

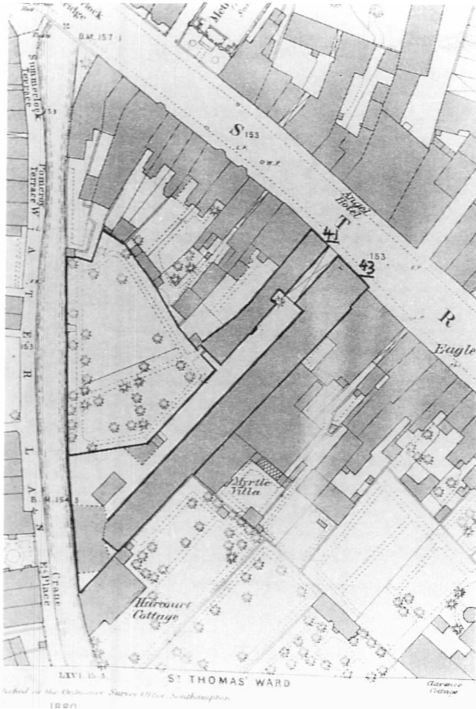
ARTHUR FOLEY: A NINETEENTH CENTURY FURNITURE MANUFACTURER IN SALISBURY

Robin Jones

This article will examine the design, manufacture and sale of furniture by an entrepreneur-craftsman, working in a provincial centre in the south of England during the second half of the nineteenth century. Christopher Gilbert has commented, 'One branch of furniture history, which is perhaps unfairly neglected, because it is felt by many to be boring, is Victorian commercial furniture made in . . . urban centres for middle-class markets, which follows routine historical styles'.¹ The underlying assumption of this view is that regionality (the localisation of artefacts through distinctive regional characteristics) cannot be implicit in such furniture. Indeed, it is assumed that the style of such furniture is completely given over to the absorption of fashionable forms, excluding any possibility of regionality. This may well be the case with such furniture, made throughout most of Britain after 1850. However, the study of Books of Prices has indicated that, even when considering the urban production of furniture, elements of fashionable styles and regionally distinct characteristics have been found to co-exist. It might be that, at our present level of knowledge, we are unable to read any localising elements which may be present in this commercially produced furniture of the provinces. The subject of this article, Arthur Foley, cabinet maker and later manufacturer, of Fisherton Street, Salisbury, serves as a case study to examine cabinet making in English provincial urban centres during the late nineteenth century.

In the mid-nineteenth century the cathedral city of Salisbury was a relatively prosperous and expanding regional centre. Historically, a number of different trades had developed in Salisbury including the manufacture of high quality furniture under the auspices of the Joiners' Company.² During the eighteenth century the production of cutlery and leatherworking were amongst the manufacturing staples. Fisherton Street, in the Parish of Fisherton Anger, saw rapid development during the following century. The population of the parish, between 1801 and 1891, expanded six-fold. The western end of the street saw the development of villa residences for the richest inhabitants of the city. With the opening of the railway stations in 1856 and 1857, terraces of smaller houses were built in large numbers.³ The parish had some industries, such as brickmaking, but was relatively poor and cholera outbreaks occurred in 1849 and 1851 due to bad drainage and poor sanitation.⁴ During the nineteenth century, as in other towns and cities, Salisbury witnessed the decline of trading patterns based on the open market and the development of a new way based on shopping. As John Chandler states, by 1855, Salisbury had 'turned . . . into a city of shop lined streets'.⁵ Reviewing the trade directory of 1855, Fisherton Street had become one of the most important of those shopping streets in Salisbury.⁶

Arthur Foley was born in 1831 at Codford St Peter, a small village some fifteen miles north-west of Salisbury, in the Wylye Valley. It is not known exactly when he and/or



1. Detail of Fisherton Street, Salisbury, showing nos 41 and 43, respectively the home and workshops/retail outlet of Arthur Foley.

From Ordnance Survey, Wiltshire, Southern District, Sheet LXVI.11.23

FISHERTON MACHINE CABINET WORKS, SALISBURY.

THE LARGEST AND MOST VARIED STOCK OF HOME-MADE ARTISTIC FURNITURE IN THE SOUTH OF ENGLAND.

