

# MORE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GILLOW FURNITURE DISCOVERED AT TATTON PARK

Susan Stuart

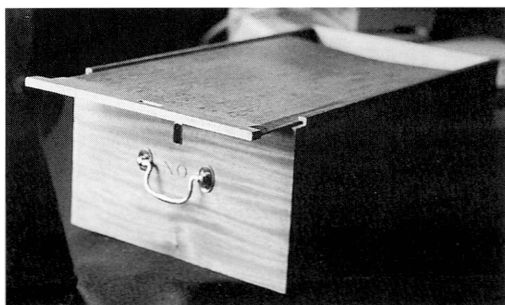
In 1970 Nicholas Goodison and John Hardy published an important and comprehensive article on the furniture supplied by Gillows to the Egertons of Tatton Park in Cheshire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> However, although they included several late eighteenth-century pieces made for William Egerton (b. 1749, d. 1806), they concentrated mainly on the many early nineteenth-century examples supplied to his son Wilbraham Egerton (b. 1781, d. 1856), especially furniture for the library and bedrooms at Tatton Park. Goodison and Hardy commented that it was clear from Gillow letters that other earlier pieces had also been supplied to William Egerton but that they could: '...no longer be found in the house'.<sup>2</sup> Further field work at Tatton Park and research in the Gillow archive has resulted in the discovery of four of these earlier pieces which were supplied by the Lancaster firm to William Egerton from 1780–82, that is immediately after he inherited Tatton Park. It is these pieces of furniture and related material which form the subject of this paper. The period from the late 1750s until the mid-1780s is a particularly intriguing one, since few drawings exist before the estimate sketch books begin in 1784. Work on several other furniture commissions made before 1784, apart from Tatton, is taking place and will be published in a book on the firm.<sup>3</sup> However, the publication of the new finds at Tatton will, it is hoped, shed a few shafts of light on a hitherto dimly lit period of Gillow furniture history. In this article an attempt will be made to explore how the furniture sent to Tatton Park from 1780–82 came to be commissioned, ordered in London, made in Lancaster, and transported to Cheshire some seventy miles from Lancaster. Other issues such as when materials and design features used in the pieces were introduced, will also be considered.

## THE WYATT-GILLOW RELATIONSHIP & MRS WILSON'S RECOMMENDATION OF THE FIRM

The year 1780 was an eventful and traumatic one for the Egerton family. Samuel Egerton who inherited a fortune from his uncle Samuel Hill, and in the mid-1750s remodelled Tatton Park, died that year, leaving the house to his sister Hester. In 1747 Hester married William Tatton of Wythenshaw (who died in 1776) when she inherited Tatton in 1780, it was on condition that she must retake her maiden name of Egerton; but only two months after entering into her inheritance she also died. On Hester Egerton's death her only son, William Tatton Egerton, inherited the property and he too changed his name by deed poll to William Egerton. He promptly invited Samuel Wyatt, who had been Samuel Egerton's architect, to re-design the house.<sup>4</sup> Gillows' name has long been linked with that of the Wyatt family, several of whom were architects. In 1772 both the Wyatts and Gillows were active in supplying the needs of



1. Library table made by Gillow, 1780  
*Tatton Park Collection*



2. One of the library table boxes or drawers  
*Tatton Park Collection*



3. Interior of the library table pedestal  
cupboard showing the shelves or 'partitions'  
that support the lettered boxes  
*Tatton Park Collection*

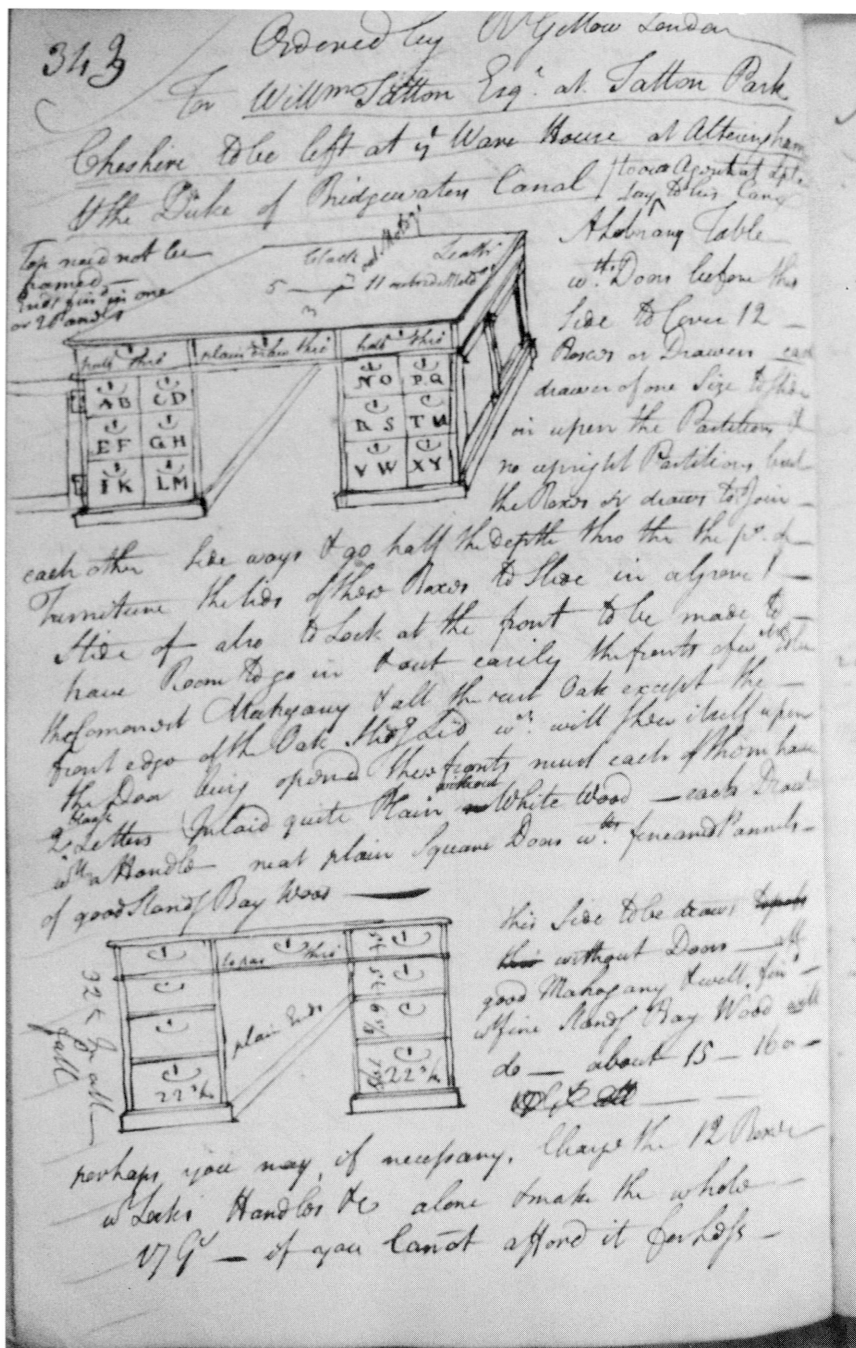
Sir Thomas Egerton of Heaton House.<sup>5</sup> Sometime after Robert Gillow (2) moved from Lancaster to London in 1776 to run the Oxford Street shop, he became friendly with the architect. In January 1779 Richard Gillow wrote to a Liverpool cabinet maker and timber merchant; '... Mr. Wyatt lives in London & my brother & he are intimately acquainted'. It is tempting therefore to assume that it was Samuel Wyatt who suggested that William Egerton should purchase furniture from Gillows. This argument is strengthened by the fact that Wyatt was working for Sir William Stanley in Cheshire in 1779,<sup>6</sup> and as will become clear one of the pieces of furniture William Egerton ordered from Gillows was described as '... like Sir Wm. S's ...'[39]. However, despite the obvious links between Wyatt, his patron Sir William Stanley, and Gillows, the actual impetus for the furniture ordered in 1780 did not come from this quarter, but from the personal recommendation of a Mrs G. Wilson as Richard Gillow acknowledged in September 1780:

