

# GILLOW AT DENTON HALL

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The Ibbetson family elevated itself from the status of prosperous Leeds cloth merchants to the rank of gentry with the purchase in 1717 of the Denton Hall estate, near Otley, Yorkshire and in 1748 squire Henry was created a baronet for his part in suppressing the Jacobite insurrections. The marriage of his son, James, to the heiress, Jenny Catgill in 1767 enabled the couple to commission John Carr of York to build a fine Palladian house which was completed in 1778 at a cost of £9,459<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1).

An undated document, penned by Sir James Ibbetson, headed: 'An account of Money expended in furniture for the new House at Denton' reveals a typical provincial pattern of patronage.<sup>2</sup>

Chippendale's	Bill	551	-	-
Gillows	do	220	12	-
Scholes	do	206	17	-
Ryley	do	009	-	-
Hacker	do	009	-	-
Moore	do	025	-	-
Howard	do	008	-	-
Bulkley	do	005	3	-
Calthrop	do	022	4	-
Ellis	do	004	15	-
Mayhew & Ince	do	018	-	-
Starkie	do	002	16	-
		<hr/>		
		1,082	7	-

Thomas Chippendale received the large sum of £551 while his London rivals Mayhew & Ince were paid only £18. Gillow of Lancaster, the largest and most successful cabinet makers in the north of England, supplied furnishings to the value of £220 12s. while nine other, presumably local, firms were remitted lesser sums. No itemised bills survive, but the Gillow archives<sup>3</sup> contain welcome evidence about various pieces they contributed to the original furnishing scheme. It appears that the cost of building Denton strained Sir James's finances, his furnishing programme being spread over at least ten years. Denton survived as a family home until 1975 when it was converted by Bailey's, a firm of engineers, into offices and a conference centre, but because of changes in ownership and sales during the present century tracing the original contents is by no means straightforward.

Sir James died in 1795 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Sir Henry Carr Ibbetson, who, between 1798 and 1803, called in Turner & Smith of New Bond Street, London, to supply a repertoire of bed and dressing room furniture and refit the Drawing Room, (they charged £446 for three looking glasses) at a cost of £2,315.<sup>4</sup> An important anthology of furniture described in their lengthy account has been identified.<sup>5</sup> Following the death of Charles Ibbetson in 1839 a comprehensive inventory of Denton was



1. Denton Hall, Yorkshire, built by John Carr 1770–78. Jones & Co., *Views of Seats*, London, 1839

compiled.<sup>6</sup> After 1861 there were no further male heirs, one daughter, Laura, inherited; she had married Marmaduke Wyvill of Constable Burton, near Leyburn in North Yorkshire and so in 1861 the two estates were united. The family lived mainly at Denton until 1902 when they returned to Constable Burton taking their furniture with them. Denton was then rented, firstly to Mrs Titus Salt, who brought with her the celebrated furnishings from Milner Field made by Marsh & Jones of Leeds in 1865.<sup>7</sup> The next tenant, Lord Illingworth, purchased the mansion from the Wyvill's in 1917 and filled it with expensive reproduction furniture. Denton was again sold in the early 1920s to Mr and Mrs Arthur Hill who stocked the reception rooms with antiques — dispersed after Mrs Hill's death in 1975.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, it is at Constable Burton that one must first look for furniture from the historic Denton ensembles. To sharpen the challenge many ex-Denton pieces featured in a three-day sale held by the executors of Mrs E. J. Wyvill at Constable Burton in 1932, so it is a depleted collection and illustrations in the old sale catalogue provide our only pictorial record of several items ordered for Denton in the 1770s.<sup>9</sup>

A stylish half-round marquetry commode and matching pair of pier tables from Chippendale's commission have been identified and published elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> They were sold in 1932, but lately surfaced in America, the commode being acquired by the Carnegie Institute in 1992, the tables by the Chippendale Society in 1996. Many examples of Sheraton-style mahogany and japanned furniture described in Turner & Smith's bill survive at Constable Burton and were illustrated in *Country Life* ten years

ago.<sup>11</sup> The present article aims to clarify Gillows' contribution to furnishing Denton between 1776 and 1787 — a subject previously only briefly explored.<sup>12</sup>

