

A PAINTED CORNER CUPBOARD FROM HANLEY, STAFFORDSHIRE, 1827

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Given the enormous quantity of painted pine furniture made throughout Britain in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is quite remarkable how few pieces have so far been recorded with inscriptions indicating their maker and place of manufacture. The fashion for stripping pine furniture is responsible for destroying many original finishes, for pine furniture for domestic use was seldom intended to appear in its unpainted form. (An exception to this rule occurs in domestic pine furniture produced in Scotland, which was more often left unpainted than in other parts of Britain). It is entirely possible that makers' or owners' inscriptions have also been lost in this vandalising process. The location of the painted pine corner cupboard illustrated here is, therefore, of the greatest significance, since it provides definite information of its maker, date and place of manufacture. This is shown in a pencilled inscription made underneath the top section (Fig. 2), which reads,

George Boulton s bros(?)
at Mr. John Stoniers
Hanley, Staffordshire.
June 10th 1827

The date, 1827, is also pencilled on the top of the bottom section.

The cupboard remains substantially in original condition, with the front door panels and stiles painted to simulate mahogany, and with darker brown pilasters, cornice, plinth, and intersection between the top and bottom cupboards and brown decorative mouldings around the door panels. The interior is painted in matt green.

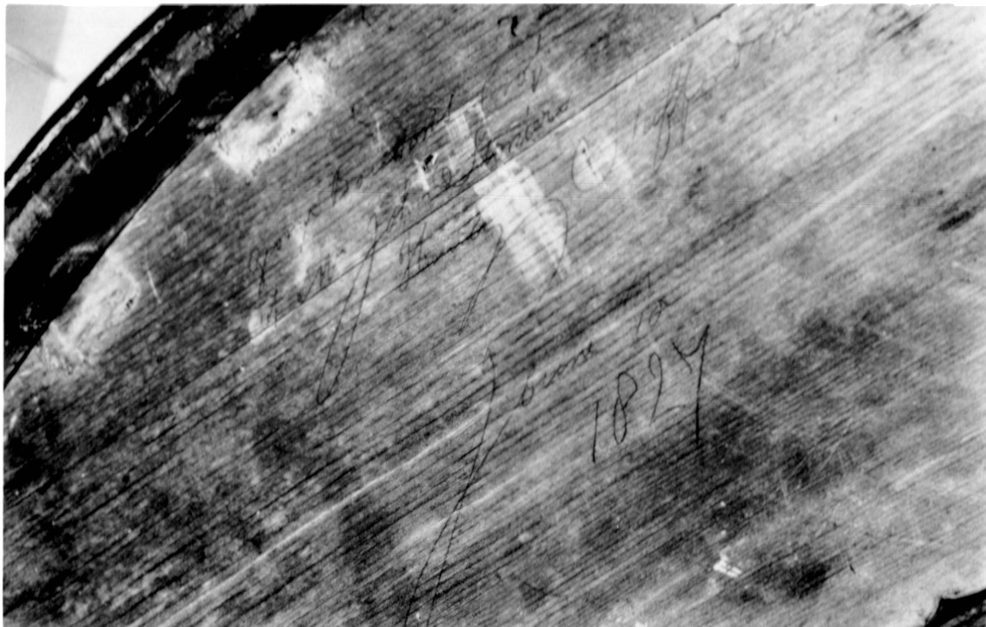
The maker, George Boulton(s) (Bolton) is recorded as a cabinet maker working in King Street, Hanley, in 1818, and in 1822–23 he was working in Wood Street. By 1827 he was apparently working as a journeyman in the shop of John Stonier in the High Street, a workshop which continued until at least 1851. John Stonier seems to have taken over this workshop from a relative, Thomas Stonier, who is recorded there between 1791 and 1818. Other Stoniers were working as cabinet makers locally. William worked at the Iron Market, Newcastle under Lyme between 1822 and 1834, and was also a chairmaker. Another William worked in Liverpool Road, Burslem, in 1834. Although records show these as two makers, they may refer to the same person, who moved to Burslem in 1834.

The drawing of the Market Square made in 1829 (Fig. 3) shows Hanley to be a prosperous centre with many shops. Inns, street lighting, and with factory buildings at one end of the square. Hanley also supported a small community of furniture makers, including three cabinet makers and two chairmakers working there in 1822.