*I think myself much obliged to you for recommending Mr. Egerton to our house in London who has favor'd us wth. some orders at Lancaster. My brother & I are equally concerned in trade both at Ldn. & Lancr. Therefore any favor or recommendation to another place wd. be much esteemd. by us both. Mrs. G. Wilson at Lathom Hall per the favor of Mr. Egerton.*<sup>7</sup>

The Wilson family had patronised Gillows for several generations, and Richard Gillow and his family were friends of Mr and Mrs George Wilson who owned property in Lancaster as well as York. Richard Gillow was at this period acting as a letting agent for Mrs. Wilson. The Egerton and Wilson families were linked by marriage, Beatrice Egerton the only daughter of Samuel Egerton had married Daniel Wilson in 1778, but the following year she died in childbirth.<sup>8</sup> Mrs G. Wilson of York was staying at Lathom Hall when Richard Gillow wrote to her in September 1780, but a few months later in November 1780, when Richard Gillow wrote again to her she was visiting Tatton Park.<sup>9</sup> Mrs Wilson was therefore in an excellent position to recommend the firm of Gillows to the Egertons. It was the firm's practice from the founding of the Oxford Street shop that some of the furniture should be made in Lancaster where it could be manufactured more cheaply, and either sent to London for sale or despatched to northern customers directly from Lancaster. Detailed descriptions sometimes accompanied by sketches were prepared in order that the furniture could be carried out to the customers requirements in Lancaster. Various Lancaster books during the early 1780s therefore gives a rare glimpse of what furniture looked like during a period when sketches were comparatively infrequent.

#### MR EGERTON'S LIBRARY TABLE ORDERED MAY, 1780

The library table at Tatton Park, illustrated in Figure 1, was ordered on 1 May 1780 by Robert Gillow of Oxford Street from his brother Richard in Lancaster. The order book 1778–81 includes a detailed description and two views of the desk (Figure 4). From the outside the desk looks like so many other 'partners' desks' made to the same basic design in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and as its external condition shows it had been in daily use in the Director's office at Tatton Park for many years. Its description is one of the most detailed recorded in the Gillow archives at this period,

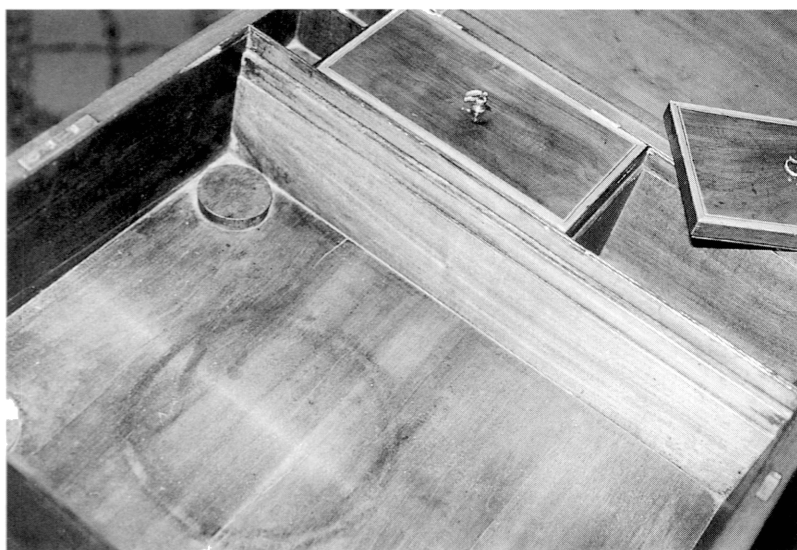


4. The *Gillow Order Book* entry for the library table made for William Egerton of Tatton Park, 1780  
*Tatton Park Collection*

