

## SHORTER NOTICE

### WILLIAM GERRARD, MAKER OF 'GYPSY' TABLES

William Vincent

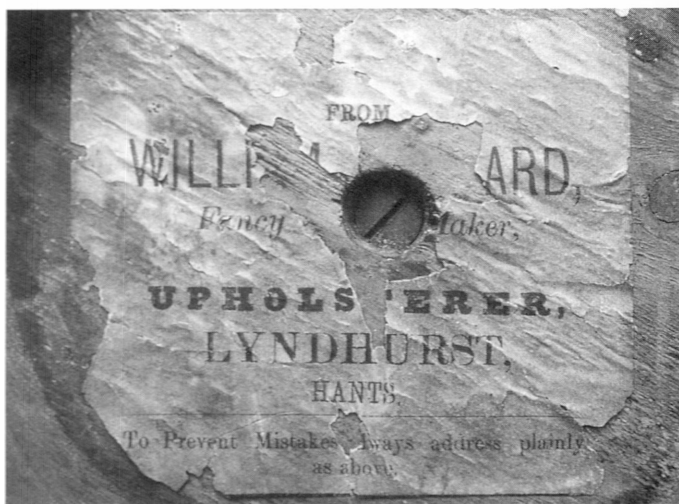
Nineteenth-century decorators and furnishers were known to adapt furniture from regional traditions to include in their fashionable repertoires. The 'Sussex' chair, which was discussed by Janet Pennington in *Regional Furniture*, Volume ix,<sup>1</sup> is a good example. It is possible that the three-legged turned tables, known intriguingly as 'Gypsy' tables,<sup>2</sup> may have had a similarly specific origin from which they were translated into a fashionable urban context during the second half of the nineteenth century. The object of this shorter notice is to present information on a known maker of these tables and to explore, briefly, the circumstances of their manufacture.

William Gerrard was born in Lyndhurst, the 'capital' of the New Forest, Hampshire, in 1840,<sup>3</sup> the younger of two sons. His parents had moved from Lymington, in the same county, between 1830 and 1847<sup>4</sup> and there is evidence that his father, grandfather and uncle were all involved with the furniture trade.<sup>5</sup> His own involvement is first noted in 1867 when he appears with his brother James as a furniture dealer.<sup>6</sup> During the previous year he had built the New Forest Hall in Lyndhurst High Street, a dance hall and theatre which he was to run for the rest of his life. At least in its early years the hall was entered through a cabinet-making shop, no doubt to exploit the purchasing power of the dance-goers as well as make full use of the High Street frontage. It is known that William kept stocks of oak, walnut and mahogany and had a range of hand tools,<sup>7</sup> but no other details of the shop have yet emerged. William continued to work as a cabinet maker and furniture dealer until 1895.<sup>8</sup> When he died, without heirs, in 1914<sup>9</sup> the furniture-making tradition of this branch of the family came to an end.

'Gypsy' tables appear to have been the principal product of the Lyndhurst workshop. Typical examples have circular tops into which are screwed three legs turned to resemble bamboo. The legs are united just above ground level by a circular shelf and the tables stand twenty inches high, with tops of fourteen and a half inches diameter. A choice of two finishes; either ebonised basswood and beech (Figure 1), or lightened mahogany (Figure 3) has been identified. These could be supplied with tops covered with fabric and fringed. Several examples have been found with labels where Gerrard describes himself as a 'Fancy Cabinet Maker and Upholsterer'; the square label in figure 2 is most probably earlier than the round version shown in figure 4. William Gerrard urges clarity in quoting the address of the workshop, indicating that he invited postal enquiries and that he possibly despatched tables by post. While a mail order service remains conjectural the related notion that tables could be bought in kit form is confirmed by the presence of a strip of paper pasted beneath the shelf of the table



1. 'Gypsy' table, by William Gerrard of Lyndhurst, Hampshire, c. 1870, ebonised basswood and beech with gold painted detail. (Legs shortened)