ARTHUR FOLEY, Wholesale Manufacturer and Patentee, having made further alterations in his Manufactory, and specially fitted it up with improved machinery and motive power, in order to ensure superiority and economise cost, respectfully invites all those about to furnish, to visit his establishment, which will be found to offer the greatest facilities and advantages for ordering or selecting Furniture, either decorative and artistic, or simple, elegant, and useful, in which economy, taste, and durability have been judiciously combined.

The Stock is conveniently arranged, including upwards of 50 Bedsteads varying in prices from 11s. to £100 each; all fixed for inspection, with Wardrobes and other articles *en suite*. Visitors are shown through the spacious show-rooms (quite an exhibition of Furniture) without the slightest importunity to purchase.

SPECIAL DESIGNS BY OWN ARTIST.

The SOFT GOODS department contains all the novelties of the Season for Curtains and Coverings in Cretonnes, Tapestry, Poplin, Silk and Wool, Damask, Carpets, Floor Cloth, Linoleum, Mats, and Matting.

PAPERHANGINGS.—This department deserves special attention, having had additions of English and Foreign Designs, which are far superior to any hitherto submitted.

BLINDS of every description made to order.

* * Plans and Estimates prepared free of charge and every attention paid in carrying out the wishes of customers.

2. Advertisement for Fisherton Machine Cabinet Works in the *Salisbury Times and South Wiltshire Gazette*, Saturday, 23 May 1874

Courtesy of Wiltshire Library and Museum Service, Salisbury Local Studies Library, Salisbury, Wilt

his parents moved to Salisbury, but in 1851 he is recorded in Fisherton Street, Salisbury in the Parish of Fisherton Anger. The census return for that year lists him as an unmarried man practising his trade as an upholsterer's apprentice.⁷ A relation (possibly an elder brother in view of the slight difference in age), Albert Foley, is listed as living next door to Arthur. Albert Foley is described as a 'journeyman cabinet maker' and a widower. It would seem that the Foleys chose to live in Fisherton Street for several reasons. As has been mentioned, Fisherton Street had become an important shopping street by the 1850s. In addition, other craftsmen in the woodworking trades had congregated in this area. A sample of names and occupations in Fisherton Street from the 1851 census reveals the concentration of those related craft skills: James Cardy, senior and junior, are recorded as carpenter/journeymen, John Griffin is recorded as a timber merchant, William Millechamp is recorded as a sawmaker, William Jackson is recorded as a carpenter/joiner, Henry Jewell and Edwin Jewell are described respectively as journeyman carpenter and apprentice cabinet maker and finally, William Clark is described as a cabinet maker's apprentice. Other carpenters and timber merchants also had premises on Fisherton Street.⁸ In the census of 1861⁹ Arthur Foley is recorded as an upholsterer and cabinet maker, living in the Parish of Fisherton Anger at

Milton Place, Windsor Road, a short distance from Fisherton Street. He is described as a 'master employing three men and one boy'. Albert Foley is recorded in Windsor Road and is recorded as a cabinet maker. During the 1850s Arthur Foley clearly established himself in Salisbury and was supporting a growing household. He married a local woman and the couple had had three children by 1861. Arthur's younger brother, Harry, boarded at the house and is described as an upholsterer. One of the apprentices, Harry F. Norton, also boarded at the house and is similarly described as an upholsterer. By 1871 Arthur Foley, 'upholsterer and cabinet maker', owned three premises on Fisherton Street (numbers 39 to 43) and is noted to be employing twelve men and eight boys. It is also recorded that he was employing a female assistant for his front shop.¹⁰ Ten years later he had disposed of one property and owned two premises on the street, namely number 41, described as unhabited and number 43, the adjoining building. The census return for 1881¹¹ records Foley as head of a large household. He is recorded as a 'cabinet manufacturer' with nine children. A number of these children are recorded as playing an active role in the firm. For example, his daughter Edith is described as 'clerk to father', whilst his eldest son, Edwin, is engaged in a more creative capacity as 'designer to father'.