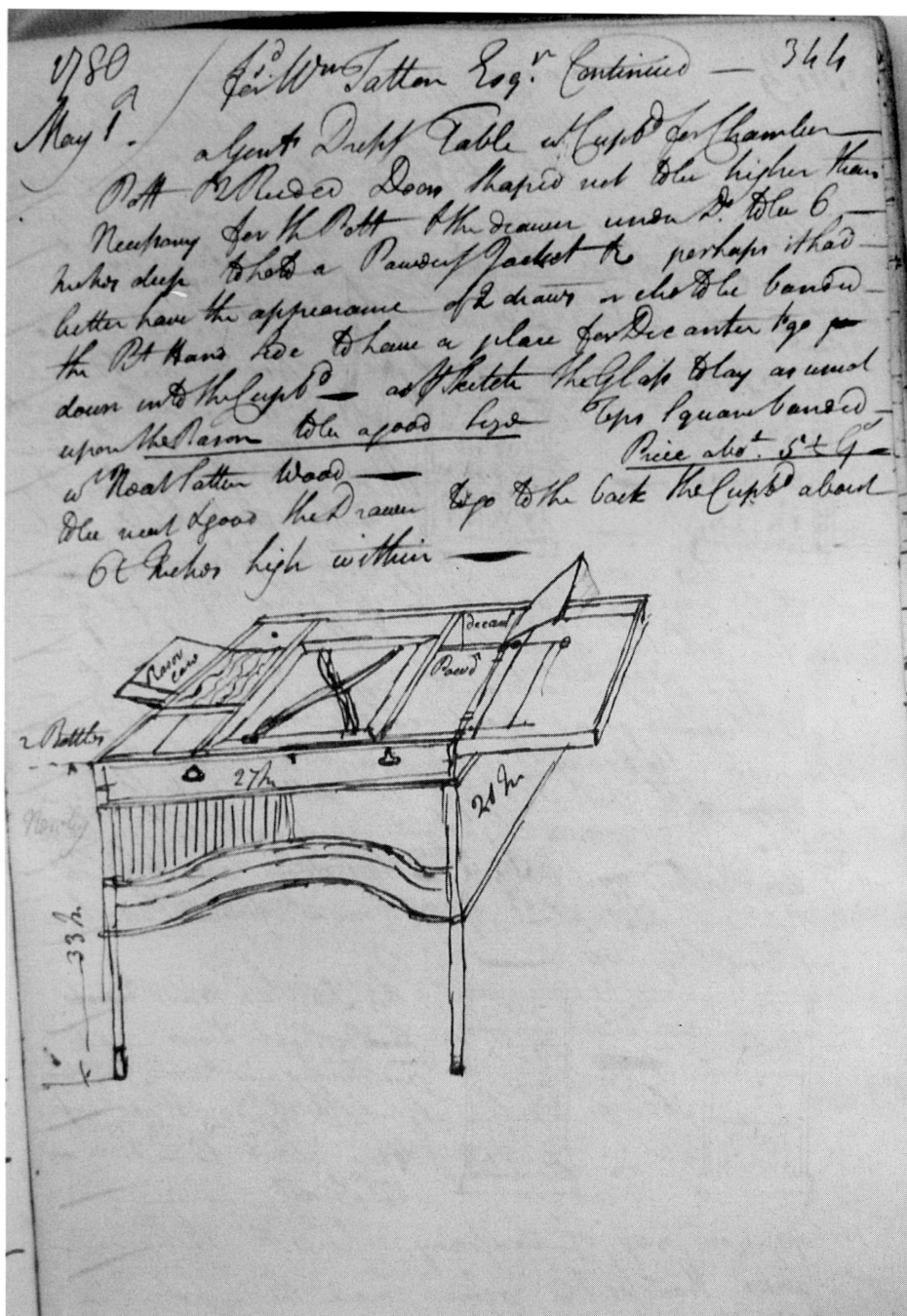




5. Gentleman's dressing table made for William Egerton by Gillow of Lancaster, 1780  
*Tatton Park Collection*



6. Interior of gentleman's dressing table showing covered compartments  
with 'tops square banded with neat satin wood'  
*Tatton Park Collection*



7. The Gillow Order Book entry for the gentleman's dressing table made for William Egerton of Tatton Park, 1780

Westminster City Archives

and indicates the ingenuity and thought which had gone into the design of the unusual drawers on this otherwise unremarkable piece of library furniture:

*A Library Table wth. doors before the side to cover 12 boxes or drawers each drawer of one size to slide in upon the partitions & no upright partitions both the boxes or draws to join- each other side ways & go half the depth thro the prs. of furniture the lids of these boxes to slide in a groove & slide of also to lock at the front to be made to have room to go in & out easily the fronts of whch. to be the comonist of mahogany & all the rest of oak except the front edge of the oak sliding lid wch. will shew itself upon the door being opened. These fronts must each of them have 2 black letters inlaid quite plain without [crossed out] white wood — each draw wth. a handle neat plain square doors wth. fineard pannels -and good standg. bay wood<sup>10</sup>*

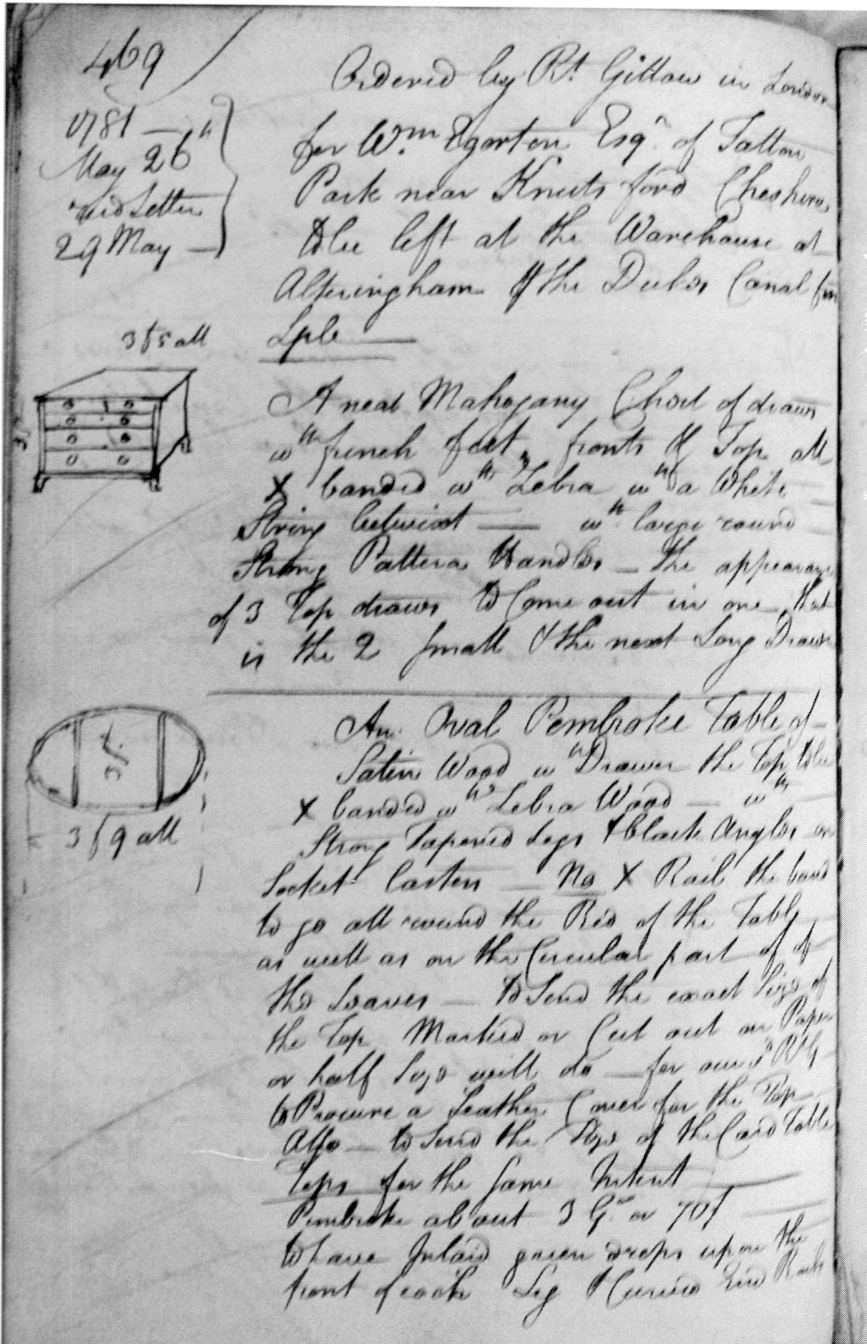
The box-like drawers formed an eighteenth-century filing system. The front edge of the oak sliding lid was to have a piece of the 'commonist' type of mahogany added because it would 'shew itself upon the door being opened . . .'. This can be seen in Figures 2 and 3, as well as a slit in the top of the lid above the escutcheon so that the box-like drawer would 'lock at the front'. William Egerton may perhaps have needed to give the boxes to servants to take to other places on the estate and consequently each box needed to be made secure. Although Gillows described the two black letters on the boxes as being 'inlaid', close examination shows that they have been carefully gouged out of the bay wood and filled with some form of composition. The reference which has been crossed out, '. . . without whitewood', is explained by comparing the lettering on these box-like drawers (Figure 2) with the 'covers' or lids of the compartments in Figure 15 which have the letters engraved on whitewood ovals set into the top of the lids. The drawers were designed to fit snugly without upright partitions and they were supported on shelves which Gillows refer to as 'partitions' (see Figure 3). The other side of the desk was to have drawers without doors in front of them, in the conventional manner. It was to be made of 'all good mahogany & well finid. [finished? or vineared?] with fine standg. bay wood'. 'Bay wood' was a plainer straighter grained mahogany from the bay of Honduras. It was a softer cheaper mahogany often used by Gillows and other Lancaster cabinet makers for partitions on drawers and as drawer linings on some good pieces. Oak was also commonly used for drawers and as carcass wood. The desk top still has its original black leather which was mentioned in the order book, and Robert Gillow added that it 'need not be framed'. Many library desks were fitted with hinged frames or 'rising frames' to elevate once or twice, and two years later William Egerton was also to order just such a desk which will be described later in this paper. The locks are inscribed 'J.F. Needs 100 New Bond Street late J. Bramah 124 Piccadily' and are later than the desk. Some of the locks do not fit very well and the escutcheons are set into a lozenge of wood which suggests that the original locks have been removed, causing damage to the surrounding wood, hence the repair and replacement of the original locks. In 1780 the table had some twenty-six locks 'made on purpose . . . wth. 3 master keys to pass the whole' which cost an extra £2 8s.<sup>11</sup> The heavy table was rendered more mobile by the addition of eight large three-wheeled brass castors, which cost William Egerton an extra 9s. 6d. The locks and handles on the box drawers are the original ones but they do not have a mark on them. The handles are of a standard design which Gillows had used from at least the early 1760s. However, their 'oval roses' which can be seen in Figure 3 may have been newly fashionable in 1778 and were



