

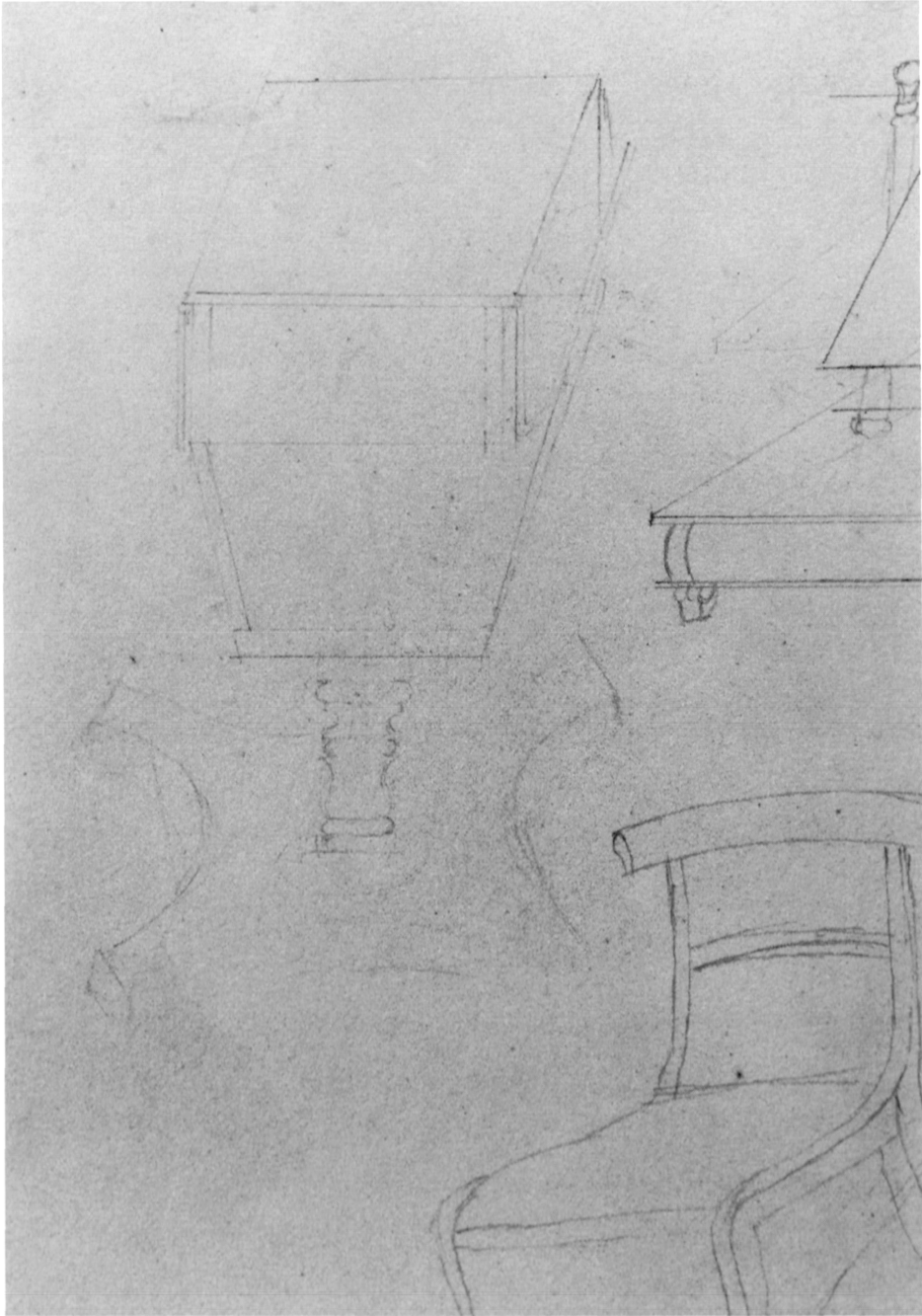
# SAMUEL PEAT: CHICHESTER CABINET MAKER

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This study of the Chichester cabinet maker Samuel Peat has been prompted by the survival, at West Sussex Record Office, of archival material that relates to him and other members of his family. The archive consists of Samuel Peat's day book kept during the period 1839-43<sup>1</sup> and an unnamed and undated book of mathematical problems, which includes a few drawings of furniture.<sup>2</sup> A third item is a book of inventories<sup>3</sup> of the homes of Chichester residents, made by William and Henry Peat, cabinet makers and appraisers. These inventories are quite detailed and as their dates cover the period from the late 1830s to 1852 they provide useful cross references with the day book. Another day book survives with the inscription 'H Peat 1806'<sup>4</sup> on the cover. This book has been examined less extensively than the later one, partly because it contains only lists of work, not always with the names of customers, and lacks the additional material of the later book. Samuel Peat's day book of 1839-43 enumerates work carried out for named customers, sometimes with cost and/or time. This day book is far from being a model business record, instead it is casual, confused and untidy. There is also extraneous material, such as poetry, which adds to the biographical picture of Samuel Peat, and items of interest such as a recipe for 'Dyeing Ivory Scarlet' taken from the *Mechanics Magazine*, 10 October 1841. On most alternate pages there appear costings for making items of furniture, sometimes with a customer's name. These items of furniture however do not appear in the daily