Some indication of the scale of Arthur Foley's activities as a 'cabinet manufacturer' can be gained from the Ordnance Survey map for Fisherton Anger published in 1880 (see figure 1).¹² Numbers 41 and 43 are drawn as adjoining properties, the former being a substantial house with rear access to a large walled garden with mature trees, backing on to a stream. Number 41 is joined to number 43 by a covered passage giving access to a long, uncovered yard with detached buildings to one end. Two of these detached buildings are indicated as roofed structures, but did not have solid walls, indicating that they may have been used as storage areas for timber or for other purposes. Number 43 is one of the largest properties in Fisherton Street, running from the street front to the stream, which runs at an angle to the street, and indicates the scale of Foley's enterprise in terms of potential workshop and showroom space.

A review of the trade directories for Salisbury gives a sense of this development of Arthur Foley's business and the elaboration of the activities with which his firm was concerned. Kelly's *Directory for Wiltshire*, 1855, describes him prosaically as 'paperhanger &c'.²¹ The growing diversification of Foley's business is illustrated in J. G. Harrod and Co.'s *Directory*, where he is recorded as 'upholsterer, cabinet maker, paperhanger and house agent, Fisherton Street'.¹⁴ This increase in the activities of Foley's workshop is in line with the development, from the eighteenth century, of cabinet makers engaged in the complete fitting out of properties, including the supply of soft furnishings and wallpaper. By 1875, it is clear that Arthur Foley's business had entered a new phase of development. The title 'Fisherton Machine Cabinet Works' is grandly attached to the firm's entry in the Post Office *Directory for Wiltshire* of 1867¹⁵ and Kelly's *Directory* of 1875,¹⁶ where Foley is described as a 'wholesale and retail cabinetmaker, upholsterer, paperhanger and carpet warehouseman . . .'. By 1889 Arthur Foley's Fisherton Machine Cabinet Works engaged in the following — 'wholesale and retail cabinetmakers, upholsterers and paperhangers and carpetware-houseman, contractors and manufacturers to the Board of Admiralty and her Majesty's War Department . . .'.¹⁷ In view of the military's presence in and around Salisbury at



3. An example of Foley's 'decorative and artistic' furniture — a carved oak cabinet, c. 1880, the back bearing the label, 'Arthur Foley, Fisherton Machine Cabinet Works, Salisbury', sold from the contents of the Fine Art Society Plc by Phillips, Edinburgh, lot 332, 26 May 1992

Photograph courtesy of Phillips, Edinburgh

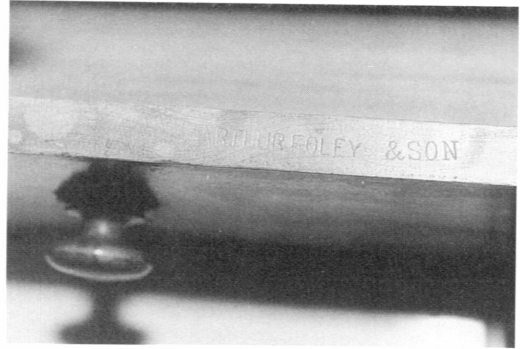
this time it is not surprising that Arthur Foley, as one of the larger cabinet-making firms in the city in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, should become involved as a contractor and manufacturer. Space does not permit the elaboration of this aspect of the firm's activities.

As the Fisherton Machine Cabinet Works expanded throughout the 1870s and 1880s, evidence of the firm's activities can be found in advertisements of the time. Arthur Foley promoted his products by emphasising a number of factors. In an advertisement of 1874¹⁸ (see figure 2) he stressed the benefits of 'improved machinery and motive power' in his workshops, which ensured 'superiority' and economised on cost. He graded his furniture making objects which were either 'decorative and artistic' or 'simple . . . and useful' (see figures 3, 4, 5 and 6). Foley also alluded to the contemporary International Exhibitions, encouraging visitors to Fisherton Street to be 'shown through spacious show-rooms' and stating that the furniture on display was comparable with aspects of these Exhibitions. In an advertisement in a trade directory of 1880¹⁹ Arthur Foley