8. Oval satinwood Pembroke table made by Gillow of Lancaster, 1781  
*Tatton Park Collection*



9. Design for an oval Pembroke table.  
A. Hepplewhite and Co., *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide*, 1788



10. The Gillow Order Book entry for the satinwood Pembroke table made for William Egerton, 1781  
 Westminster City Archive

probably those obtained from a Birmingham manufacturer Glover, Clarke & Griffiths, when they were described as 'plain handles and oval roses'. Another consignment was ordered again from John Clarke in June 1779.<sup>12</sup> Robert Gillow had suggested when he placed the order with his brother in May 1780, that the price charged should be 15 or 16 guineas and added, 'perhaps you may, if necessary, charge the 12 boxes wth. locks handles & c. alone, and make the whole seventeen guineas — if you cannot afford it for less —'.<sup>13</sup> In fact the final cost excluding transport and packing was slightly cheaper at £17 14s. 6d.<sup>14</sup> Richard Gillow had obviously listened carefully to his younger brother in London and costed the desk accordingly.

#### A LARGE AND HANDSOME GENTLEMAN'S DRESSING TABLE, MAY 1780

Another order, for a gentleman's dressing table, was made in May 1780 by William Tatton at Gillows' London shop, and sent by Robert to Lancaster to be manufactured by his brother. The drawing is illustrated in Figure 7, and the dressing table in Figure 5. Robert Gillow described the piece in the following terms:

*A gents. dressg. table wth. cupbd. for chamber pott & 2 reeded doors shaped not to be higher than necessary for the pott & the drawer under do. to be 6 inches deep to hold a powder jacket & perhaps it had better have the appearance of 2 draws or shou'd be banded — the rt. hand side to have a place for decanter to go down into the cupbd. -as per sketch. The glass to lay as usual upon the bason to be a good size. Tops square banded — wth. neat satten wood — Price abt. 5½ gns. to be neat & good the drawer to go to the back the cupbd. about 6½ inches high within-.*<sup>15</sup>

The information given in the above description and the notes on the accompanying drawing throw a great deal of light on how William Tatton would have used his dressing table, and the items which he would have kept in it. It is a social history lesson in itself. William Tatton wore a wig as can be seen in contemporary portraits. The compartments for two small bottles, razor cases, and other items can be seen in Figure 5 and the lidded compartment intended for powder on the drawing (Figure 7). The bottom drawer, which was six inches deep, was given the '... appearance of 2 drawers or should be banded' (presumably to give it a more elegant appearance), housed a 'powdering jacket'. The jacket would have protected William's clothes from the wig powder. The mirror fitted in grooves on top of a sizeable bason when not in use, the marks of the foot ring of a bason can still be seen in Figure 6. The slightly raised circles in the corners near the bason would have supported the two soap glasses or dishes which were also ordered for the dressing table. Soap was made in the shape of small balls in the eighteenth century. Two tumbler glasses were also included when the dressing table was completed.<sup>16</sup> The 'razor cases' formed partitions in one of the compartments, and these thin strips of mahogany can still be seen occasionally in fitted drawers in commodes and chests of drawers of the period, including one commode now in store at Tatton Park which may be another unrecognised Gillow piece. Gillows put a great deal of thought into the design of their furniture, as the comment that the cupboard for the chamber pot should not be 'higher than necessary for the pott ...' demonstrates. Many entries in the archives show how much care went into making their furniture fit the dimensions of the average eighteenth-century figure. However the idea of keeping a chamber pot above a powdering jacket does not seem a particularly

good one, nor does a decanter placed adjacent to a powder compartment seem very practical either[45]. The dressing table is made of mahogany, with what Gillows called 'reeded doors' but which are generally called tambour doors today. The tops of the compartments were 'square banded wth. neat satten wood'. Satinwood contrasted well with mahogany, and the use of banding and stringing to emphasise the line of furniture in addition to its value as a contrasting wood was, as will be explained later, a newly fashionable concept in London at this period. The description, however, does not mention the other very fine lines of stringing on the covers of ebony and a white wood lighter than the band of satinwood which was probably boxwood (Figure 6). The lock on the top compartment has the words 'secure lever' engraved on it. The final price for the gentleman's dressing table on completion was £5 18s. Can the design source for the gentlemen's dressing table be identified? The nearest pattern book design appears to be figure 132 from Thomas Malton's *Treatise on Perspective* which was published in 1778.<sup>17</sup> However, although the basic design is similar, if the Gillow design was inspired by Malton's it had been greatly adapted. It seems more likely that the firm were adapting current styles in day-to-day use in London, and adding a few touches of their own. In fact an entry in the Petty Ledger by the payment to Christopher Newby who made the dressing table tends to confirm this view; it reads, 'A Gents Dressing Table like Sir Wm. S. chiefly as per draft from London find. [vineared] ends & back only 1 bottom drawer x banded & strung Top £2.14.9'[38]. This entry makes it clear that the design came from London, via Robert Gillow. Once again 'Sir William S' must be Sir William Stanley, and a later entry confirms this and shows that this style of table 'like Sir William Stanleys Plan but exactly like the last in every respect . . .' the 'last' being Egerton's example was made by Newby for another customer in November 1782. The design must have been successful since Newby made another three with slight variations over the next few months for Gillows of Lancaster [39].

