

TO A MAHOGANY CASE — THE BEST SORT: INFLUENCES ON THE DESIGN OF 18th-CENTURY NORTH LANCASHIRE CLOCK CASES

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During the second half of the 18th century several factors influenced the development of furniture in Lancaster, the county town: trading opportunities and access to raw materials; London pattern books; and the movement of cabinet makers and their products. This article outlines these factors with special reference to clock cases recorded in the archives of Gillows of Lancaster.

A major factor which helped to sustain Gillows' interest in clocks was the alliance between the Roman Catholic clock maker and merchant, Thomas Worswick, and the Gillow family. Worswick, married Robert Gillow senior's daughter Agnes in April 1756¹ and naturally he supplied Gillows with clocks and bought cases from them. In 1773 Gillows recommended Lancaster clocks to Tenerife merchants no doubt with Worswick in mind when they wrote; 'We should have ordered 'em in London as you hint but we can have as good work and upon lower terms in the country.'² Having a clock maker in the family meant that Gillows were informed of the latest developments in the trade. One of the most important innovations was the introduction of the white dial clock, which by the end of the 18th century had virtually replaced the traditional brass dial. A detailed study of the Gillow archives has shown that Thomas Worswick was the first recorded clock maker to use painted dials on his clocks, and he supplied one such clock to Gillows in May 1772³, several months before the first recorded dialmakers Osborne and Wilson of Birmingham advertised dials in 'imitation of enamel' as '... entirely new'.³ If Gillows knew about these dials from Thomas Worswick, they were equally aware of new developments in the furniture trade generally, for example they used French polish occasionally at an early date (1817)⁴; and made mahogany furniture as early as any joiners in the country. They may not have been leaders in the design of furniture but they were aware of technological developments.

THE EARLY USE OF MAHOGANY AND THE OVERSEAS TRADE

The establishment of north western ports such as Whitehaven, Liverpool and Lancaster from the last quarter of the 17th century meant that during the 18th century North Lancashire joiners had, as well as ample supplies of native oak, easy access to a variety of imported woods: Danzig oak; deal from the Baltic; 'red wood'⁵ (*Ficus laurifolia*) and mahogany from the West Indies: and exotic finishes such as satinwood, zebra wood, etc. Clock cases were amongst the first items of furniture to be recorded by Robert Gillow, and a '... clockcase of mahogany' was made as early as April 1732.⁶ Robert Gillow was bound to John Robinson a Lancaster joiner in 1721⁷ the same year that the tax on imported woods

such as mahogany was abolished and he may, along with other Lancaster joiners, have worked with the wood prior to 1732. According to the Gillow archives mahogany was the premier wood for clock cases from the 1730s. Out of about fifty cases (probably longcases) in which the wood was described between 1732 and 1743, some forty-two were made in mahogany; five in oak; two in walnut; and one in deal. Mahogany cases described in 1747 as 'the best sort' were bought, probably for export, by merchants, sea captains, and a few clock makers. Hardwares, textiles, felt hats, and other items as well as furniture were exported from Lancaster mainly to the West Indies and exchanged for foreign produce. Gillows imported sugar, cotton, and rum as return cargo, but during the wars of the 1740s Robert Gillow expressed a definite preference for mahogany; in 1747 he wrote 'with respect to remittance in the HANNAH nothing better than mahogany', and the following year he observed, '... for my part would choose nothing else if you can get it shipped'.⁸

The price and availability of mahogany fluctuated during the 18th century, mainly due to the 'French wars' and this had an effect on the cost and design of furniture. In 1759 Gillows complained '... mahogany plank is very dear',⁸ lengths of Jamaican mahogany '... suitable for table tops' one inch thick and ten to twelve feet long could also be obtained from a London merchant, but later in the century large sizes became very scarce. In 1784 for example a table had to be made narrower,⁹ and a curious fashion for dividing the bottom section of clockcase doors during the last thirty years of the 18th century may have been the result of a scarcity of long lengths of veneer.² An early 19th-century clock case with a similar door has also been recorded, another period when mahogany was scarce and expensive.²

Clock cases were ambassadors of Gillow furniture and were invariably included in cargoes for new export markets such as St Petersburg, and the Canary Isles. They were usually mahogany, fretted, carved, gilded and/or painted in the latest style. In 1761 Gillows showed their usual enterprise by trading with the newly captured French colony of Guadeloupe, and consulted a sea captain, on the 'goods most suitable for the Guadeloupe market', the list included dressing chests, dining tables, close-stool chairs, toilets & desks 'with sliding prospects', and 'clock cases paintd'.¹⁰ Judging from contemporary orders it was probably the spandrels (or tympanum) which were painted, it is unlikely that these cases were japanned especially since they were made of mahogany. Cheaper clock cases of deal painted 'mahogany colour',²⁷ were noted occasionally, invariably for the home market.