The most significant furniture supplied by Gillows was for the Library and the Dining Room, together with a range of bedroom pieces and a billiard table. The magnificent library writing table (Figures 2–8), recorded in the 1839 inventory as a 'Commode Mahg Library Table', is of great interest because it corresponds to a design in Thomas Chippendale's pattern book *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director*, 1754, pl. lvi (Figure 3) and letters reveal something of the relationship between the cabinet maker and Sir James, who paid close attention to details of its construction. Richard Gillow of Lancaster is listed as one of the original subscribers to the *Director* and when an enlarged third edition was being published in weekly parts he urged his cousin James, in London, to send 'Chippendale's additional Number as soon as possible'.<sup>13</sup> Five years later, on 26 April 1765, when posting to a client '2 Sketches of Library Book Cases' he remarked, 'if any of Chippendale's designs be more agreeable I have his Book and can execute 'em & adapt them to the places they are for if you'll be so obliging to Point out the Number'.<sup>14</sup> As late as 1784 Gillows made, for Lord Muncaster, a set of six 'Gothick Back' armchairs slavishly based on a *Director* plate.<sup>15</sup> This Lancaster firm is a textbook example of how Chippendale's designs were transmitted to provincial tradesmen and continued to influence them and their more conservative-minded gentry patrons long after such models had ceased to be fashionable in aristocratic London circles. Chippendale suggested in his Preface 'that if no one Drawing should singly answer the Gentleman's Taste, there will yet be found a Variety of Hints, sufficient to construct a new one'. The dimensions of the Denton library table are exactly those specified by Chippendale but it is not an exact translation of the engraving, the corner trusses being headed by neo-classical paterae rather than rococo fronds. Some modification was only to be expected because twenty-four years had elapsed between publication of the design and production of this table (the plate was omitted from the revised 1762 edition).

Letters from Gillows to Sir James Ibbetson indicate how he set about ordering his handsome new table.<sup>16</sup>

13 October 1778

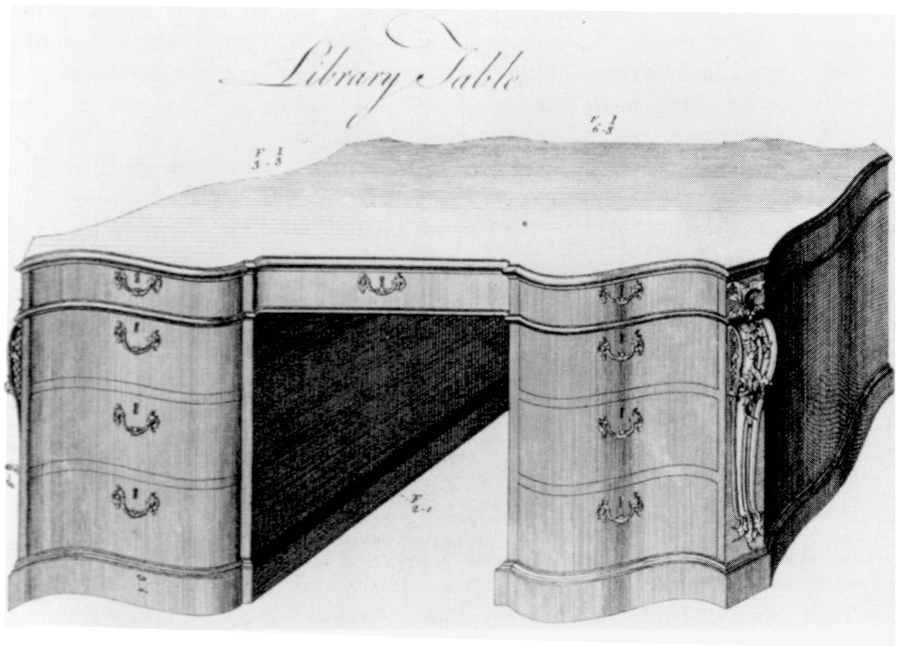
I am obliged wth Your favour of the 9th Curr and according to your Request the Library table is put in hand upon the plan you fixed upon here & also with the alterations you pointed out to my Bror in London — wth alterations as follows — the Right hand Drawer next to the top to be fit up for a Writing drawer wth Divisions for papers etc. 2 Private drawers and a Slide covered with Green Cloth/ over 'em/ to Write upon & the only Drawer in the Center to pass thro' the Middle so as to Draw out on either Side and be a plain drawr.

Please to favour us with a line mentioning whether you would like the table top to be Covered with black Leather, Green Cloth or have it of Mahog . . .