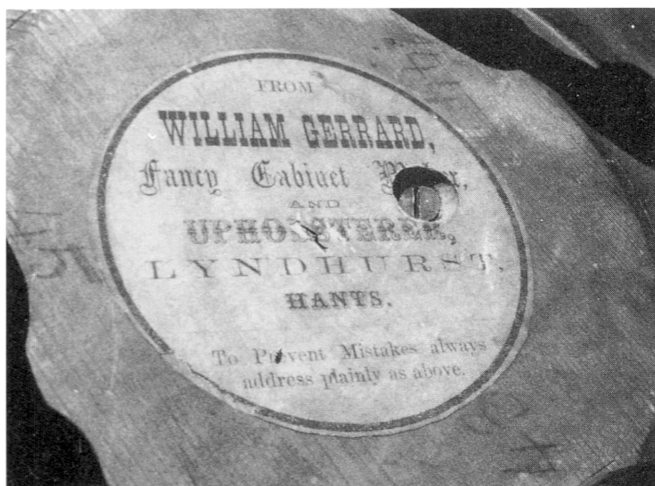


2. William Gerrard's label, pasted beneath top of table in Figure 1



3. 'Gypsy' table, by William Gerrard of Lyndhurst, Hampshire, c. 1890, lightened mahogany

*Glynn Interiors, Knutsford, Cheshire*



4. William Gerrard's label, pasted beneath top of table in Figure 3

*Glynn Interiors, Knutsford, Cheshire*



5. Domestic interior, probably New Forest, c. 1875. Original photograph by John Golden Short of Lyndhurst

*Reproduced courtesy of the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust*

shown in figure 3, offering simple assembly instructions. As well as enabling the tables to be assembled by the customer and perhaps sent to them as a flat package, such ease of assembly, or more particularly disassembly, provides a clue about their origin. Before the 1850s, when Gypsy caravans or 'Vardoes' became popular, travelling folk lived in tents, carrying these and other possessions on horses and small carts. Their furniture, like military or campaign pieces, would have to be highly portable and the so-called 'Gypsy' table, being easily knocked down into a few components, could well have been an item developed for this style of life. Whether or not this was their origin, black and gold japanned versions of the table fitted very well into 'Aesthetic Movement' interiors of the 1860s and 70s, and both the shelved and 'cat'-legged variants fulfilled the need for occasional tables in the late nineteenth-century sitting room. Both types are illustrated in figure 5.

It is not yet clear if the tables were made in, or simply retailed from the Lyndhurst workshop, but given the number that survive, it seems that they were manufactured in considerable quantity. If others are known that are labelled, or can be attributed, especially to workshops other than that of William Gerrard, the author would be grateful to be advised.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to the Hampshire Record Office and to many people in Lyndhurst, most especially Louise Bessant, Roy Jackman and Jude James.

## REFERENCES

1. Janet Pennington, 'Sussex Chairs', *Regional Furniture*, Vol. IX, 1995, pp. 81–87.
2. The name refers to tables in the style referred to in this article and also those with 'cat'-style legs. Both are shown in Figure 5. Origins for the name are of possible local significance due to the sizeable Gypsy community present in the New Forest throughout the period discussed here.
3. In the 1851 census, Hampshire Record Office: M213, Public Record Office (London): HO107/1668, William is aged eleven years. He was christened 1 March 1840, IGI Index, Hampshire Record Office.
4. See Lymington entries in *Pigot's Directory*, 1831 and *Kelly's Directory*, 1847.
5. William Gerrard's father is listed as a Broker or Furniture Dealer in *Kelly's Directory*, 1847; *Slater's Directory*, 1852; and *Kelly's Directory*, 1855.
6. *Kelly's Directory*, 1867.
7. Conversation with Mr Jack Howard of Lyndhurst, whose father bought timber and some tools from William Gerrard when he stopped working as a cabinet maker. I am indebted to Mr Howard for this information and to Mr Stephen Ferder for the introduction.
8. *Kelly's Directory*, 1895.
9. I am indebted to Mr R. Butcher for this information.

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