#### AN OVAL SATINWOOD PEMBROKE TABLE, MAY 1781; AND THE INTRODUCTION OF SATINWOOD

A year later in May, 1781, Robert wrote to his brother in Lancaster again with details of several more pieces he wanted him to make for Tatton Park selected from a second order placed by William Egerton.<sup>18</sup> Although several orders were sent to Lancaster to be made, and are listed in the appendix, the only Lancaster piece which has been identified in the Tatton Park collection is an oval Pembroke table of satinwood (Figure 8). The top of the Pembroke table was sketched in the order book (Figure 10). It was described in the following words:

*An oval Pembroke table of satin wood wth. drawer the top to be x banded wth. zebra wood — wth. strong tapered legs & black angles on socket castors — No x rail the band to go all round the bed of the table — as well as on the circular part of the leaves — to send the exact size of the top marked or cut out on paper or half size will do — for our Rt. G to procure a leather cover for the top — Also to send the size of the card table tops for the same intent. Pembroke about 3 gns. or 70s. to have inlaid green drops upon the front of each leg & curved end rails'.<sup>18</sup>*

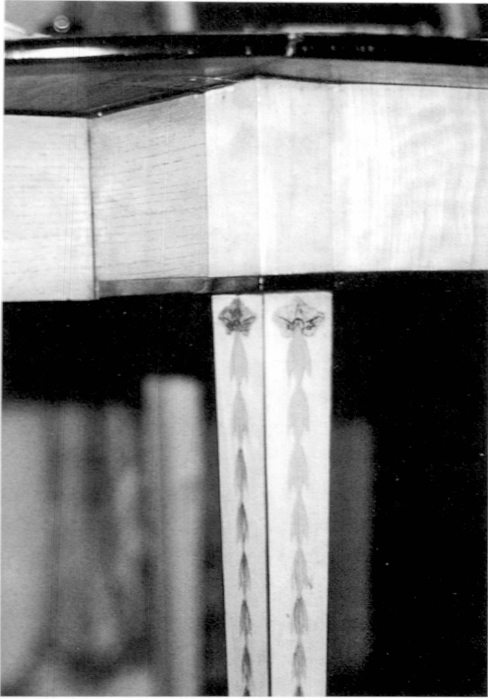
Satinwood was first mentioned in the Gillow archives in the late 1760s. Gillows wrote to their London wood merchant Mr Hurd in June 1769 to ask him to buy for the firm



'about 5 shillings worth of sattin wood, the best you can & send it us the first opportunity by land'.<sup>19</sup> At first satinwood was used mainly for stringing as a contrast to mahogany, an example can be seen on the gentleman's dressing table in Figure 5. However by the 1770s its potential was being realised also for other uses. It was a new wood at this period and Gillows' customers were unsure about its potential as a furniture wood. In 1774 the wife of William Salmond of Waterfoot, Cumberland, who also had an estate in Antigua, wrote to Gillows to enquire what furniture the Lancaster firm could make from seventeen pieces of satinwood they possessed. The planks varied in length, breadth, and thickness. The longest was 8 feet, the shortest 4 feet, and the widest 14 inches by 5 inches in thickness, the narrowest 8 inches by 3 inches in thickness. Gillows replied:

*We think it would make about double the quantity of goods you've mentioned or more, but we cannot exactly say what waste there will be in it until it be sawn up owing to the shakers hidden defects but we are well convinced t'will make very neat furniture. The sooner you can fix what sort of furniture you would choose to have made of it the better for yourself as it should be sawn up before winter to be in good season for 1775.*<sup>20</sup>

William Salmond had deposited the satinwood with Gillows but when Gillows despatched other furniture to him in the autumn of 1775 they still had not received a reply.<sup>21</sup> Gillows wrote to Salmonds on several occasions and by 1777 he had moved to Marpool near Exmouth in Devon when they wrote to ask if he would be willing to sell them 'any part or the whole of the sattin wood in our possession. — If a small plank could be spared at a fair price 'twould be a convenience to us at this time', and they urged him to reply as soon as convenient.<sup>22</sup> It would appear that satinwood was coming into Lancaster from the 1770s via West Indies merchants or customers with connections there, some of whom were experimenting with the new wood for their own furniture. In May 1774 Gillows supplied a customer with '... a satinwood Pembroke table'; others were made in 1775 including one for a Manchester merchant '... with an ebony banded top' for £2 6s. od.; and in December 1776 Lady Derby of Knowsley ordered what may have been a similar version of William Egerton's Pembroke table [44]. The fact that Gillows were willing to buy just one plank if Salmond was unwilling to sell all seventeen planks suggests that satinwood was much in demand by 1777. Although as mentioned earlier Gillows obtained small quantities of satinwood probably for contrasting stringing from the 1760s from London. Within a very short period, however, it was being used regularly by Gillows and no doubt other Lancaster cabinet makers for small tables and other furniture. The legs are probably solid satinwood (Figure 11), the lopers which support the leaves of the table top are probably ash, and the satinwood veneers on the table top are applied to a mahogany carcass. Zebra wood was used as a cross-banding round the circumference of the table top, with a very fine line of ebony with a 'white line betwixt' as Gillows often described it, this was probably box wood. One of the most striking features and one which may well help to identify other satinwood furniture made by the firm during this period are the 'black angles' the black wood on the angles or edges of the legs and on 'the band to go all round the bed of the table — as well as on the circular part of the leaves'. This band round the table top appeared on close inspection by a group of furniture restorers to be mahogany ebonised, although the 'black angles' on the legs appear to be ebony [46]. However, the