THE LONDON INFLUENCE AND ITS EFFECT ON CLOCK CASE DESIGN

The most interesting period in North Lancashire clock case design was the second half of the 18th century, when a recognisable Gillow or 'Lancaster' style began to emerge. The availability of Jamaican mahogany, 'well trained workmen' and a knowledge of London styles which were modified for provincial taste, all contributed. During the mid-1750s Richard Gillow, Robert Gillow's eldest son, returned to Lancaster probably from London where he is believed to have studied architecture,¹¹ and in 1757 he joined his father as an equal partner. All Gillow apprentices were bound to Richard Gillow from September 1758,¹² and by 1762 it appears that they were expected to learn 'such variety of work', that one apprentice who came to Lancaster to finish his apprenticeship needed to extend his 'apprenticeship a little longer than the remaining term in order to perfect himself for a journeyman. . . and be taught his business in perfection', otherwise Richard Gillow remarked that he could not answer for him nor Gillows.⁷

Richard Gillow's major contribution however appears to have been his interest in, and influence on, the design of the firms' furniture. In 1759 he wrote to his cousin James, asking him to send 'patterns for chairs and any other good designs'. James was apprenticed to his uncle Robert Gillow in 1746,¹³ but by 1759 '[D?]irections' for James Gillow were to be sent to 'Mr. Evans's [?] Coach and Horses in St. Martins Lane, near Charing Cross London',¹⁰ perhaps just doors away from Chippendale's shop. By the early 1760s Gillows had access to several London pattern books, including Chippendale's *Director; Houshold Furniture in Genteel Taste*;⁷ and presumably the London drawings supplied by cousin James, as well as an unidentified book 'full of ingenuety', mentioned by Robert Gillow in 1749.¹¹

THE FIRST GILLOW CLOCK CASE DRAWING AND THE 'CHIPPENDALE' INFLUENCE

The earliest surviving designs date from 1759, most of them were fairly simple, however one of the best executed drawings, was a longcase clock in the style usually termed 'Chippendale' (Fig. 1). It was drawn during the summer of 1760 and is the earliest surviving Gillow clock case drawing, pre-dating the other twelve Gillow clock case drawings first noted by Goodison¹⁴ by twenty-six years. The drawing, which was described in detail in an earlier article,⁷ is of interest since it helps to date and identify similar cases as probably made by Gillows or by other Lancaster cabinet makers. Figure 2 is one of three very similar clock cases which all house movements by Lancaster makers and bear a strong resemblance to the 1760 drawing, although all three vary in details such as the style of fretwork, or the carving on the trunk doortop, they demonstrate the way Gillows adapted a basic design to suit the taste of each customer. This practice was mentioned by Chippendale in the preface to his third edition, and echoed by Gillows in a letter to a potential customer in 1765, when, after alluding to their designs, they added '... if any of Chippendale's designs be more agreeable can execute 'em and adapt them to places they are for if you'll be so obliged to point out the number ...'⁷

The fretwork on the walnut Barber clock case (Fig. 3) can be dated via Barber's numbering system to c. 1754, the year Chippendale's *Director* was first published and is an early instance of a provincial cabinet maker using Chippendale's designs since some of the fret patterns are identical to those on plate CXIX. The Westmorland case combines pattern book frets with regional characteristics such as walnut used in its solid form as opposed to a veneer, and simple flat hood and general shape typical of its period and country origins. Another more sophisticated Barber clock case in the Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, dating from c. 1758 is clearly based on a combination of two of Chippendale's first edition clock case designs (pls CXXXV and CXXXVI) the former only appeared in the 1754 edition. Fretwork in the Chippendale manner both on the moulding which supports the hood, an area called the 'impost' by Gillows, (Figs 1 to 4) and in the frieze below the hood mould (Fig. 3) are features frequently seen on elaborate Lancashire cases and sometimes on South Westmorland, Yorkshire, and a few Welsh and Irish cases made during the second half of the 18th century.