The firm's Order Book contains, under 19 October 1778, a rough sketch of the table (Figure 5) with the following memorandum.<sup>17</sup> 'Ordered by Sir James Ibbetson A Library Table, one drawer wt 6 Covers & 4 Letters upon each plainly Inlaid & two Private Drawers with a slide upon Right Hand Drawer — the Middle Drawer to pass thro' — but he is not quite clear.'



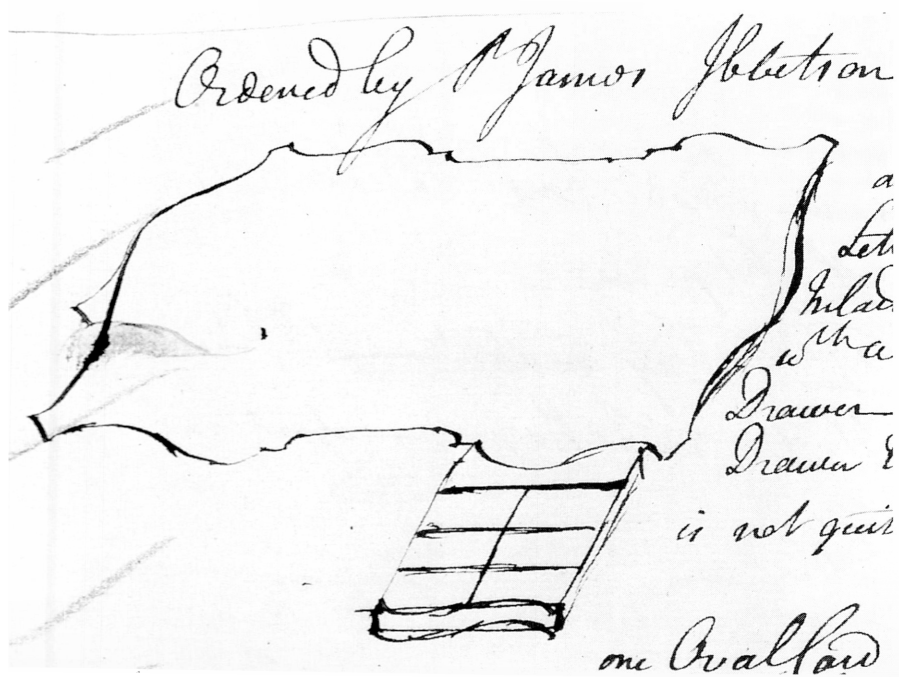
2. Library writing table made by Gillows in 1778 for Sir James Ibbetson, Denton Hall, now at Judges' Lodgings Museum, Lancaster  
*Photo: Sotheby's*



3. Design for a library table from Thomas Chippendale's *Director*, 1754, pl. lvi  
*The Chippendale Society*



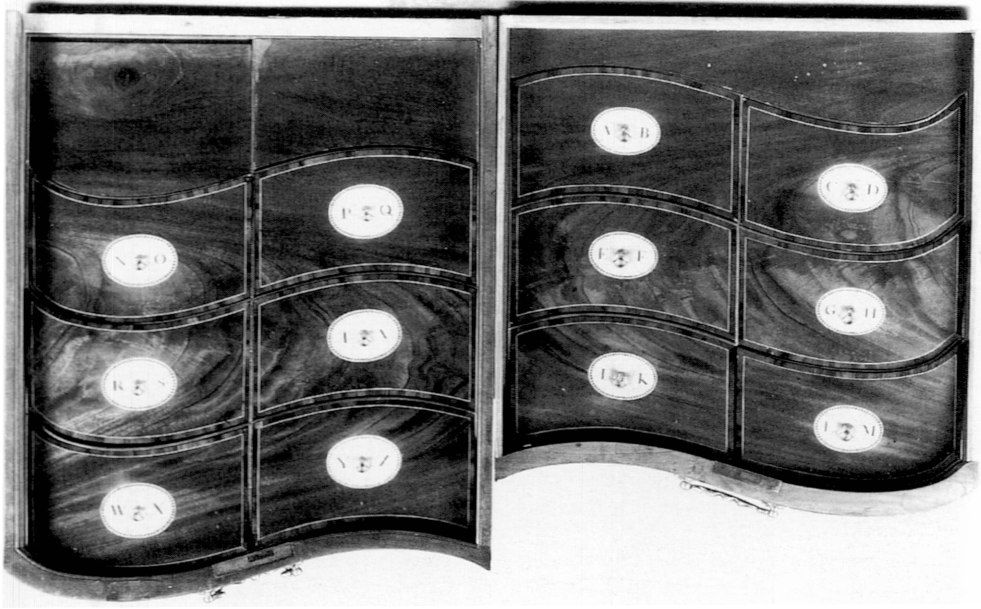
4. Alternative view of the library table  
*Sotheby's*



