original painted or japanned scheme with its multiplicity of layers to remain intact after two hundred years, even though the finishes we observe today

³⁴ 344/97, fol. 1290.

may appear convincing. However, paint analysis of a limited number of samples furthers our understanding and reveals more about surface treatment techniques used by specialist painters, often with exceptional artistic skills and botanical knowledge, employed by Gillows and possibly by other workshops in the North West of England, even though at present there is little evidence of a consistent or shared approach.

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APPENDIX I

FURTHER EXTRACTS FROM THE ARDERNE LEDGER:
FURNITURE PAINTING COSTS

DATE	PAGE	
1822	p. 30	Deal loby chest 3 ft 6 ins long 'painted bamboo' or 'oak' — total £2 12s
1823	p. 38	Deal Press Bed 4 ft 3 ins high, 'painted mahogany' — 7s 6d
1823	p. 40	Mahogany buffet 8 ft high. Inside painted blue — 5s 6d
1823	p. 43	Wash stand table 3 ft long, painting — 9s
1823	p. 43	Dressing table to match above 3 ft long, 'drawers painted bamboo gothick' — 5s 6d
1823	p. 44	Wash hand stand 3ft 3ins long, painting — 9s
1823	p. 44	Dressing table to match above 3 ft 3 ins long, painting — 6s
1823	p. 48	Dresser in deal or Danzig oak 9 ft long If deal 'painted oak' 12s — total £4 17s
		If deal painted under to match oak top — total £5 15s
		If in Danzig oak (cross banding to drawers and door extra) — total £7 5s
		Shelves above dresser for plates made of deal 'painted oak' — 4s
1823	p. 63	Oak corner cupboard 3 ft 7 ins high with doors banded by bay mahogany and frieze top. 3 shelves top and bottom painted once — 9d
1824	p. 67	Enclosed wash hand stand 3 ft long, 'painted white, blue and black' — 7s
	p. 67	Dressing table 3 ft 10 ins long, 'painted white, blue and black' — 5s 6d
1825	p. 83	Deal wardrobe 'painted mahogany' — £1 5s
1826	p. 86	Deal cradle 'painted mahogany' — 3s
1826	p. 87	Deal wash hand table, 4 ft long, 'painted buff and black lines' — 6s 6d
1826	p. 87	One drawer dressing table to match, 3 ft 6 ins long, painting — 5s
1828	p. 100	Deal bookcase in two parts. Bottom part painted 'hair wood' — 12s
		Top part painted — 10s
1832	p. 128	Knee hole dressing table 4 ft 2 ins long, painting — 7s
1833	p. 133	Deal dresser for painting with oak knobs 5 ft 2 ins long (uncosted)

APPENDIX 2

EXTRACTS FROM THE DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH FURNITURE MAKERS

*Listing Painted Chairmakers, Chair Japanners, Painted, Fancy and Stained Warehouses,
Rosewood Painters and Stainers, Furniture Painters, Japanners and Varnishers*

CHESTER

1798	Samuel Davies	Painted chairmakers (supplied to Tabley Hall)
1819-34	William Read	Painted and stained chair manufacturer

LANCASTER

1799-1801	John Atkinson	Furniture painter and japanner (Gillows)
1819	Candby	Furniture japanner (Gillows)
1825-29	Richard Hutton	Furniture painter (Gillows)
1790-1838	Hutton	Japanner & furniture painter (Gillows)
1788-89	Joynson	Japanner (Gillows)
1787-90	Thomas Knight	Furniture painter and japanner (Gillows)
1788-91	Mackereth	Furniture painter (Gillows)
1789-96	Thomas Nelson	Furniture painter (Gillows)
1784-88	James Ripley	Japanner & furniture painter (Gillows)
1827	P. Seward	Japanner (Gillows)

1811-38	Shrigley	Furniture painter and varnishers (Gillows)
1815-23	T. Tasker	Furniture painter, gilder & japanner (Gillows)
1793	J. Wilks	Furniture painter (Gillows)

LIVERPOOL

1818	Thomas Cross	Furniture painter
1816	Joseph Dutton	Japanned wares for East and West Indies
1807-18	John Edmunds	Furniture painter
1813-18	Benjamin Gill	Made two elaborate painted chairs
1781-90	Samuel Hazlehurst	Stained chair warehouse
1804-05	William Heald	At the Painted Chair Warehouse
Up to 1830	Thomas Hughes	Rosewood stainer and painter
1835	Charles Lyons	Stocked painted, stained and japanned furniture
1811-18	John McMillan	Furniture painter
1816-18	John Maddox	Furniture painter
1807	Seth Pennington	Furniture painter
1839	Mary Raymond	Furniture painter
1818	William Richmond	Furniture painter
1802	George Robinson	Stained, painted and Windsor chairs supplied
1810-14	Daniel Rothwell	Painter and furniture japanner
1827	Duncan Wainwright	Turner and rosewood stainer
1827	G. Watson	London' imitation rosewood chairmaker
1790	John Williamson	Chair japanner

MANCHESTER / SALFORD / ASHTON

1808	J. & D. Bancroft	Fancy chair warehouse (Salford)
1172-88	John Cadman	Stained chair warehouse (supplied to Dunham Massey)
1824	William Haselded	Painter and gilder (Ashton)
1808-09	George Lofthouse	Painter, gilder and japanner
1804-18	John Pickford	Fancy chair warehouse
1802-25	George Steel	Chairmaker and fancy chair warehouse
1804-13	William Steele	Painter, gilder and japanner