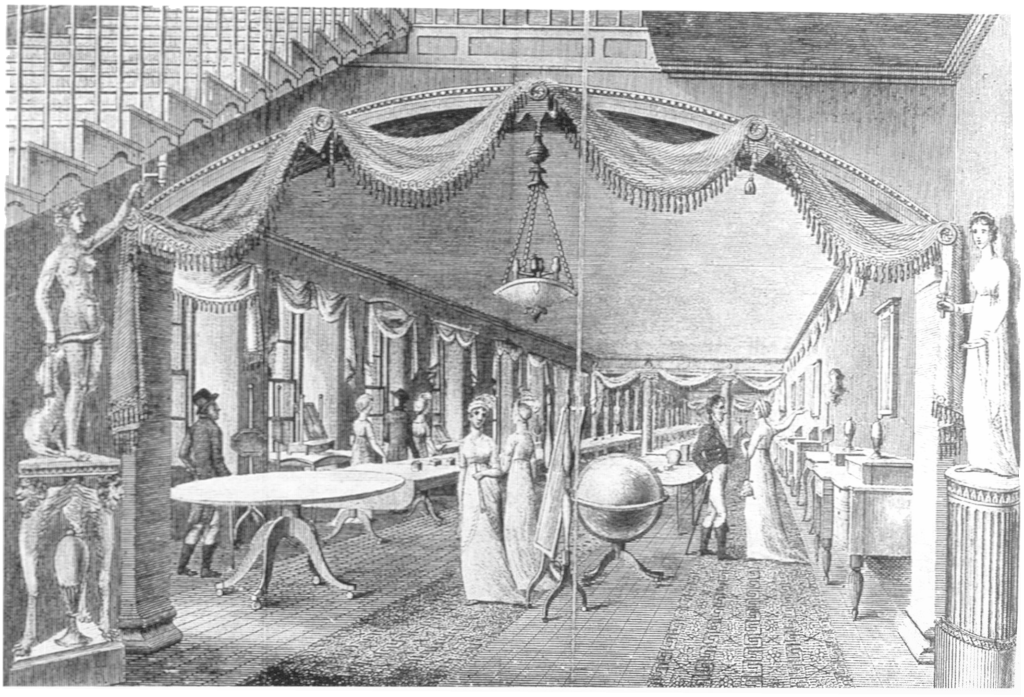
INTRODUCTION

THE GLASGOW BOOK OF PRICES FOR MANUFACTURING CABINET WORK 1806

David Jones

The Glasgow Book of Prices for Manufacturing Cabinet Work, launched on 14 August 1806, was not conceived as a lavish pattern book, nor was it intended to challenge the comprehensive repertoire of the *Edinburgh Book of Prices* published a year earlier in 1805.[1] Glasgow, the most populous urban settlement in Lanarkshire, was the centre of fashion and style for a large area of western and central Scotland and its first cabinet makers' price book was a statement of local preferences in furniture with agreed labour costs. To the north and west of Glasgow the Highlands and Islands undoubtedly looked to the city for ideas and it is conceivable that some makers in this area may have used the Glasgow book, but demand for fashionable consumer goods here was relatively small. In those cases where families of means did not import their fashionable furniture by sea from outwith Scotland they seem to have bought what they needed from Glasgow itself. Elsewhere in the orbit of the urban centre, the most significant population of craftsmen who used the city's price book lived in the area known as the West Country. Here, in county towns such as Ayr, Wigtown, Kirkcudbright and Dumfries and regional centres such as Greenock, Paisley and Irvine, communities of established cabinet makers made local variants of Glasgow types and forms.

The preface to the first edition of the price book contains a candid explanation of the need for standard piecework rates to be set. Rates were too low and in 'a vague and unsettled state'. Equal numbers of masters and journeymen met and after 'mature deliberation' came to an agreement in which the prices paid to the journeymen were 'considerably advanced'. Such equanimity of agreement might seem remarkable when observed against the background of considerable civil unrest that we know existed in Glasgow at this time. Between 1792 and 1820 the west of Scotland was in a state of near revolution. After escalating distress, mainly amongst working people, there was a general uprising on 4 April 1820 and several leaders, all skilled artisans from the Glasgow area, were arrested.[2] Andrew Hardie, weaver, of Glasgow and John Baird, weaver of Condorrat were hanged for treason at Stirling on 8 September 1820. Nineteen others were transported to Australia. One of these nineteen, a cabinet maker from Old Kilpatrick named Alexander Hart, had his face disfigured by sword in the clash with government troops at Bonnymuir, but he went on to become a very successful member of the cabinet making community in Parramatta, New South Wales, Australia. He is the