11. Satinwood Pembroke table; detail showing the band around the table bed and the 'inlaid green drops' on the legs

*Tatton Park Collection*

example made for Lady Derby by Gillows in 1775 did have '... an ebony banded top' so ebony was apparently used on some similar satinwood tables [47]. In May 1775 Gillows wrote to Mr William Kerrs, a Liverpool merchant: 'have received the black ebony wch. appears to be good but not a kind of wood that we use much of ... take five hundred weight of the blackest stuff at the rate of 18 gns. per ton' [42]. Five hundred weight seems a lot for a wood that they did not use much, but it indicates the volume of furniture the firm was making in 1775. However fashions were to change within a few years. In 1780 a contrasting line of inlaid wood was a newly fashionable feature used on other furniture in London. Gillows introduced this immediately to their Lancashire customers. They informed a Manchester customer in September 1780: 'As to plain satinwood card tables they will not look well unless they have some banding & stringing of other sort of wood to set 'em off'.<sup>23</sup> As has already been noted on the gentleman's dressing table which Gillows supplied to William Egerton in 1780 the Lancaster firm also employed light and dark banding and stringing to achieve a contrast against mahogany, or as Gillows put it so concisely '... to set 'em off'. Under the heading of 'London', that is, to be made for the London shop or bespoke for metropolitan customers, in the Order Book of October 1780, Gillows noted: '2 sattin wood secretaires & book cases wth. inlaid vauses and festoon of husks upon the top french feet — no projecting beads but a green or black string dressed flush wth. the drawer wch. forms a band'.<sup>24</sup> Contrasting black or green beads as Gillows put it 'dressed flush' had also replaced projecting beads on fashionable mahogany furniture made in London, they also had 'French brackets' (feet) by 1780 as Gillows observed:

'they make mahogany chests of draws now of mahogany wth. black or green beads dressed flush wth. French brackets & a band down the corner of the end — wch. makes it neat & also continues it on the bracket & sometimes forms a panel of different colour wood'.<sup>25</sup> Inlaid 'green drops' or husks (probably harewood) are another feature on the Gillow satinwood table supplied from Lancaster in 1781 (Figure 11); they bear a strong resemblance to those on a very similar Pembroke table illustrated in plate 62 (Figure 9) in Hepplewhite's *Guide*.<sup>26</sup> However, it must be noted that the design book was published seven years after Gillows made the table for William Egerton of Tatton, so Hepplewhite was probably adapting a design used first by Gillows and other London cabinet makers rather than the reverse being the case. Tables were often protected by a leather cover, this meant that a paper pattern to the exact shape had to be sent to Robert Gillow in London so that he could arrange for its manufacture. Quality leather was unobtainable in Lancaster at this period.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately the pair of satinwood card tables which also required a leather cover have not yet been found at Tatton Park nor has the 'neat mahogany chest of draws wth. French feet' illustrated in Figure 10. Details of all the Egerton pieces made in Lancaster at this period are included in the appendix. However, nothing is known about the rest of the Egerton pieces for Tatton which were ordered at, and made in, the Oxford Street shop in May 1781. Presumably satinwood chairs to match the Pembroke, card tables and secretaire would have been included, if so none remain at Tatton Park today. It appears that in 1780 Richard knew of only one chair style which was suitable for manufacture in satinwood and this example was on display in the Lancaster wareroom. The satinwood chair, Richard Gillow informed a customer, retailed at 16s. 6d., excluding the 'stuffing' for the seat. He added: 'We think that chintz would be very neat furniture for satinwood chairs & sofa & c. or blue damask. If you fix upon satinwood chairs we think the legs of the sofa should be of the same sort of wood'.<sup>28</sup>

#### ANOTHER LARGE AND NEAT LIBRARY TABLE, NOVEMBER 1782

The final piece of furniture which has been identified in the Tatton Park collection is another very fine library table which William Egerton ordered on 11 November 1782 (Figure 12). Unlike the desk ordered in 1780 no drawing survives but it has been identified by a very detailed description:

*For a large neat & strong mahogany library table, the front all round — All the draws & inside covers crossbanded & strung, The tops, ends, slide & c. framed & paneled, the upper top covered wth. leather to elevate twice wth. frames & hinges — supported wth. brass steps sundry conveniences, sliding partitions private draws & pidgeon holes within £23 4s 3d*

*To 2 strong brass lifting handles a sett of large 3 wheeled castors & sundry rollers for the drawer & c. 14s 6d.*

*To a sett of curious brass locks made in London by the same person who made Sr. Wm. Stanley[s] & cost the same wch. was £8 8s od*

*2 master & 2 comon keys*

*To matts & packing & cord wth. wood & nails & labour to case all the outside part of the bottom £0 17s 6d*

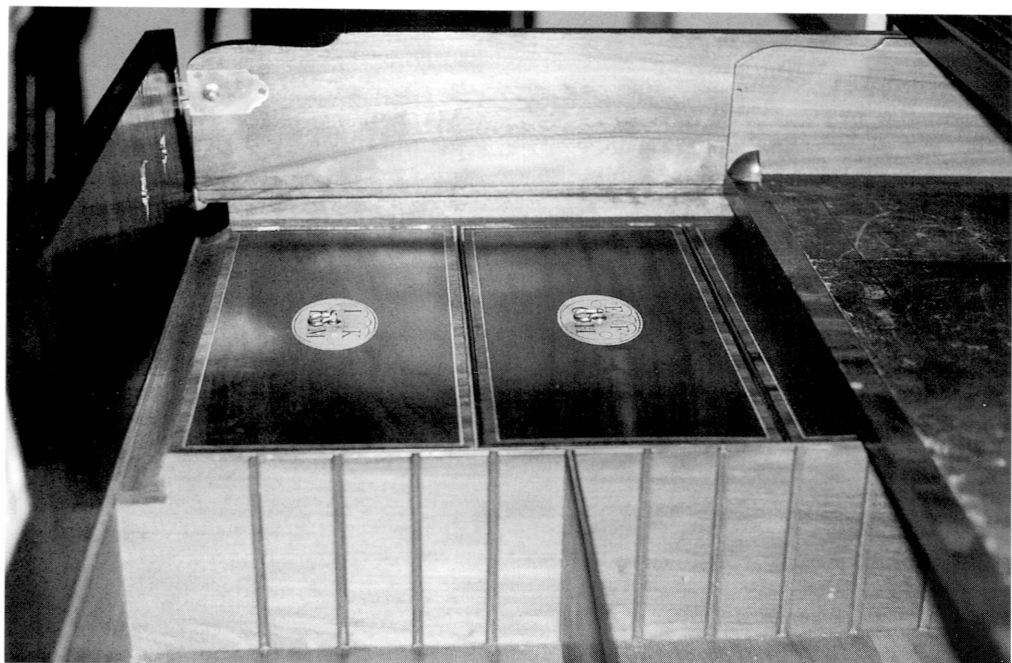
*£33 4s 3d.<sup>29</sup>*



12. 'Large and strong library table' made for William Egerton by  
Gillow of Lancaster, 1782  
*Tatton Park Collection*