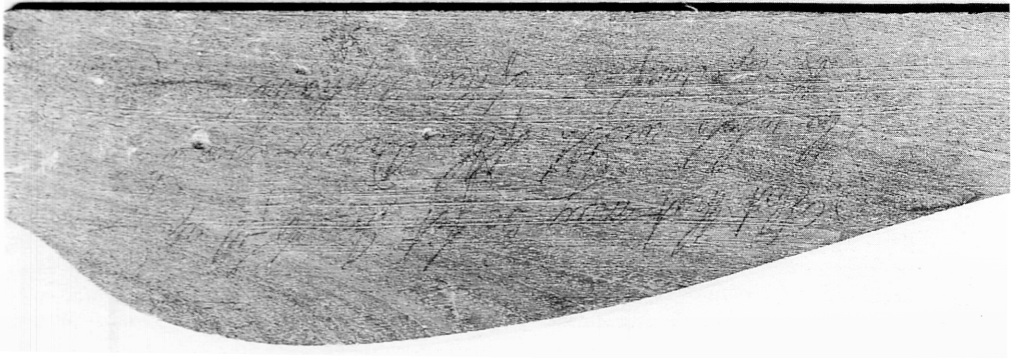
5. Annotated sketch of library table 'Ordered by Sir James Ibbetson' in Gillows Order Book, 19 October 1778  
*Westminster City Archives*



6. Detail of carved corner truss  
*Sotheby's*



7. Partitioned top drawers, the wells fitted with alphabet covers, they were the source of a misunderstanding and had to be altered  
*Sotheby's*



8. Blank capping at the back of one partitioned drawer inscribed: 'Flat that may be fit in to fill up the whole width of the Drawer even with the Top Surface of this Alphabet'  
*Sotheby's*

Gillows' Waste Book contains a copy invoice dated 'Lancaster 23d Decr 1788' and addressed to 'Sir James Ibbetson Bart. at Denton near Otley Dr. to Stock'.<sup>18</sup>

For a large & Handsome Mahogany  
Library Table in the Comode Shape with  
8 draws on one Side, 2 on the other,

2 Cupboards & a Drawer in the Center  
 one of which drawers is a Writing Drawer  
 with 6 Shaped Covers & 2 Private draws  
 also a Carved Truss & Pattera upon each  
 Cant Likewise 4 Carved Brackets

£22 10 0

For a Suit of 14 brass Locks for Do  
 made on Purpose one of which opens  
 the Writing draw is a Master Lock  
 with 2 Master 2 Common Keys all Screw Caps  
 For 8 brass Casters for Do & Screws large & Good  
 a Piece of Green Baise to Cover the Top  
 of Do & Guard the Leather

1 8 6

0 9 6

0 4 6

The table was delivered before 15 January and on 19 January a further letter refers to Sir James's estate joiner who, following a change of mind on the part of his master, was involved in partitioning the top left-hand drawer to create wells for an additional six alphabet covers to match the fittings in the right-hand drawer<sup>19</sup> (Figure 7).

We are Honored wth your favour of the 15 Currnt. and are glad to hear that the Library Table came safe we made it in all respects as near the Instructions reced. from our Rd. Gillow in London as we could

We can send you 6 other covers for the left-hand drawer so near in Point of Size & Shape that one of you good Joiners may fit up the drawer wth Partitions & Carving round the Inside of it to Suit Said Covers wch presume is what you wish to be done. Should be glad you would Inform us what letters you would Choose to be put upon these 6 Covers & then they shall be done and dent wth Speed . . .'

This extra work included sending a blank capping to fill an awkwardly shaped space at the back of the drawer; the underside bears a helpful pencilled inscription: 'Flat that may be fit in to fill up the whole width of the Drawer even with the Top Surface of this Alphabet' (Figure 8).