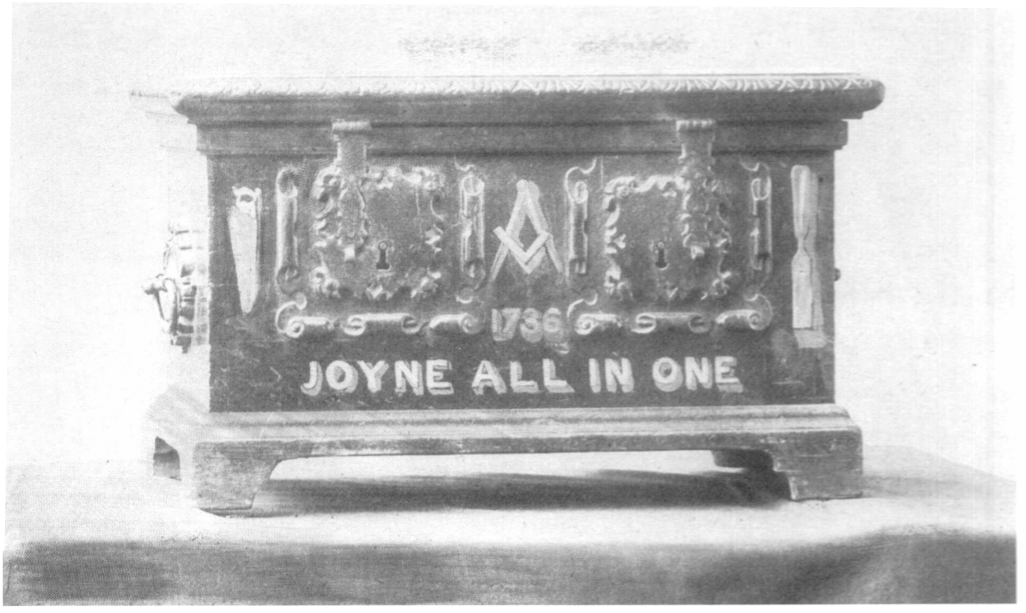


1. Interior view, ware rooms of Messrs. Cleland, Jack, Paterson & Co. Trongate, Glasgow. From R Chapman, *The Picture of Glasgow or Stranger's Guide*, 1812

subject of an article in this journal by John Hawkins (pp.82-94). Many owners of the *Glasgow Book of Prices* must have been involved in political activity in the period before the uprising of 1820 and by doing so lived in circumstances of great danger. The price book re-printed here can be seen as a means whereby employers and workmen reached a peaceful agreement to a dispute over low wages and ensuing social distress - but it is difficult to determine whether or not the masters took any notice of the agreed price book rates. That the book did achieve some success however, is indicated by the fact that it was re-issued in 1809 and published in enlarged form in 1825.

The man who signed the preface of the 1806 book on behalf of the masters was James Cleland, owner of Glasgow's leading cabinet firm.[3] The company, of which James Cleland assumed control in 1800, advertised extensively in the Glasgow press between 1803 and 1811 revealing that they employed a range of specialist craftsmen including carvers, gilders, bronze-workers, turners, japanners and upholsterers in addition to straightforward cabinet makers. From May 1811 the firm's ware-room was in the Trongate, Glasgow's main shopping street. Its interior is illustrated in a unique engraved view of 1812 in which can be seen several items that correspond with distinctive specifications in the *Glasgow Book of Prices*.[4]

Although clearly a tycoon with involvement in building and property leasing in the city, as well as cabinet making interests, Cleland seems to have had a keen sense of civic responsibility. He was a member of the Town Council in 1800, in 1804 Chief Magistrate of the Gorbals, in 1806 a Baillie of Glasgow, in 1812 Treasurer of the City and in 1814



3. Collector's Box, Incorporation of Wrights in Glasgow, 1736
The Incorporation of Wrights in Glasgow

4. Deacon's Box, Incorporation of Wrights in Glasgow, nineteenth century
The Incorporation of Wrights in Glasgow

2. Glasgow sideboard table with 'boxes framed up with the table ends', creating a three sided stage. *Bonhams, Edinburgh*

Superintendent of Public works. Much of his energy, following his departure from the family business in 1814, went into improvement of the city's drains and public spaces. He had occupied high office in the Incorporation of Wrights, becoming Collector in 1794 and Deacon in 1796. In 1809 he was Deacon Convener of all trades. Cleland is also well-known for his interest in statistics. This study, for which he was recognised by the award of Ll.D from Glasgow University in 1826, perhaps made him a particularly suitable person to take part in the calculation of the precise and complex specifications that formed the city's first furniture price book.[6] Of James Wilson, signatory for the journeymen, nothing is known. Without supporting information it is very difficult to put character to this very common name.

Remaining on the subject of the book's preface, an item that deserves mention is the final paragraph that concerns provision of candles. Journeymen were expected to provide their own candles during the winter and the cost of this was taken into account in the agreed prices. Candlelight was an important consideration in a country where darkness fell early between October and March. The journeymen used them to illuminate their benches, but they were required for other significant reasons. The practice of maintaining an altar, by gift of money and candles to a patron saint, pre-dated the constitution of Glasgow's wrights as a distinct Incorporation in May 1600. St John the Evangelist was patron saint to the Wrights and Masons and those woodworkers who wished to do so continued to support an altar to St John. Clearly, the masters would not allow quantities of their candles to be used for this purpose, as it was a custom of

5. Cleland and Jack, Glasgow, writing table
University of Glasgow

personal observation amongst the journeymen.