13. Library table with its top elevated once  
*Tatton Park Collection*



14. Library table secretaire drawer fitted with sliding partition and lettered compartments  
*Tatton Park Collection*



15. Detail of one of the lettered compartment fronts  
*Tatton Park Collection*

The library table or 'buroe writing table', as Gillows described it in their Journal, was a much more expensive piece than the previous desk bought from the Lancaster branch in May 1780 (Figure 1). The basic cost of the desk was £23 4s. 3d., and with the extra cost of the London-made 'curious locks' and the lifting handles plus packing it amounted to the considerable sum in 1782 of £33 4s. 3d. The library table exceeded the cost of the desk made by Gillows of Lancaster for Sir James Ibbetson of Denton Hall in 1778 by over £10. William Egerton wrote to Gillows to say how pleased he was with the table, and he certainly should have been.<sup>30</sup> It had all the requirements that any eighteenth-century

gentleman could wish for use in his library. The height of the desk was 40 inches so it was clearly intended that Egerton should stand rather than sit at the desk. The secretaire drawer (Figure 14) was fitted with 'sundry rollers for the drawer & c. . .', thus enabling the drawer to move smoothly. The 'sliding partitions', only one of which remains, enabled William to alter the size of the compartments in order to hold any form of documentation. The 'inside covers cross-banded & strung . . .' still have their original handles and four letters engraved and apparently filled with some sort of composition on an oval white wood ground (Figure 16). It was a handsome eighteenth-century filing cabinet for letters, business papers, and other plans. The 'strong lifting handles' for the secretaire drawer part of the desk, set of three wheeled brass castors, and drawer handles were probably obtained from a Birmingham supplier. The 'sett of curious brass locks made in London' with '2 master & 2 comon keys' were obtained from an unnamed London source. Sir William Stanley, who had apparently made his own arrangements for similar locks from London, was another Cheshire customer for whom the Lancaster branch had made a library table previously.<sup>31</sup> No marks have been found yet on any of the locks. The 'upper top' was covered with dark green leather. The top was made to 'elevate twice wth. frames and hinges' and to be 'supported wth. brass steps', all these features can still be identified on the library table. The angle of the top could be varied so as to support large and heavy volumes, architects plans etc. On similar tables a removable mahogany ledge was fitted in order to support the books when the leather top was raised at an angle. Figure 13 shows the table elevated once, a similar table drawn by Gillows shows it elevated twice [41]. The first known designs which incorporate these rising frames are illustrated in plate 24 of Ince and Mayhew's *The Universal System of Household Furniture* which was published in 1762.<sup>32</sup> A feature not illustrated in the photographs is the broad ledge on the edge of the leather top. This ledge, which measures about 5 inches, is designed to remain flush with the top when not in use. It was intended as a flat ledge to support a candlestick when the top was angled to rest a book. The joint is cleverly designed so that it remains rigid when in use. An accounting house desk drawn about 1767, and a desk in a private collection made in 1774 by Gillows, also have the same feature.<sup>33</sup>

#### TRANSPORTING WILLIAM EGERTON'S FURNITURE FROM LANCASTER TO TATTON PARK

Instructions on how the furniture was to be sent to Tatton Park from Lancaster a distance of some seventy miles was also noted in the order book. The library table (Figure 1) and the gentleman's dressing table (Figure 5) were completed by July 1780 and despatched by Captain George Wright on board ship in three parcels from Lancaster to Liverpool, consigned to the care of Gillows agent there. They were then taken up the Duke of Bridgewater's canal (built by a kinsman of the Egertons) to 'ye warehouse at Altringham' in Cheshire. No doubt William Tatton would have sent a servant and cart to collect them or arrangements would have been made for a carrier to bring them the remaining distance to Tatton Park near Knutsford, Cheshire. However, not all furniture was sent to Tatton by the same route, the deciding factor appears to have been the size and weight of the furniture. The 'large neat and strong' library table (Figure 12) weighed 4cwt. 2lb 14oz.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore when in 1782 Mrs Wilson inspected it she agreed with Richard Gillow that the best and safest form of transport was by road to Warrington instead of by sea to Liverpool. As Richard Gillow wrote to Egerton on 11 November 1782:

*we have this day forwarded as per the annexed acct. by William Richmond carrier from hence to Warrington who has agreed to deliver it safe there for 9s 6d therefore we thought it more eligible to send it by that conveyance (and no more expence) than by sea to Liverpool & wth. far less delay & risk. Mrs. G. Wilson of York saw the piece of furniture and desired we would hint to you that she advised the above mode of conveyance upon our representing it to her as preferable to the other. We hope you'll receive it safe & that it will prove agreeable.*<sup>35</sup>

The carrier was to be paid when the desk was delivered to Warrington. From Warrington the large library table was to be sent on the 'Dukes canal' to the warehouse at Altringham in the same manner as the previous consignments of furniture for Tatton Park.<sup>36</sup> However a contradictory entry in the Sales Day Book also dated 11 November 1782, the same date that Gillows wrote to Egerton, gives the same information but states that the three cases and three parcels (which contained the library table) were to be sent on the Dukes canal from Liverpool, not Warrington, at a cost of 8s. 9d., therefore other arrangements may have been made at the last minute.<sup>37</sup>

To summarise, it appears that several factors affected the choice of the most suitable means of transporting furniture during the eighteenth century, one being the expense, another issue, and one which has not been mentioned above, was how well it was packed. The main factor was however the safety of the item, this depended on the bulk and weight of the particular piece of furniture, and/or its fragile nature. The library writing table ordered in 1782 for example, at over 4cwt, one might have expected to have been sent by sea. However, the hazard of unloading the table apparently made this a less desirable option. Lighter pieces such as the chest of drawers, Pembroke table and other pieces were apparently sent from Lancaster to Liverpool by sea, but other letters show that this was not always the case. All the Tatton furniture sent from Lancaster at this period apparently normally completed the journey from Warrington or Liverpool on the Duke of Bridgewater's canal to the warehouse in Altringham and a servant of Egerton's or perhaps another carrier then took it by cart the remaining distance to Tatton Park.

This article was written with the intention of demonstrating how between 1780 and 1782 some furniture was ordered by a member of the gentry from Gillows' London shop; and part of the order was sub-contracted to the Lancaster shop. The visual design of some pieces were influenced to some degree by the latest pattern books which were adapted to customers' needs, and some pieces also demonstrated the latest methods and materials as used in London, such as narrow contrasting banding. The types of wood, brasswares, leather and other materials used; when they were introduced; and (when known) which Lancaster journeyman actually made Egerton's furniture have also been outlined. Finally a few of the problems involved in obtaining materials in the provinces, and transporting the heavy or delicate finished products some seventy miles by complex routes over land and water from Lancaster to rural Cheshire during the last quarter of the eighteenth century have also been explored. The furniture 'discovered' at Tatton Park, together with information contained in Gillows' books, has resulted in a complex portrait of the ambitious firm and its furniture at the beginning of the 1780s.