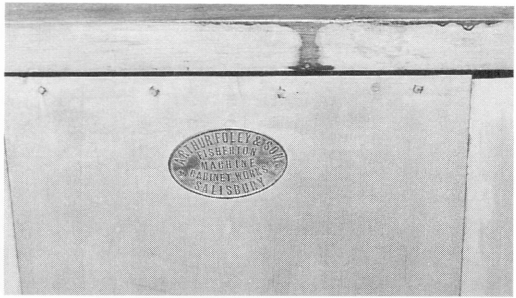


4. An example of Foley's 'simple and useful' furniture — a stained birch chest of drawers, dated 1889

Courtesy of Woolley and Wallis, Salisbury



5. Detail of stamp on drawer of chest of drawers illustrated as Figure 4



6. Detail of brass label attached to back of chest of drawers illustrated as Figure 4

Courtesy of Woolley and Wallis, Salisbury

promotes a piece of furniture for which he was patentee (see figure 7). The role of patents in nineteenth-century furniture manufacture has been discussed by Clive Edwards and others.²⁰ Foley's patented furniture could be viewed as a manifestation of the adoption and promotion of mechanisation as a 'pervasive cultural value'²¹ during the nineteenth century (see figure 8). The 'Salisbury Combination Secrétaire', advertised by Foley as combining the uses of bookcase, bureau, cellaret/sideboard and other functions, was promoted because of its space-saving capabilities. The advertised secrétaire was marketed in terms of its originality, its utilisation of every part and its compact nature.²² Presumably, Foley believed that by naming the article after the city in which it was manufactured, an element of regionality would attach to it and would help to market the item locally (notwithstanding the fact that the secrétaire reflected the influence of J. P. Seddon, Charles Bevan and other 'geometric gothic' designers and showed no discernible localising characteristics in terms of its style or construction). Foley was clearly an innovative craftsman/businessman and had taken out a patent in 1870 for 'producing photographic designs on veneers &c'.²³ He continued to register his innovations in the design of furniture with the Patent Office into the 1880s.

No. 2 E.

THE
Salisbury Combination Secretaires
FOLEY'S PATENT.

THE SALISBURY COMBINATION SECRETAIRES are adapted to all purposes and classes of society.

Combine the uses of Bookcases, Bureaus, China Cabinets, Cellaret Sideboards, Esecroires, Secretaires, etc.

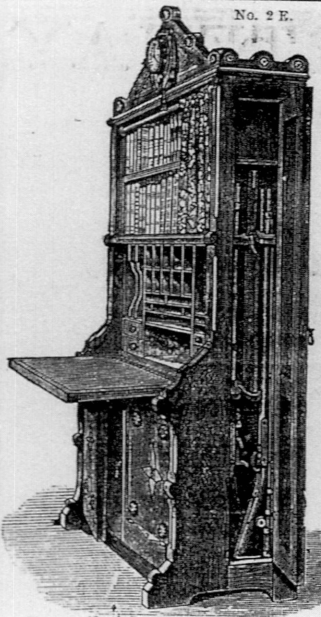
Every part is utilised, the floor space is the same, whether open or closed.

These Secretaires are elegant and original in design and construction, and destined to become the Cabinets of the age.

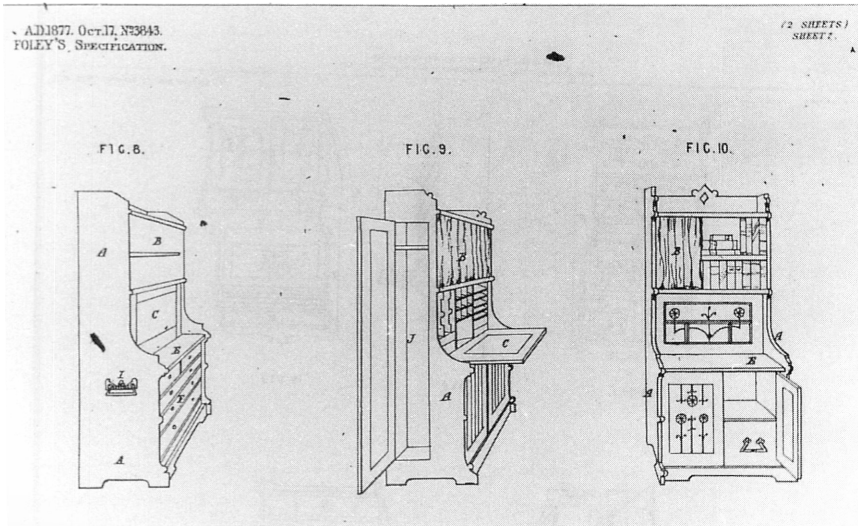
List of Prices and Illustrations of other Combinations can be obtained of the Patentee and Manufacturer,

ARTHUR FOLEY,
Fisherton Machine Cabinet Works
SALISBURY.