lists. This puzzle is probably explained by the fact that Samuel Peat was listed as a journeyman cabinet maker in the 1841 Census and therefore a more detailed list of work was no doubt kept by the firm that he worked for, probably Henry Peat in North Street, Chichester.<sup>5</sup>

The Peats were an old established firm in Chichester (there is a reference to a Peat doing appraising work in 1733).<sup>6</sup> By the 1820s their main business activities were centred in North Street, one of the four main streets of the town, as were most of the seven to ten cabinet makers listed in the directories of the period. Whether there were differences in quality in the work of the various firms and how the Peats compared with them is impossible to say due to lack of evidence.<sup>7</sup> Samuel Peat seems to have achieved a good reputation and it is claimed that he exhibited a 'cylinder-fall writing desk' in the 1851 Exhibition.<sup>8</sup> Using the evidence that does exist in the documents, the furniture making activities of Samuel Peat can be examined, before turning to a more general outline of his work and customers.

The starting points for examining Samuel Peat's furniture are the drawings in the book of mathematical problems. Although there is no name and date in this book in the Peat archive it contains a drawing of a chair similar to one on the endpaper of the 1839-43 day book. It is possible therefore that Samuel Peat produced this book during his apprenticeship in the 1830s. One drawing (Fig. 1) is of a tea poy or work box which has been drawn at an angle to display the base. However the top section is difficult to interpret and the base is out of proportion with the top section. The poor quality of the Peat