In November 1780 Gillows politely reminded Sir James that he had not yet paid his accounts,<sup>20</sup> to which, on the evidence of the surviving one-sided correspondence, he responded by complaining he had been overcharged for the table. They replied on 2 December.<sup>21</sup>

As to the Price of the Library Table being fixed at 20 Gs we presume that must be a mistake either in you or us as we have no Traces of it either in our Books or Memories. We endeavour'd to execute it in Ye best Manner & did not Spare Labour to have it Complete. Perhaps you might ask us some time before you order'd it Upon looking at the Draft about the Price & we might say about 20 Gs w'ch we dont remember, but then there is a good deal of extra Work in the Inside of Writing Drawer & some additional Work without not Shown or included by sd Draft wch [with] the gradual advance of Wood will we hope be a Sufficient Cause for the Difference in ye Price as especially as the Ps Furniture deserves the money chargd or more.

This impressively documented library table remained at Constable Burton until offered by Charles Wyvill at Sotheby's on 10 July 1992, lot 91, but failed to reach its reserve. It was subsequently acquired by an overseas collector and became subject to an export deferral: happily Lancashire County Council succeeded in raising the funds to buy it for display at the Judges' Lodgings, Lancaster. Two other library writing tables corresponding to the same *Director* design are known, both unfortunately lack a worthwhile provenance or evidence for authorship.<sup>22</sup>



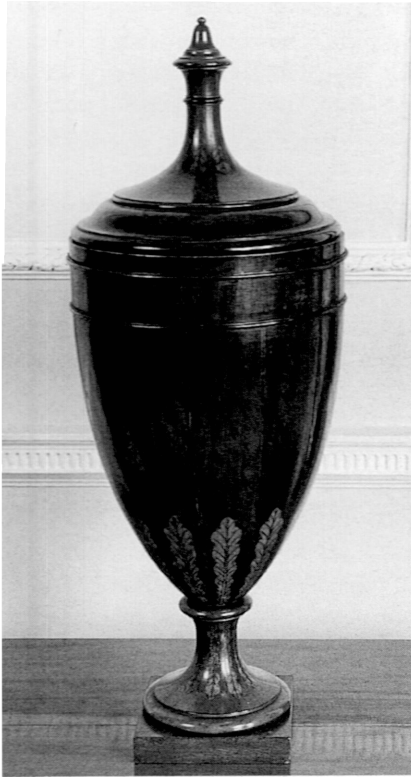
When Sir James was furnishing Denton well appointed dining rooms were equipped, along one end wall, with a dignified suite comprising a sideboard table with a cellaret below, flanked by a pair of pedestals and urns. The 1839 Denton inventory records 'Two mahg Urns on Pedestal' in the spacious Dining Room, they had been supplied by Gillows in 1787: a single urn survives in the Constable Burton collection (Figure 9). A drawing in the firm's Estimate Sketch Book<sup>23</sup> portrays a 'Pedistall and Vause' made for Sir James (Figure 10) together with the usual cost analysis.<sup>24</sup> They are of orthodox design, not unlike examples engraved in the same year for George Hepplewhite's *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide*, pls 35–36. One pedestal, lined with strong tin and provided with a heater, served as a platewarmer. The other housed a partitioned drawer for wine bottles. The (missing) vase, intended to hold water for the use of the butler, was lined with lead and fitted with copper pipes and a brass cock. The unlined vase which, according to a note, cost 'about 8s 8d less' is illustrated in Figure 9. The charges included 'Inlaying and Engraving . . . per Mes Dowbiggin 3s 6d' indicating that this specialist work — the leaves on the base and cover of each vase and stringing lines between the segments — was carried out by a member of the Dowbiggin family, several of whom were employed in the workshops.<sup>25</sup> The schedule details the cost of materials, the charge for making being given in code. It is interesting to set this information beside the labour costs of making a standard pedestal and vase as specified in *The Cabinet-Makers' London Book of Prices*, 1793, pp. 145–48. Since both these sources are reasonably accessible to scholars transcripts of the lengthy passages are not quoted here.

Furniture by Gillows dating from the 1770s is comparatively rare so it is cheering to record a refined card table from their Denton commission, even if known only from an illustration in the Constable Burton sale catalogue (Figure 11). It is documented in one of the firm's Lancaster ledgers as having been supplied to Sir James Ibbetson on 4 November 1778.<sup>26</sup>