Scroll pediments, first recorded by Gillows in 1746, remained the most common shape, and combined with carved rose terminals are typical of 'high' Lancashire and South Westmorland casework of the second half of the 18th century. Some rose buds were angled slightly so that they could be seen to advantage from below. During the period c. 1760–90 roses were sometimes gessoed and gilded and traces of this finish can be seen on the roses in



1. The earliest surviving
Gillow clock case drawing,
1760

2. Clock by Joshua
Horracks of Lancaster;
the case resembles Figure 1

Figure 4. Bead and reel ornaments were sometimes incorporated into the bosses which support the roses on the finest cases. Another typical North Lancashire feature which reflected the ready access to good carvers are carved shields, or ornaments between the roses; designs included flowers, cornucopia, or fronded cartouches, as in Figures 1 and 9. The frets in the tympanum or 'spandles', were sometimes painted and gilded during this period and as late as 1775 some round dial clocks, particularly those made for export, were ornamented with 'gilt sprigs', possibly painted onto wood not glass. Glass was always expensive and as Gillows complained by 1782 was subject to 'an additional duty'.¹⁵ Painted designs on the wood in the tympanum have been noted on Kendal clocks; cases from South Westmorland often resemble those of North Lancashire. Glass panels with gilt sprigs seen on South Lancashire/Cheshire casework are rare on Lancaster examples, but a Kirkby Lonsdale clock at Abbot Hall¹⁶ in the Gillow style has *verre eglomise* panels. Glass friezes were used more frequently on Preston and Fylde clocks, and the 1799 *Preston Cabinet-Makers Book of Prices* includes a clock with 'two glass friezes' in the 'head'.

Sometimes capitals and bases of hood columns were gessoed and gilded in imitation of brass which was expensive and scarce in Lancaster. Even basic accessories such as screws and hinges had to be transported from Birmingham and Wolverhampton, as well as towns like Ashton near Warrington. In 1783 Gillows complained that some furniture had remained unfinished for several months for want of brass fittings, and on other occasions fittings were damaged through bad packaging. The fact that the majority of clock cases housing Lancaster movements have turned capitals and bases may reflect Lancaster cabinet makers' solution to the problem. Gillows occasionally employed specialist turners such as Marmaduke Ball to turn columns and make other parts for clock cases. Brass Corinthian capitals and bases were ordered from a Birmingham brassfounder in 1779 at 5s. 6d. a pair, but this was a rare occurrence.

Other features associated with North Lancashire casework are an absence of side windows in the hood, and deep and elaborately moulded cornices. The semicircular shaped trunk door top is very characteristic of Lancaster casework from the mid 18th century onwards and can be seen on the 1760 drawing. However, the deep moulding around its edge was generally restricted to fine casework of the period c. 1760–70, and by the early 1770s had been replaced by much narrower mouldings. Stringing was first noted on Gillow casework in 1760⁷; the pedestals which support the pilasters in the hood on Figure 4 have this feature. However although stringing was used more frequently from the 1770s inlaid designs are referred to very infrequently whilst the preference for carving in some form persisted for many decades, and carved roses appear on one Westmorland case as late as 1797.¹⁷ Despite the inclusion of one elaborately inlaid clock case and an equally elaborate watch case in the 1788–89 Estimate Sketch Book, the Sheraton style failed to capture the imagination of North Lancashire customers.

One striking feature of the clock case illustrated in Figure 4 is the carved shell on the trunk door, references to carving on clock case door tops occur during the 1760s. This clock bears a striking resemblance to an order recorded in the Gillow archives in 1761, by Messrs. Birkett, for 'Valmont', who was probably a gentleman or merchant of Guadeloupe:⁷ 'S & E Valmonts no. 1 two clock cases with fluted pilasters the head and feet to be gilded with a scalloped shell on top of ye door'.⁷ Robert Townson, carver, was paid 6s. in 1761 for carving two shells on clock case doors which may have been similar to the shells illustrated



3. Clock by Jonas Barber of Winsters, c. 1754, the frets are derived from plates in Chippendale's *Director*, published the same year



4. Clock by Thomas Fayrer of Lancaster with 'a scalloped shell on top of ye door' and a Greek key fret identical to fret on the Gillows design dated 1760 illustrated in Figure 1

in Figures 7 and 8, the latter carved in the style of William Kent, and a rococo motif incorporating C-scrolls and foliage is featured in Figure 67. References to 'carved faces' also occur in the early 1760s and may perhaps have been masks combined with 'Chippendale' roses and foliage which appear on a case by William Wilson of Kendal at Cannon Hall Museum near Barnsley (Fig. 5). 'Fluted pillasters', of the type illustrated in Figure 4 are rarely seen on 18th-century clock cases.