1. Drawing from Samuel Peat's book, showing a tea poy or work box

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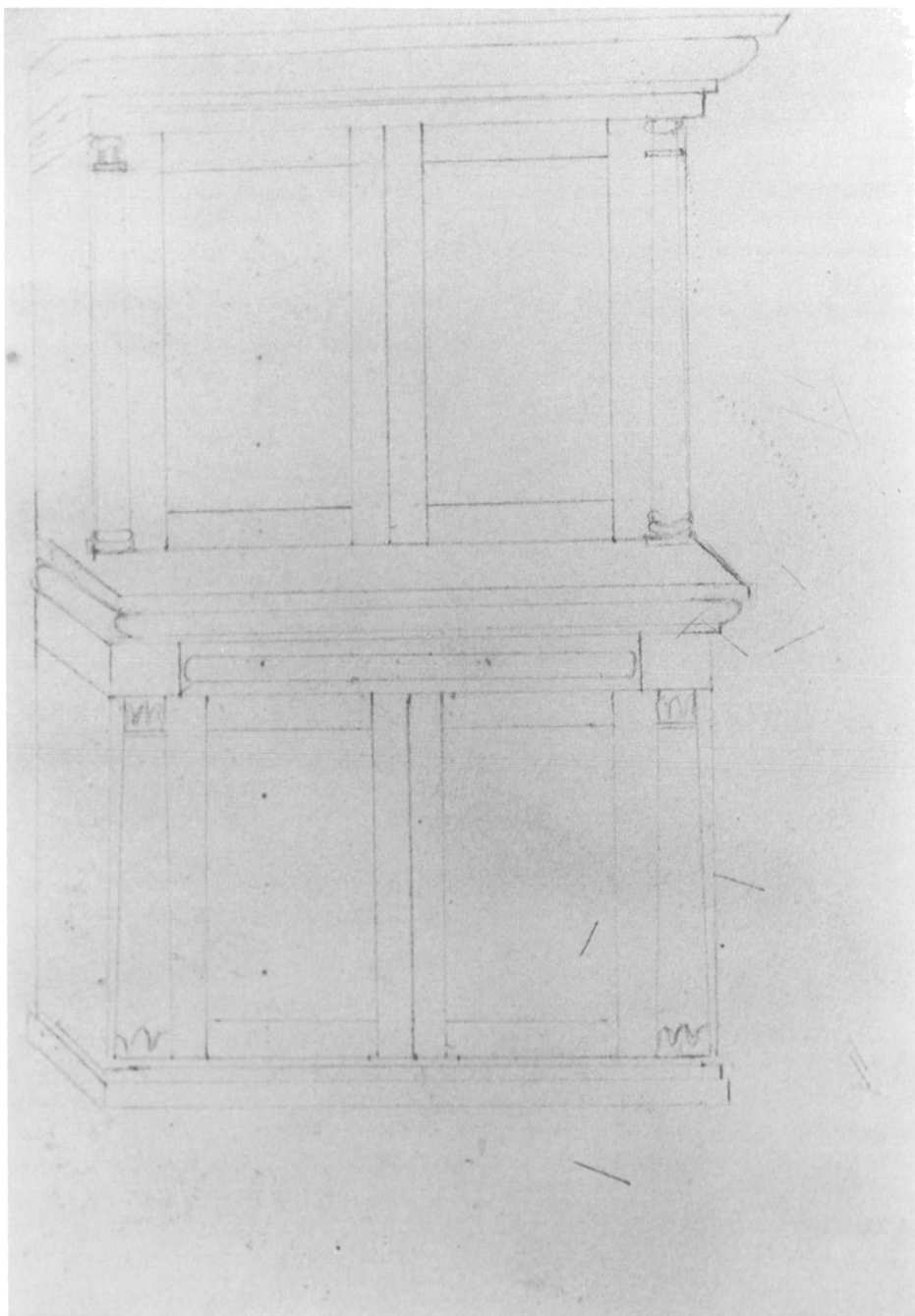
drawings is perhaps not surprising but certainly the existence of accomplished drawings would indicate a larger and more fashionable firm that utilised drawings to promote their goods and to communicate ideas, both to customers and within the firm. The lack of small drawings alongside entries in either of the Peat day books, such as are often found in day and order books of this period,<sup>9</sup> suggests a small concern but also that a more casual arrangement existed that depended on verbal or written communication.

Figure 2 shows a bookcase with rounded half columns on the top section and flat pilasters on the projecting lower section. The 1839-43 day book contains the breakdown of an 'Open Bookcase' which is useful to examine in detail along with the drawing.

<b>Open Bookcase</b>	
Start	6-6
12 in extra at 1 1/2	1-6
24 do at 2	4-0
10 do height 1 1/2	1-3
5 do do 2	-10
2 do in width of ends	-5
a rail under the top	2-0
fixing pilasters	1-8
framed back 4 pannels	3-1
sawing down joint in top and ends	1-9
fillet round the frieze 7ft 4in at 1 1/2 & mitres	1-0
saw teeth rack 10 doz & 4	2-7
two shelves 5ft 3in by 10in	4-4
preparing and fixing columns	1-0
veneering the top	1-7 1/4
do the edge of do	-10
do ends	1-7 1/4
do frieze	-8 1/4
do plinth cross ways	2-6 1/4
	<hr/>
	1-19-2 1/4
veneering pilasters	1-3 1/4
but joint in top	8 1/4
polishing	1-2 1/4
	<hr/>
	2- 2-5 1/4

This was obviously a substantial piece of furniture. Although the reference to pilasters and columns corresponds to the drawing, the latter appears to have doors to the top section. The method employed by Peat when itemising furniture-making corresponds with that used in price books of the period and in a couple of instances he records, at the left hand side, a page number, presumably the page in a price book.