The corner cupboard made by George Boulton is an impressive piece which was probably made for a large farmhouse or other relatively prosperous household, where vernacular, rather than fashionable furniture would have been appropriate. Lowering the cost of production was clearly a factor in the production of this piece, and examination of the constructional devices shows that the maker adopted a number of practices intended to



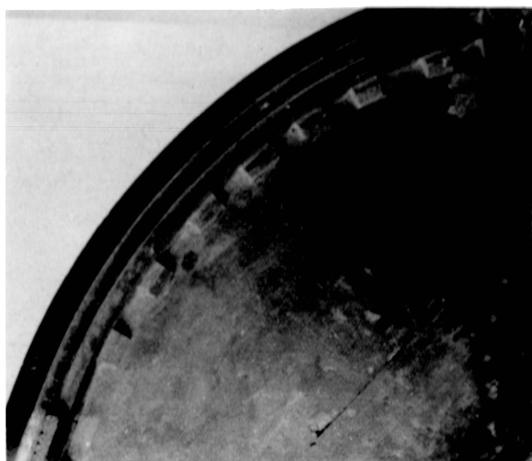
1. Painted pine bow-fronted corner cupboard. 201 cm h (base 69 cm. h), 116 cm w, 74 cm. d. Inscribed by George Boulton, cabinet maker, of Hanley, Staffordshire, 1827



2. Pencil inscription made underneath the top section of the corner cupboard shown in Fig. 1 which reads: 'George Boulton s (bros?) at Mr John Stoniers, Hanley, Staffordshire, June 10th, 1827



3. The Market Square, Hanley, Staffordshire, 1829. F.E. Watts
Courtesy City Central Library, Stoke-on-Trent



4. Top of the cupboard showing the four kerfed sections, blocked and bent to form the cornice



5. Front view of the cupboard showing the different uses of multiple moulded sections for decoration

produce relatively complex forms in the least costly way. For example, the bowed cornice and the upper divider and plinth of the lower section were formed by kerfing (making saw cuts into straight sections of wood), and then bending the sections to the appropriate curve, rather than making the curved section in the more time-consuming way of shaping it from solid wood, which would also have required more costly material. The cornice is bent in this way with four stepped sections, which are kerfed on the inside (Fig. 4). Subsequent shaping of these blocked sections had the effect of revealing the kerfing marks, and although the surface has a grain filler and is finished with brown paint, the saw marks are partially visible from the front, illustrating the limitations of this practice.

The pilasters show that the mouldings are stopped with a gouge at the upper ends of the top section and then surmounted by a flat section of wood. A view from the top of the cupboard shows that a moulding plane was used to create the pilasters, and rather than stopping the mouldings below the frieze, the maker extended these to the top of the uprights, and then chiselled away the mouldings to hold the small flat surmounting section. This, again, would have reduced the time to make the pilasters, and, again, represents a cost-saving device.

The grooved, decorative friezes below the cornice, between the upper and lower sections, and around the edges of the panels are also the product of a labour-saving device, since it is likely that all of these decorative features were cut from one strip of moulded wood and then sawn and applied in different ways to maximise the decorative qualities of the cupboard without requiring essentially different techniques (Fig. 5).

In addition to its intrinsic interest, the promise of the Hanley cupboard is that other painted pine pieces may be expected to enter the repertoire of British Regional Furniture design. In so doing, this will add to the depth and texture of our understanding, not just of stylistic features from a particular region, but of the constraints on working practices within known workshops at a given time in history.

FURNITURE AT CORFE CASTLE

Gabriel Olive

The Probate Inventories from Corfe Castle, referred to elsewhere in this journal, have not yet been published.¹ The following notes indicate some points of interest regarding the furniture in them. Of the total 312 inventories, 276 are from the seventeenth century (24 have no furniture or are unspecified). The parish embraced the whole of the Eastern end of the Isle of Purbeck, including the marble quarries at Kingstone and the Western shore of Poole harbour. Hence there is a wide variety of occupations represented and some foreign imports of goods and language. The testators were all tenants of the Bankes estate. An early map of Corfe Castle² shows clearly the typical layout of a medieval town, the houses crowded together along the street frontages, with long narrow gardens behind.

The general pattern of furnishing is similar to that recorded in rural areas³ but with a number of additions and variations. A higher proportion of households had more than one table. Many inventories include tenants' fixtures, such as sealing (panelling) and in several cases are mentioned 'the benches with the sealing'. This undoubtedly indicates that in some of these houses the long table was placed at right angles to the window, parallel to the cross partition to which the bench was fixed. Light from the window would therefore have shone down the length of the table. There is also, in 1624, one 'seate in the Chimney'.

Descriptive detail, of which there is more than in most comparable inventories, reveals several interesting points. Out of 341 chairs, 30 are described as 'rush' a higher proportion than surviving examples of seventeenth-century chairs would suggest. There are also 3 wicker chairs and 4 'chaire stooles'. Eleven pieces of furniture from the early seventeenth century are of timber other than oak. 'Firre', 'deale', 'spruce', 'elme', 'sweetewood' and 'cedar' are recorded.