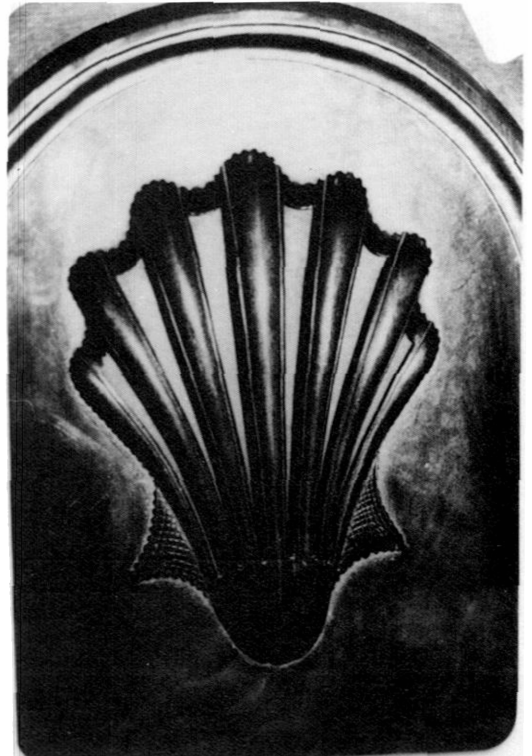
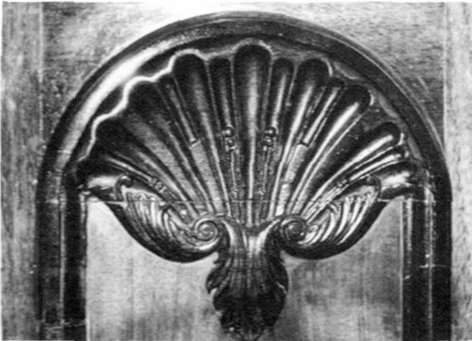
LATER DEVELOPMENTS IN GILLOW CASEWORK

The shape of the Lancaster longcase clock varied little over the next forty years, but details changed as newly fashionable features were incorporated such as 'Gothick' decoration which was introduced *c.* 1767 (Fig. 10) although used on other Gillow furniture at an earlier date. Two years after the 'enamelled' or painted dial appeared, Gillows recorded (in July 1774) a case with 'the face a circle and circular pediment'. Circular dial longcase clocks were made in other parts of Britain about the same period. Approximately fifty round dial clock cases were recorded during the next twenty-five years, a few were made for local customers but most were exported, mainly to the West Indies, and others were sent to Gillows' London shop, Walsall, and Manchester. Although such clocks were not popular locally, Worswick supplied several round dial clocks to Gillows for export, and one example in a Gillow case can be seen in Lancaster Museum. Most Gillow round dial cases had unbroken semicircular arched pediments *c.* 1774–86 but after *c.* 1786 most had the characteristic scrolled pediment of the region.

Various pediment shapes were recorded during the period *c.* 1760–95, such as 'hippt'; 'pitched'; 'close'; 'rustic'; or 'circular'; as well as square pediments with arched dials. One pediment, seldom used on North Lancashire cases, was sketched in 1778, it was a form of pagoda or bell top, which Gillows described elsewhere as a 'dome'. Pagoda pediments are mainly associated with cases of London and the north east and are rare in North Lancashire but 'Chinese' pediments recorded in Preston in the early 19th century may have been similar²⁵. Manwarings pattern book²⁶ which illustrated 'rural' chairs may have inspired the 'rustic' pediment recorded but not illustrated in 1774.