A comparison between the probable level of the Peats upholstering work with that of a more fashionable firm can be attempted by using a third drawing from the book of mathematical problems: Fig. 3 features a Grecian style couch. In the 1839-43 day book making a couch, for Miss Livenston, is itemised and costs £1 4s. 9d. This price was just for making the wooden frame and did not include upholstering the item. A little more



2. Drawing from Samuel Pear's book, showing bookcase with half-round columns  
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information can be added from the daily lists which record 'Miss Livingston stuffing sofa and making squab 3 $\frac{1}{2}$  days'. The following year Miss Livingston died and Henry Peat recorded in his inventory of her possessions a sofa in both her drawing room and front parlour; each are described as a sofa with squab, 2 bolsters, 2 pillows and cover. If one of these sofas was made by Samuel Peat then some of the items are not accounted for in his day book. The covering stage of upholstery is never mentioned in the daily lists, so perhaps another member of the firm performed this operation. There is also no mention of materials involved with which to estimate the final cost of a sofa made by the Peats. However, when a comparison is made with the fashionable London upholsterer, Hindley, the gulf between them and provincial firms such as the Peats is clear. In 1825 for example, Hindley records making 2 chaise longue in canvas for £20. Covering them was entered separately as 'covering 2 chaise longue and 8 cushions with chintz, bound with pink £9'.<sup>10</sup> This would make the complete chaise longue £14 10s. Obviously a firm such as Hindley were not only using good quality, and therefore expensive, materials but were also charging extra for their name and reputation. Combining upholstery with cabinet making seems to have been common practice for provincial cabinet makers whereas London firms specialised in upholstery and this reflected the level of expertise that was offered. It is interesting to note in the earlier day book of Henry Peat of c. 1806 that he records making a 'Fauteuil Chair' which demonstrates the French association with upholstered items but also that Henry Peat was engaged in this type of work at a relatively early date. The other aspects of the Peats upholstering work to consider are curtains and bed hangings, since these were also essential parts of the upholsterer's repertoire. Henry Peat has a large number of entries with similar wording that refer to this, for example 'Mrs Fleming fixing Window Curtains 100 tacks [or possibly tucks] 2-6'. This is a curious description and if tacks is the correct reading then it implies that the curtains were fixed on to a batten above the window. This would be possible if they were of the eighteenth century style of fixed pull-up curtains. This style was going out of fashion by 1806 in favour of divided curtains" but it is not surprising to see that Chichester was a little old fashioned in this respect. Samuel Peat's day book has no references that exactly correspond to Henry's although he does refer to 'putting up' or 'taking down' curtains and bed hangings.

The most noticeable difference between the two day books, and one that relates directly to changes that had taken place in furnishing homes between 1806 and 1839, is the mention of wallpapering. Whereas Henry records very few wallpapering jobs Samuel has numerous entries for this work. The increase relates directly to the lower cost of wallpaper by the 1830s making it available to a much wider market. Wallpapering had always been part of the upholsterers work since the paper was attached to canvas that had been stretched between wooden battens, rather than pasted directly onto the walls. By the 1840s this practice was dying out, especially in newer houses with smoothly plastered walls. However, Samuel Peat's day book continues to record this work demonstrating that for a while wallpapering made up a significant part of the provincial cabinet maker's work.

It would now be appropriate to consider the range of work carried out by Samuel Peat as well as the range of customers employing him. During the period June 1839 to June 1840 the entries in the day book break down as follows:

putting up curtains and bed furniture – 3  
 laying carpets – 2  
 papering – 5  
 making small items – 8 + 2 helping Emanuel making furniture<sup>12</sup>  
 repair jobs – 18  
 'jobbing' and moving goods – 4  
 making coffins – 2

Therefore repair work of a cabinet making nature is by far the most common category, for example:

19 May 1839 C. Ridge Esq repairing and french polishing fire screen 5s. 2½d.  
 3 April 1840 Mrs G. Newland putting btm to sideboard drawer (¼ day) 2s. 3d.  
 25 May 1840 Mr Dendy repy & veneering end of sideboard (2 days) 9s.

Did customers call in person or perhaps send a servant with a note asking for an item to be collected for repair? The prominent position of the workshop premises in North Street provided easy access for their better off customers. However, repairs and commissions for furniture were premeditated rather than impulse purchases, and convenience rather than showy premises would have been all that was required, which could have been achieved in one of the smaller roads in the centre of Chichester. Did these main street premises, occupied by the Peats and the other cabinet making firms, add to their respectability and ensure their acceptance with the gentry families? This aspect takes on great importance when considering the close connection that this firm had with its customers and the large extent of work carried out in their homes on a regular basis. The range of customers occurring in Samuel Peat's day book is quite varied, and includes one aristocrat, Lady Mary Lennox, the daughter of the 4th Duke of Richmond. There is also a number of families whose names appear in the 'Nobility, Gentry and Clergy' list in the directories, a clutch of shop keepers and tradesmen and some names that do not appear at all in the directories; which would of course be the case for the majority of Chichester's inhabitants. The proportions are approximately 36% each for 'gentry' and tradesmen and 27% for others. It is however a few families, whose names invariably appear in the 'gentry' lists that employ Samuel Peat on a fairly regular basis.