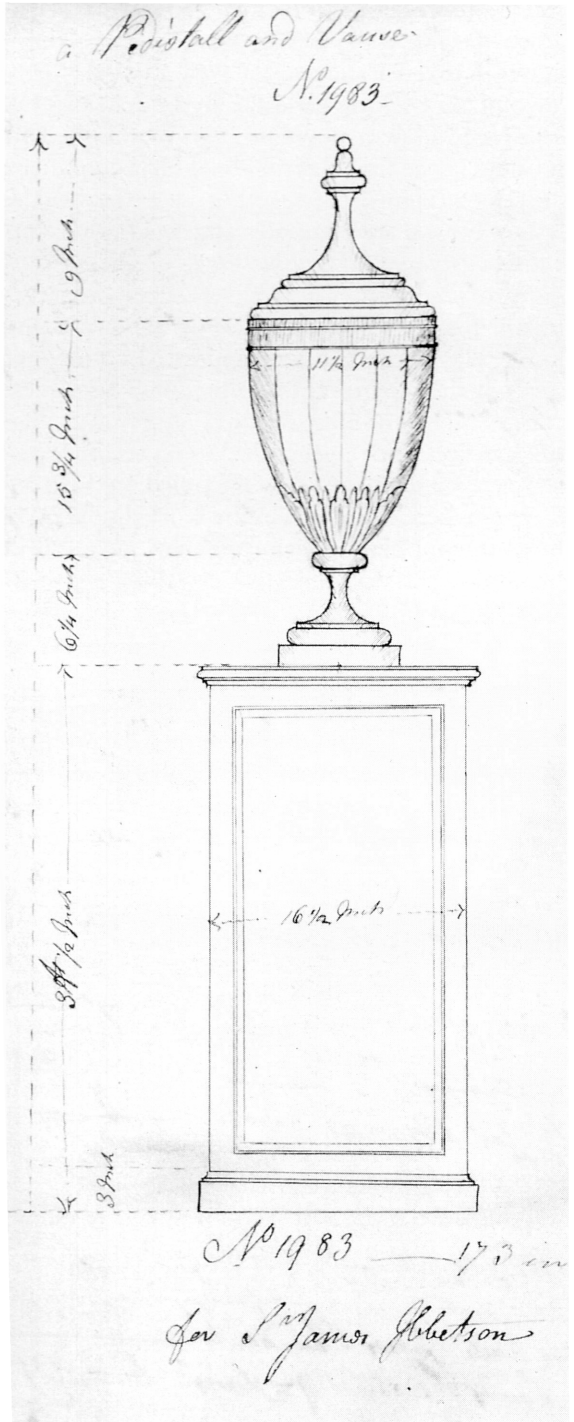
For a very neat mahogany Card Table Circular 3 ft 2 long by ab 2 ft 10 when open with Satten Wood bands & Strings & Covered with Good Cloth. Rails Inlaid wt White flutes. Inlaid Tablet – fluted legs & Carved Caps. £3 5s

On 23 December 1778 Gillows invoiced a slightly cheaper matching tea table, the only difference being that it lacked a baize-lined top.<sup>27</sup> 'To a neat Mahogany round Tea Table with inlaid tablet & Rail fluted legs & Carved Caps £3 3s 8d'. These tables were evidently admired in the neighbourhood since, the following April, Gillows wrote to Mrs Amilia Hawkworth of Hawkworth Hall, near Otley, about her wish to exchange her card tables for ones like those sent to Sir James Ibbetson.<sup>28</sup> A few years ago Asprey offered for sale a half-round table (Figure 12) which is virtually identical to the Denton example and manifestly by Gillows; it is tempting to speculate that it may either be from Hawkworth Hall or the missing Denton 'tea table'.

The records show that between 1776 and 1779 Sir James also ordered a billiard table and accessories costing £32 1s.;<sup>29</sup> a complete set of dining tables with circular ends,<sup>30</sup> a mahogany bookcase bed with wirework panels; a neat hanging shelf; a Pembroke table, numerous Venetian sunblinds and various items of bed and dressing room furniture, including wash stands, dressing tables, shaving tables and small swing glasses.<sup>31</sup> It is



9. Vase, mahogany with inlays, the only surviving element from a pair of sideboard pedestals and urns made by Gillows for Denton Hall in 1787  
Charles Wyvill



10. Drawing of 'Pedistall and Vause for Sir James Ibbetson', from Gillows Estimate Sketch Book, 1787  
Westminster City Archives



11. Card table, mahogany with inlaid satinwood flutes and tablet, made by Gillows for Denton Hall in 1778. Reproduced from an illustration in the 1932 Constable Burton sale catalogue



12. Unprovenanced card or tea table c. 1778-79, attributed to Gillows on the basis of its affinity to the documented Denton example  
*Asprey*