Gillows had a foot in each camp, they were both regional and metropolitan, with a branch in the provinces and the capital. It was their boast in 1775 that they had it in their 'power to execute any orders . . . better than any other in the north of England'; and they constantly reminded customers that they could obtain anything in the upholstery line which the Lancaster shop was unable to provide via the London concern.<sup>43</sup> The furniture made for William Egerton reflects both aspects. Perhaps the last word should go to Richard Gillow as he despatched the Lancaster-made library table with its London locks to Egerton in November 1782: 'We hope you'll receive it safe & that twill prove agreeable'.<sup>40</sup> It did, Mr Gillow, and it still does.

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##### *Abbreviations*

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1. Nicholas Goodison and John Hardy, 'Gillows at Tatton Park', *Furniture History*, vi, 1970, pp. 1–39.
2. Goodison and Hardy, op. cit., p. 3.
3. I am working on a book on the Gillow firm and their furniture.
4. *Tatton Park: the Mansion*, Cheshire County Council, first published 1987, second edition 1992.
5. Samuel Wyatt was employed as the architect and Gillows supplied sixteen chairs to Sir Thomas Egerton of Heaton House or Hall in July 1774 and a large and handsome commode was also supplied in September 1774, see *Sales Journal*, pp. 693, 703.
6. GA, Letter Book 1778–81, 21 May 1779.
7. GA, Letter Book 1778–81, 18 September 1780.
8. Tatton Park, Cheshire National Trust 1982, pp. 49, 54.
9. GA, Letter Book 1778–81, 27 November 1780.
10. GA, Order Book 1778–81, p. 343, 1 May 1780.
11. GA, Waste Book 1779–80, p. 1001, 18 July 1780.
12. GA, Letter Book 1778–81, 18 June 1778; 23 October 1778; 26 June 1779; 6 July 1780.
13. op. cit., reference 10.
14. op. cit., reference 11.
15. GA, Order Book 1778–81, p. 344, 1 May 1780.
16. op. cit., reference 11.
17. Elizabeth White, *Pictorial Dictionary of British Eighteenth Century Furniture Design; the Printed Sources*, Antique Collectors' Club, 1990, p. 253.
18. GA, Order Book 1778–81, p. 469, 26 May 1781.
19. GA, Letter Book 1769–72, 18 June 1769.
20. GA, Letter Book 1775–78, 16 February 1774.
21. GA, Letter Book 1775–78, 1 October 1775.
22. GA, Letter Book 1775–78, 18 April 1778.
23. GA, Letter Book 1778–81, p. 357, 5 September 1780.
24. GA, Order Book 1778–81, p. 409, October 1780.
25. op. cit., reference 24.
26. A. Hepplewhite, *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide*, 1789, plate 62.
27. GA, Letter Book, p. 476, 11 May 1784.
28. GA, Letter Book 1778–81, 5 September 1780.
29. GA, Waste Book 1781–83, p. 418, 11 November 1782.
30. GA, Letter Book 1782–86, p. 168, 27 January 1783.
31. Sir William Stanley of Hooton near Chester had an account with Gillows from c. 1781.
32. White, op. cit., p. 292.

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33. GA, *Estimate Book* 1766–73, p. 39, see also 1760–1800, L. Boynton, *Gillow Furniture Designs*, Bloomfield Press, 1995, p. 65, figure 19.
34. op. cit., reference 10.
35. GA, Letter Book 1782–86, 11 November 1782.
36. GA, Waste Book 1781–83, p. 418.
37. GA, Sales Day Book 1778–84, 11 November 1782.
38. GA, Petty Ledger 1780–82, p. 201, 18 December 1781.
39. GA, Petty Ledger 1780–82, p. 258.
40. GA, Letter Book 1782–86, 11 November 1782.
41. *Gillow Furniture Designs*, op. cit., figs 24 and 25. Please note figure 23 shows a writing table drawn in 1787 which also shows the ledge on which to stand a candlestick, figure 24 illustrates an alternative arrangement.
42. GA, Letter Book 1775–78, 4 May 1775.
43. GA, Letter Book 1775–78, 20 January 1775. Please note although the date on the letter is '1775' its position in the Letter Book indicates it was probably a mistake by the clerk for 1776.
44. GA, Waste Book 1773–74, p. 269, May 1774; Waste Book 1775–76, p. 123, 2 September 1775.
45. I am indebted to the comment of a delegate at which this paper was given (BAFRA, Gillow Seminar, Tatton Park, 1 April 1998), for pointing out that in his grandfather's day, the chamber pot was kept in the pot cupboard and after use was left under the bed for the maid to attend to the next day, only empty pots were therefore kept in the cupboard. Another delegate pointed out that the Reverend George White refers to the contents of the pot under the bed freezing one winter. Therefore the arrangement may not have been so unsatisfactory as it first seems.
46. BAFRA, Gillow Seminar, Tatton Park, 2 April 1998.
47. op. cit., reference 44.

## APPENDIX

### DESCRIPTIONS OF FURNITURE MADE BY GILLOWS OF LANCASTER FOR TATTON PARK FROM 1780–82, WHICH HAVE YET TO BE TRACED

Several items of furniture which were manufactured in Lancaster between 1780 and 1782 for William Egerton have not been located in the Tatton Park collection. They may have been dispersed to other Egerton properties or sold in various sales. However, details of these pieces are transcribed below, in the hope that they may eventually be discovered.

18 September 1780

'a full sized billiard table to be made in the completest manner wth . . . (?) & other balls — masts cues & c. @ 33 gns.

A small secretaire upon legs inlaid drops & black angles abt. 35 inches — long wood doors — inlaid dentil cornice & square inlaid fluted gallery — no vauses in [or ?] center — the top row of draws of mahogany banded & the face of draws & c. chiefly sattin wood — white rings wth. jn. [?] & brass furniture without — a neat netting [?] box wth. a spring

2 oval satin wood card tables per Mrs. Wilson order by letter'

[Order Book 1778–81, p. 401, LB 26 March 1780. Please note they were ordered on Egerton's behalf on 18 November 1780, LB 1778–81]

17 January 1781

The keys were lost to a secretaire bookcase sent to William Egerton:

. . . our foreman who packed them says they were wrapped up in paper nailed behind the cornice at the top of the cornice bookcase where we hope they will be found or at least tyed to some part the furniture they belong.

[LB 1778–81, p. 441, 17 January 1781]

26 May 1781

'A neat mahogany chest of draws wth. french feet fronts & top all x banded wth. zebra wth. a white string berwixt — wth. large round strong patera handles — The appearance of 3 top draws to come out in one, that is the 2 small & the next long draw

[Order Book, 1778–81, p. 469, see illustration figure]