During the period June 1839 to June 1840 Samuel Peat records forty-seven entries for jobs; six people had two entries each, one person three entries, one person four entries and two branches of the Newland family, Mrs G. Newland and W. Newland Esq, had five and three entries respectively. A pattern is apparent over the four and a half years that the day book covers, with the Newlands most prominent but quite a few families having 2–4 jobs done each year. Using examples of the Newland family, some of the occasions for employing Samuel Peat can be examined. The Newland family were near neighbours of the Peats; four doors away from Henry Peat in North Street. The four households lived next door to each other (39, 40, 42 and 43 North Street) and comprised: William Newland aged 35, his wife and two children, one male and four female servants, Mrs G. Newland aged 60 and her three grown up children and three female servants, Miss Sarah Newland aged 56 and one female servant and lastly there was William Charles Newland aged 65, his three adult children and one male and three female servants. The Newlands were a well established family in Chichester; William

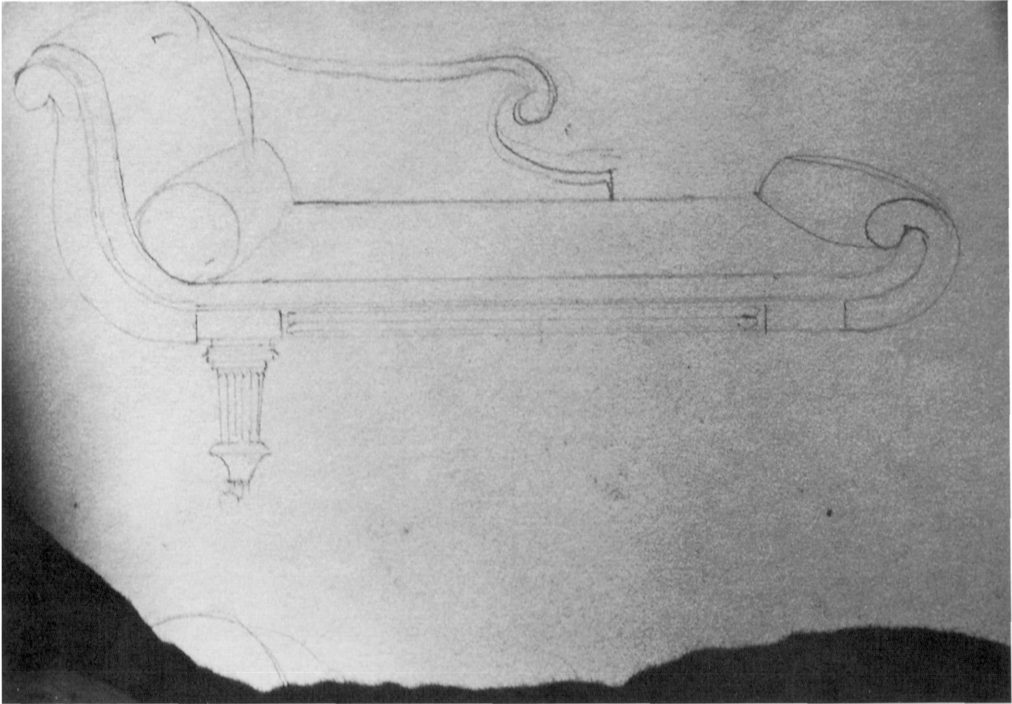
Charles was mayor several times, his brother Gideon had married Alithia, and hence her title Mrs G. Newland, but he had died by the 1830s. The younger William was junior partner in the Chichester Old Bank and William Charles Newland's son, Henry, was a solicitor. The entries for the Newland family in the 1839-43 day book by household are: William – three, Alithia – fifteen, William Charles – twenty-one and Sarah – four. As with the Peat book generally the work for the Newlands was mostly repairs with various members of the family having items of furniture repaired several times a year. There are a great many entries that are either wallpapering or connected with soft furnishings and these sometimes show a seasonal pattern. For example the wallpapering entries always occur in the summer:

July 1839 Mrs G. Newland  
 August 1840 William Newland  
 May and June 1841 Mrs G. Newland  
 June 1841 Sarah Newland  
 July 1841 William Newland  
 August 1841 Mrs G. Newland  
 July 1842 William Newland.