13. Shaving table, mahogany (retractable mirror missing) made by Gillows for Denton Hall in 1776

*Charles Wyvill*

never easy confidently to identify ordinary furniture from terse descriptions, but a gentleman's table at Constable Burton, now lacking the retractable mirror housed in a slot at the back (Figure 13) is likely to be the 'large & Handsome Mahog Shavg Table wt large looking glass, sope glasses, places for Razors &c' invoiced on 11 December 1776 at a cost of £3 8s.<sup>32</sup> The 'sope glasses' or dishes lodged in the two hollows behind the basin well and one of the narrow drawers was divided for razors. To have, over the years, traced three Chippendale pieces and four by Gillows from the original furnishing programme plus over a dozen from Turner & Smith's Denton commission of 1798–99 is an encouraging tally.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the staff at Westminster City Archives for many kindnesses and for permission to publish material from the Gillow archive, to John Goodchild for consent to quote from manuscripts in his collection, likewise to the Chippendale Society. Susan Stuart has generously shared relevant information in her extensive Gillow files and Sarah Medlam deserves credit for first tracing two key passages in the Letter Books. The late Dr Lindsay Boynton and the late Mrs Davidson How also contributed to my Denton dossier. Charles Wyvill has provided welcome support and ready access to the furniture collection at Constable Burton over many years. Giles Ellwood, when at Sotheby's,

supplied a full set of photographs of the library table, six of which are reproduced here, Asprey produced a print of the unprovenanced card table, while Christopher Hutchinson photographed the shaving table and the vase.

## REFERENCES

1. R. G. Wilson, 'Merchants and Land: The Ibbetsons of Leeds and Denton 1650-1850', *Northern History*, xxiv, 1988, pp. 75-100.
2. The Chippendale Society collection: C. 1973/1.
3. All the relevant Gillow papers are at Westminster City Archives.
4. This account and several later bills are now in the John Goodchild Collection, Wakefield.
5. See note 10.
6. John Goodchild Collection, Wakefield.
7. L. O. J. Boynton, 'High Victorian Furniture: the example of Marsh and Jones of Leeds', *Furniture History*, iii, 1967, pl. 24 illustrates the Salt furniture installed at Denton.
8. Denton Hall sale (Henry Spencer & Sons, Retford), 16-18 July 1975.
9. Constable Burton sale (Hollis & Webb, Leeds), 20-22 August 1932 (copy owned by the Chippendale Society).
10. C. Gilbert, *The Life and Work of Thomas Chippendale*, London, 1978, pp. 286-87, fig. 500.
11. C. Gilbert, 'Hallmarks of Craftsmanship: The Furnishing of Denton Hall, Yorkshire', *Country Life*, 9 April 1987, pp. 148-52.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Letter dated 5 July 1760.
14. I am grateful to the late Mrs Davidson How for this reference.
15. S. Stuart, 'Three Generations of Gothic Chairs by Gillows', *Furniture History*, xxxii, 1996, pp. 33-45.
16. Letter Book (344/169-70), I am grateful to Sarah Medlam for this reference.
17. Order Book (344/84), 19 October 1778, p. 76. I am indebted to Susan Stuart for this reference.
18. Waste Book (344/6), p. 559.
19. Letter Book (344/169-70), Sarah Medlam first traced this passage.
20. Letter Book (344/169), p. 408.
21. Letter Book (344/169), p. 425. Susan Stuart kindly passed on this and the previous reference.
22. Sotheby's 11 July 1986, Lot 31 and *Connoisseur Year Book 1954*, p. 50, fig. x.
23. Estimate Sketch Book (344/94), p. 34.
24. Estimate Sketch Book (344/94), p. 35.
25. L. Boynton, *Gillow Furniture Designs 1760-1800*, Royston, 1995, p. 225.
26. Waste Book (344/6), p. 507.
27. Waste Book (344/6), p. 560.
28. Letter Book (344/69), p. 144. Reference supplied by the late Lindsay Boynton.
29. Waste Book (344/6), p. 559.
30. Waste Book (344/6), pp. 437-38.
31. Waste Book (344/5), pp. 455-56 (furniture). Letter Book (344/169), p. 425 (blinds). There is a letter dated 10 November 1781 about an order for chairs. Also summary accounts in ledgers 344/52, p. 243 and 344/53 (1781-89).
32. Waste Book (344/5), p. 455.