

PRICES FOR WORKMEN IN LANCASTER

THE EARLIEST SURVIVING CABINET-MAKERS' PRICE LIST

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Considering the comparative importance of Lancaster as a cabinet-making centre during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is interesting to note that it was not until the period 1739–45, when the port had become established, that the principal joiners of Lancaster, men such as Henry Baines; Robert Thorney; John Lowther, and Robert Gillow described themselves as 'cabinetmakers'.¹ No sketch books survive for this period, but Robert Gillow's Memorandum Account Book 1741–48 contains a handwritten list headed 'Prices for Workmen in Lancaster'. The price list indicates that men who hitherto had regarded themselves as 'joyners', were not merely adopting a fashionable term but were producing veneered furniture of some variety. However, this manuscript entry which dates from about 1746, is of more than regional interest and importance since it is the earliest known price list of its type to have survived anywhere in the world. Previously the 'Rule and Price of Joyners Work' agreed by tradesmen in Rhode Island in 1757–58 was the earliest recorded document which set out the going rate to be paid to journeymen for making a piece of furniture.² The York Book of Prices agreed in 1764,³ was hitherto the first English price list known, but not only is the Lancaster agreement considerably earlier and more extensive than the York list but it also provides more detailed descriptions of some of the furniture.

PRICES FOR WORKMEN IN LANCASTER⁴

Snap Tables pierced Claw & plain top 1s. p. foot.

Do. Pierced Claw & sunk top 2s. p. foot

Do. Plain Claw & plain top 1s. 6d.

Do. Dining tables with. 4 feet at 1s. 6d. ft.

Do. with. 6 feet at 1s. 8d. Do. with 6 feet & Double rails @ 2s. 4d. foot

Desks with. 2 heights Drawers finear'd a nich prospect & swell'd Letter hole tops finear'd at £1 15s. 6d.

The same size & same work but ye Drawers not finear'd 2 quarter Culloms & pillasters £1 11s. 6d.

Do. 3 foot 9 Desks with 2 height of Drawers finear'd with nich prospect & sep & letter hole tops finear'd culloms pilasters £1 11s. 6d.

Do. The same size & same work not finear'd £1 8s. 6d.

Do. 3"6 Desks with 2 height of drawers finear'd & swelled Letter hole tops culloms & pillasters. £1 7s. —

Do. same size & same work but finear'd £1 5s. 6d. ye (?) same size 1 hieght of drawers not vineard £1 2s. 6d.. Do. 3 foot 3 Desks 2 heights of drawrs not vineard & swelled letter hole tops 2 Quarters Culloms £1 1s.

Do. 3"6 Desks 2 height of drawrs finear'd & straight inside 18s.

Do. the same lenth wth. one height of drawrs 15s.
 Chest upon chest canted corners & a Desk in y' top part £1 7s. 6d. the same wth out a Desk in
 £1 1s.
 Chest of draws upon a frame 15s.
 Dressing Chest canted & fineard 10s. 6d.
 Do plain & square ye top not fineard 8s.
 Corner cubert round fronts either solid or fineard 7s. 6d.
 Do. all flatt front & square head 7s.
 Do. flatt & a pediment 9s. 6d.
 Boffet flatt either strung wth. brass or crossbanded wth. double corners in ye doors & scrowld
 pediment £1 8s. 0d.
 Corner Tables solid frame without box @ 1s. 6d.
 Do. with box @ 1s. 8d.
 Senter tables strap toas @ 1s. 8d.
 Bookcafes wth. scrowld pidediment & Lienge Cornish 16s. 6d.
 Do. wth.out Leinge Cornish & plain inside 15s. 6d.
 Do. wth. suare Curnish 12s. 6d.
 Do. wth. scrowld pediment & 3 pelasters in ye front £1 2s. 6d.
 Plain square walnut chairs @ 3s. a piece
 Do. wth. efs Backs @ 3s. 6d.
 Do. mohogany Chairs square seats & plain backs @ 3s. 6d.
 Do. with efs Backs 4s. 6d.
 Compas seated chair solid wth efs backs 6s. 6d.
 Do. with strap toas and beaded knees 7s.
 Corner chairs compas seated strap toas Bead @ knees 7s. 6d.
 Do. square seat 5s.
 Clock cases scrowld pediment or compas'd pediment wth. cullams corners & canted pedestal
 18s.
 Dressing tables wth. 3 Drawers walnut or mohogany 5s.
 Do. of oak 4s.
 3 ft 3 Desk wth. compased drawrs & plain letter hole tops 18
 Do. plain inside 14s.
 Tea boxes plain without basis 2s.
 Do with bases 2s. 6d.
 Do. with brass mouldings & Basis 4s. 6d.
 & strung wth brass 5s.
 oak dineing tables @ 1s. 4d. per ft.
 [Gillow Archives; Memorandum Account Book 1741-47 folios K-L, c.1746]

The range of furniture made in Lancaster prior to 1750 is apparent from the list, but the terminology employed is often puzzling, and we can only guess the meaning of some words. 'Compas'd' was commonly used to describe curved features and when applied to a clock



1. A desk signed in pencil under a drawer 'David Wright Fecit Lancaster 19th August 1751', which illustrates some of the features mentioned in the schedule
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case pediment probably refers to an unbroken arched shape, and in a different context to a rounded front on a chair seat. However, the meaning of 'strapd toas' is more difficult to determine, presumably a type of claw foot? 'efs' backs on chairs perhaps suggests the serpentine or 'S' shape of the chair back. I am grateful to Christopher Gilbert, for his suggestion that a 'Lienge Cornish' refers to a cornice probably of French design. 'Boffets' or buffets were a type of built-in cupboard, intended for a recess or corner; some buffets are illustrated in the Gillow Estimate and Memorandum Book 1759–61. Several examples with green painted interiors, decorated with painted (or japanned) scaloped shells, in a domed interior are known in the Lancaster region, and one can be seen in the parlour at the Judges Lodgings Museum, Lancaster. These buffets had serpentine shelves and a drawer fitted at a suitable height with a hinged flap, which when in place formed a convenient writing or serving surface. The 'double corners' on the buffets may refer to the moulding details in the door panels. I am grateful to Christopher Gilbert for his suggestion that a 'pierced claw' (a sign of superior quality cabinet work) when used on a snap table could refer to the talons on

the claw and ball foot being perforated where the claw gripped the ball, or alternatively he suggested that 'claw' denotes the whole tripod element in which case the stem was probably of elaborate open-work design. Swelled letter hole tops on desks implies a bowed profile. The use of brass stringing on buffets and tea boxes *c.* 1746, is somewhat surprising given the problems Gillows encountered in obtaining good quality brass furniture in Lancaster later in the eighteenth century, and it is a feature not previously associated with furniture of the region during this early period.

REFERENCES

1. *Lancaster Marriage Bonds 1739–1745*, vol. 100, Record Society.
2. C. Montgomery, *American Furniture, The Federal Period* (1966), p. 20. Reference from: C. Gilbert, 'London and Provincial Books of Prices Comment and Bibliography', *Furniture History*, xviii (1982), pp. 11–20.
3. C. Gilbert, 'An Early Cabinet and Chair Work Price List from York', *Furniture History*, xxi (1985), pp. 227–28.
4. Gillow Archives: Memorandum Account Book 1741–48, fols. K–L.