A Large Stock of General Domestic Furniture, in Old English, Queen Anne and other Styles, on View in the extensive Show Rooms. Tapestry and Curtain Materials of all kinds; Wall Decorations of Newest Designs and Colorings. Carpets and other Floor Coverings.



7. An advertisement for 'The Salisbury Combination Secretaires, Foley's Patent', *Kelly's Directory for Hampshire, 1880*
Courtesy of Wiltshire Library and Museum Service, Salisbury Local Studies Library, Salisbury, Wilts



8. Specification for 'Improvement in Bureaus, Bookcases, Cabinets, Writing Tables, Desks and Other Articles of Furniture', Letters Patent, Arthur Foley, 17 October, 1877, No. 3843
Courtesy of Portsmouth Central Library, Portsmouth, Hants

This brief review of the activities of a provincial cabinet maker working in the second half of the nineteenth century has highlighted a number of issues in relation to the craft at this time. Due to the disjunction between maker and consumer, which became increasingly apparent throughout the century, Arthur Foley, of necessity, had to devise effective methods to promote and sell his furniture in a changing marketplace. This was effected by the opening of a showroom, where finished furniture could be viewed. It entailed the manufacture of furniture for different levels of the market, from utilitarian to decorative and artistic goods. He was also involved in the search for innovation in terms of furniture design, probably as a means of marketing his wares to greater effect. Arthur Foley's career and his establishment of the 'machine cabinet works' in Fisherton Street, Salisbury illustrates a shift from the production of regionally distinct furniture to the production in the regions of Britain of furniture that was of largely homogeneous form, following fashionable types and made with increasing use of machine power.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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2. See V. Cinnery, *Oak Furniture — the British Tradition*, Woodbridge, Antique Collectors' Club, 1979, pp. 550–51. See also C. Haskins, *The Ancient Trade Guilds and Companies of Salisbury*, Salisbury, 1912.
3. R. B. Pugh (ed.), *A History of Wiltshire*, Victoria County History of the Counties of England, vol. vi, University of Oxford Press for the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 1962, p. 181.
4. R. B. Pugh, *ibid.*, p. 188.
5. J. Chandler, *Endless Street — A History of Salisbury and its People*, Salisbury, Hobnob Press, 1983, p. 111.
6. J. Chandler, *ibid.*, p. 111.
7. 1851 Census Returns, Salisbury, Fisherton Anger Ward, HO 107/1846, fol. 471, p. 11, schedule 26. Foley's premises were between Chapel Yard and Dyer's Building.
8. Several timber yards had existed in Fisherton Street since the eighteenth century. By 1842 two timber yards were recorded. One of these was owned by James Griffin (recorded in the 1851 census), who converted it into a steam saw mill by 1879. It was still in occupation by 1903 and the owner's name had been given to a narrow lane called Griffins Court off Fisherton Street, almost opposite where Foley had his premises. R. B. Pugh, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
9. 1861 Census Returns, Salisbury, Fisherton Anger, 2068/8/9, 1341499, p. 43, vol. 1315, schedule 217.
10. 1871 Census Returns, Salisbury, Fisherton Anger, p. 16, schedule 57.
11. 1881 Census Returns, Salisbury, Fisherton Anger, 50, 2068/8/10.
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18. In the *Salisbury Times and South Wiltshire Gazette*, Saturday 23 May 1874.
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21. Michael Ettema, 'History, nostalgia and American Furniture', *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. xvii, 1982, p. 140. Quoted in C. Edwards, *ibid.*, p. 145.

22. Letters Patent, Arthur Foley, 17 October 1877, No. 3843, 'Improvements in Bureaus, Bookcases, Cabinets, Writing Tables, Desks, Cupboards and Other Articles of Furniture'.
23. Letters Patent, Arthur Foley, 9 February 1870, No. 383, 'Improvements in the production of photographic pictures or designs on veneers and solid woods . . . '.