Of particular interest are a number of inventories totalling each less than £5 *os. od.* Since there was no legal requirement for probate below this figure, these offer a rare glimpse of the furnishings of the poorer sections of the populace.⁴ Thirty of these inventories are dated between 1600 and 1630. Of these 3 had no furniture and were presumably not householders. The remaining 27 had between them 189 pieces of furniture, an average of 9 each. The next highest group of inventories between the same dates — 30 at values between £5 and £10 — had an average of 9.4 pieces of furniture, and the average for all testators during the same period was 10.3. While there is no discernible difference in the overall pattern of these poorer people's possessions, the fact that they owned this number of identifiable pieces suggests that there must have existed in the early seventeenth century a whole range of furniture of poor quality and very low value, none of which has probably survived.

The following selected individual entries are of intrinsic interest to the furniture historian:

- 1613 two planks for furmes ...
- 1616 one ffyre chest.
- 1617 one wainscott chest one Elme chest & two Coffers.
- 1619 one piece of seeling wth the stooles benches and shelves.
- 1619 one sea Chest and another Coffe.

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- 1620 a tablebord with the Cubbord under the same ...
- 1620 A shefe for Pewter ...
- 1620 one Coffe with a Lock and a Key.
- 1621 one paire of playing Table without men.
... one joyned furme one plaine ffurme.
- 1622 one fframe for shelves eight Loose boords ...
- 1623 1 Rush chaire ...
- 1623 one Sweetewood ffossett.⁵
- 1624 ... seate in the Chimney ... a box for linnen
a slope box
- 1624 two Copper ffassets ... a Counterbord
- 1624 Butter & cheese wch came home in his chest.
for his new foundland voyage.
- 1624 One desk.
- 1625 an hollow trunk.
- 1625 1 Cheast 1 hamper 1 lettell Coffe.
- 1627 ... a Wainscott Chaire two Coffers and a little Chaire.
- 1627 a working furme and c'rtaine Carpenters & Joyners tooles ...
- 1628 Eleven Loose boards ov' the Shoppe & Entry.
Livery bedstead 4/- Trundle Bedstead 1/-
two pillars for a Bedstead ...
- 1628 ... one Wainscott Chest two Coffers one Wainscott Box and a ffossett.
- 1628 ... one foure legged bord ...
- 1629 a Sweete wood Chest ...
- 1630 One ffyre Table bord with a frame & a ffurme and one round Table with a frame ...
one long ffyre chest. ... 1 small box in the chest ... and two back chaires.
- 1631 ... one heigh Chaire & one little Chaire.
- 1632 ... one wicker Chaire ...
- 1660 ... one huch to keepe Corne in ...
- 1668 one smale standing Cubbord.
- 1670 2 small low table bordes
1 table desk 1 small deske
a settle table
- 1672 ... one Cushen stoole.
- 1673 sum bordes forkes poles & tresells for the use of ye faire.
- 1681 ... a Groaning Chaire ...⁶
- 1689 one standing tabell and a side table ...
- 1694 a skreen ...
- 1705 one box with two Iron slats.
... one Oaky Chest one Oak Coffe ...
- 1706 ... one Chest of Drawers.
five working seets and a candle stoole.
- 1733 ... One Screen to stand before ye ffire ...
- 1759 one Dresing Table.

The only complete set of woodworking tools is that of Robert Pike, Carpenter, in 1626. He had:

two bad whipsawes one Tennant saw 1s three planetrees 2 plane irons 6d 1 handsaw 4d 4
borryers 8d 3 Chesells a mortis chesell one Googe a paire of Compas a wimbletre & a woode
Compas 1s £0 3s 6d
one Ax An hatchet a Jennet & an iron wedge 2s 2d
(Jennet — or Ginnet — is an old name for an adze)

Total numbers of the principal items of furniture recorded in these inventories are as follows:

Coffers 1576-1639	312	1640-1760	101	Total	413
Bedsteads	225		155		380
Chairs	122		219		341
Tables	144		141		285
Stools	157		134		291
Chests	132		137		269
Cupboards	113		78		191

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge with gratitude permission from Robert Machin to use his transcripts. My thanks to Christopher Gilbert for giving me the reference to a groaning chair.

REFERENCES

1. Dorset County Record Office. Bankes Papers. Transcribed R. Machin.
2. Map by Ralph Treswell dated 1585. Reproduced in Hutchins, *History of Dorset*.
3. E.g. at Yetminster. See article in *Furniture History*, Vol. XII (1976).
4. Probate was administered by the Ecclesiastical Courts and the requirements were laid down in the 93rd canon of the Church. No reason is given for the inclusions of these inventories.
5. R. Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (1632) gives 'foffec' [sic]: 'coffret' and 'coffret: a casket, cabinet, *forfet*; a little chest, or coffer'.
6. Randle Home, *The Academy of Armory* (1688) records these chairs had a hood, were often of wicker and sometimes used for invalids or women in labour.