THE MOVEMENTS OF LANCASTER CABINET MAKERS

The high standards set by Richard Gillow combined with the 'variety of work' expected of Gillow apprentices, the broadening of horizons offered by the opening of the London shop, and the transatlantic trade made Lancaster journeymen very much in demand in other towns. A point which led Gillows to complain that they had to pay their painters throughout the winter in order to keep them 'in the country'.¹⁸ According to figures extracted from Lancaster Freemans' rolls¹⁹ prior to *c.* 1840, about 400 cabinet makers or joiners were described as working in Lancaster or its environs, and an additional 173 men worked in other towns, i.e. forty-two in London; thirty-nine in Liverpool; twenty-four in Preston; fifteen in Manchester; and seven in Kendal. Another eighteen men worked in the



5. Detail of case housing a clock by William Wilson of Kendal

6. Detail of clock case in Figure 2

7. The carver James Townson was paid 6s. in 1761 for carving two shells on clock case doors

8. Detail of shell on the door of a clock case by Joshua Horracks of Lancaster



9. Carved 'shield and roses' from the Joshua Horracks clock case illustrated in Figure 8



10 'Gothic impost and fret' recorded in descriptions of Gillow clock cases from 1768. The movement is by Thomas Worswick (Robert Gillow's son-in-law) and the case probably by Gillows, c. 1773

Lake Counties; twelve in central Lancashire; nine in Yorkshire; and seven south of Manchester. Other evidence of the movement of cabinet makers, most of whom were either apprenticed in Lancaster or the sons of local cabinet makers can be observed in the Poll Book of 1784–86,²² which lists over thirty cabinet makers who were Lancaster freemen and worked in other northern towns; and sixteen cabinet makers and two upholsterers, who worked in London. Since some cabinet makers were not freemen, or moved to another town after completing their apprenticeship, the numbers are underestimated, but it does indicate the possible influence that such movement could have had in introducing characteristics of North Lancashire into furniture of other areas, and underlines once again the importance of the London connection. Although most apprentices came from the north-west, as Gillows reputation grew a few boys came considerable distances 'to serve in Lancaster'²⁴, and thus the sphere of influence widened. In 1780 for example, Thomas Baker, of East Lullworth, Dorset, was apprenticed to Richard Gillow, of Lancaster '... and Robert Gillow ... of Oxford Road, Middlesex ...'²⁴.

Possible evidence of North Lancashire influence is illustrated by a clock (c. 1780) signed 'John Hawthorn Newcastle' reproduced in David Barker's book *The Arthur Negus Guide to English Clocks*, 1980, pl. 59, the case displays several 'Lancaster' characteristics. 'John Hawthorn' was probably John Hay[w]thornthwaite who shortened his name after he left Kirkby Lonsdale for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, prior to 1757.²⁰ Although he ordered a billiard table from Gillows in 1773 he does not appear to have ordered any clock cases, but Gillows mentioned a relative of Haythorns who placed the order and 'was now at your town', this relative was probably the cabinet maker, John Haythornthwaite who came from Kirkby Lonsdale to be apprenticed to a Lancaster cabinet maker in 1762²¹ and was living at 'Shields' near Newcastle in 1784–86.²² The case was probably made then for John Hawthorn of Newcastle by his Lancaster trained kinsman in the Lancaster style.

Cabinet maker's drawings were another way ideas were spread. Gillows supplied drawings to customers who lived outside Lancaster from the 1760s and they were aware of plagiarism. In 1788 for example they wrote to a customer in Sheffield, 'Should be much obliged to you not to let our drawings be seen by any person of the same trade'²³, and on another occasion they requested that drawings of the latest London styles be returned as soon as possible.

Clearly, Gillow's furniture itself could be copied and Gillows themselves also copied furniture; during the 1760s they sketched a chair 'from London' and in 1780 they sent a man a considerable distance to examine a 'Bath chair' unheard of in Lancaster.²⁸ Gillows clock cases could then have been copied by cabinet makers from another area. Unfortunately most clock case orders do not include the addresses of customers probably because they lived locally, however about eighty-five cases were bought by English customers living outside Lancaster between 1733 and 1813. Predictably, most Gillow clock cases were acquired by north-west customers from Liverpool in the south, to Penrith in the north, with Pocklington near York providing the eastern most point. However, a few were sent further afield; two to Dublin, one to Walsall, two to Kent and several to Gillows' London shop. The longcases sent to London included some with typical Lancashire characteristics such as scrolled pediments, carved roses, etc. whilst others had popular London features such as round dials; echoing once again the mixture of northern provincial taste and metropolitan influence.

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Figure 1 is published by permission of the City of Westminster Libraries Archives Section; Figures 2 and 4 by permission of private owners. I am grateful to Mr and Mrs J. Taylor for drawing my attention to the William Wilson (Kendal) clock at Cannon Hall, Barnsley, and to the Metropolitan Borough of Barnsley for permission to publish Figure 5.

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