A connection with spring cleaning is clear from the entries for taking down and putting up beds and bed furniture for William Newland Snr of which there are five and these appear each year in April, May or June. Taking down or putting up a bedstead would be necessary if a bed was being moved from one room to another and would require a carpenter or cabinet maker to perform the task. Taking down bed furniture, particularly in the spring suggests that this was for washing. Mrs G. Newland has no entries for this, but the Peat inventory of her possessions on her death in 1852 shows that she favoured dimity bed hangings. Dimity was a white textured cotton material and probably made up in a simple design that could be put up or taken down by servants. The implication here then is that William Charles Newland had more elaborate bed hangings that required expert attention.

The frequency of the entries for members of the Newland family reveal how important it was to a comfortably-off family to have constant recourse to a capable, versatile and trustworthy firm of cabinet makers to keep their homes in good order. Loudon<sup>13</sup> recommends quarterly or twice yearly checks by carpenters, plumbers and glaziers to keep the fabric of the building maintained, for example oiling locks and examining the roof and guttering. The employment of Samuel Peat as revealed by his day book, generally and in particular for the Newland family, shows that a far more intimate level of maintenance in the home was probably quite common. It is also clear that fashion was not the sole concern when even quite wealthy families were engaged in homemaking; instead of purchasing new items, or in addition to this, the home was refined and enhanced by constant attention to the condition of existing elements.

This survey of the Peat firm of cabinet makers is far from complete due to the lack of furniture that can be attributed to them and the incomplete nature of the archival material that survives. This last point is particularly due to the day book of Samuel Peat being kept whilst he was a journeyman. However the long tradition of skills in the Peat family is apparent from the surviving documents with new skills being added to the cabinet



3. Drawing from Samuel Peat's book, showing a design for a Grecian couch

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maker's repertoire as fashion necessitated. Also apparent is that in the 1830s and 1840s various branches of the family were involved in the cabinet making trade with older members training their sons and nephews so that the range of skills and expertise offered to customers was wide and ongoing. No doubt Samuel, whilst a junior member of the firm, was required to do a lot of their servicing work, in which case it is perhaps fortunate that his 1839–43 day book has survived to provide an insight into this aspect of a provincial cabinet maker's work.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is based on the research for my MA dissertation. Of the many people who helped me with my research I would particularly like to thank Frances Collard of the V&A Furniture Department and the staff of West Sussex Record Office.



REFERENCES

1. WSRO Add Mss 2239
2. WSRO Add Mss 2238
3. WSRO Add Mss 2245
4. WSRO Add Mss 2235
5. Directories and the 1841 Census give the following information about members of the Peat family involved in cabinet making at this period:  
 William Peat, Westgate, 60, cabinet maker  
 Richard Peat, North Street, 50, auctioneer  
 Richard Peat, North Street, 20, cabinet maker  
 Henry Peat, North Street, 55, cabinet maker  
 George Peat, North Street, 14, cabinet makers apprentice  
 Samuel Peat, West Street, 25, journeyman cabinet maker.
6. Samuel Peat twice refers to 'helping Emanuel' in his daily lists; an Emanuel Atkins is recorded in the 1841 Census, aged 20, cabinet makers apprentice, so perhaps he too worked for the Peats.
7. Samuel Peat does not get an entry in the directories until 1855 when he is in business in North Street, probably having taken over from Henry Peat.
8. *Chichester Papers*, no 31, p6.
9. The early 19th century furniture of Chichester cabinet maker John White is featured in *Regional Furniture* Vol III, 1993.
10. Price, B., *Changing Chichester*, Phillimore, 1982.
11. eg. *Regional Furniture* Vol 1, 1987, pp. 71-78.
12. Westminster City Archives, 494/12.
13. Divided curtains were also fixed sometimes but with narrow curtains on either side and a fabric pelmet, see Thornton, P., *Authentic Decor: The Domestic Interior 1620-1920*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984, p. 154.
14. E.g. making a flower stand, roller blinds, a 5 ft. flock mattress and 'Helping Emanuel finish Capt Fraser's French bedstead (1 day 3/4)'.
15. Loudon, J. C., *The Suburban Gardner and Villa Companion*, publ. by the author, 1838.