On page one of the specifications, the *Glasgow Book of Prices* reveals its personality by introducing a particular form of sideboard table. The 'sideboard with boxes framed up with the table ends, a drawer in each box' that is with a three-sided stage, a characteristic Glasgow form, can be seen on the right hand side of the firm's ware room in Chapman's view (Figure 1). This type of sideboard table occurs also in Northern Ireland but is not generally found outside Ulster and Glasgow. The example raises the perplexing issue of identifying the origin of Scottish and Irish furniture types. Many were transferred to Ulster directly from Scotland and this is amply illustrated in the repertoire of the *Belfast Book of Prices for Manufacturing Cabinet Work*, 1833. The straight stage top is a design component that was transferred to Belfast and region, but it is possible that the three-sided version was an Ulster variant that found popularity back in the west of Scotland. At seven feet, the basic 'straight front' sideboard table in the cabinet makers'

Glasgow Book of Prices is one foot longer than the standard sideboard specified in the *Edinburgh Book of Prices*, 1805. The sideboard specification is an indicator of the generous proportions of Glasgow furniture when compared with Edinburgh pieces of this period. But the Glasgow book includes also important clues about the social use of the sideboard in urban society. The inclusion of a 'plate drawer with a sliding board in the top', a feature that the Edinburgh price book does not offer, says something about the continuity into the nineteenth century of lavish, almost ceremonial, displays of silver in the Glasgow dining room.

Before the late-eighteenth century appearance of the movable stage top sideboard described in the 1806 price book, a fixed press or 'buffet' was used to strike a note of domestic theatre in the dining rooms of the west coast of Scotland.[8] These presses, that could almost be described as museums of silver, china and glass, were centrally-placed and flush with the wall or wooden panelling of the short end of a dining room. Folding doors, usually between pilasters, disclosed an arched niche with concave hood, decorated like the inside of a shell, and several tiers of painted and profiled shelves. An inverted punch bowl typically occupied the central shelf, flanked by rows of glasses. Because the scolloped edges of the shelves had different profiles, or perhaps only one central shelf had this feature, particularly tall glasses, towers of small tea cups and saucers, or long-necked cordial bottles could be placed to rise through two tiers. China teapots, or silver bowls were placed on top of further inverted punch bowls to enhance the complex display. These items might not have been regularly used but some of these dining room buffets featured, at waist level, a folding board supported on one folding leg. On this temporary table top the punch bowl and glasses, or silver tea pot and cups, would have been placed when in use. The 'plate drawer with sliding board in the top' described in the 1806 book, duplicated the older functions of the dining room buffet in a new piece of furniture.

In chambers where space was at a premium, full length but movable buffets were placed in the corner of the room. Known as 'corner buffets', they are known to have been a regional preference in in the south west of Scotland. Gillow of Lancaster supplied these full length versions to customers in the area.[9] The corner buffet tradition, at least, can be seen to have continued into the nineteenth century repertoire of Glasgow furniture in the form of a 'corner cupboard with scolloped shelf'. In the small dining room or parlour of a modest urban house this piece of hanging furniture would have performed the same function as its much grander eighteenth century predecessor. Early nineteenth century examples can be found with green-painted interiors and gilded edges to the shelves, although there is no mention of such decorative extras in the Glasgow price book specification.

Whilst the corner buffet can be seen as an old-fashioned custom, there are some very new items in the Glasgow book. The pillar and claw dining table is one. In line with fashion across the United Kingdom, the single pillar and claw table pedestal replaced the previous use of four tapered legs. Again, the Glasgow version of the pillar and claw dining table was slightly larger than the basic Edinburgh model of 1805. Interestingly, the Glasgow table had four, rather than three, claws. This salient configuration can be seen in Chapman's view of Cleland's ware room, 1812. (Figure 1) The reader will search in vain for the appearance of card table specifications, because these were known in Glasgow as 'turn over' tables. Edinburgh's 1805 price book had two types of table for

6. Corner cupboard with scolloped shelf
John Walker

7. A 'mounter', or strengthening batten across the base of a drawer
Private collection

playing cards, while Glasgow had eight. The 'Tryo' table on page six is a kind of lady's work table, so-called because it was made in three parts, forming a trio of box sections that folded into one another.[10] The formula of three repeated features, either drawers, cannisters or boxes, occurs with consistency throughout the price book. Although Glasgow cannot be said to have had a greater population of lawyers than early-nineteenth century Edinburgh, legal furniture is given greater prominence in the Glasgow book. One such item is the 'Consulting Table' that appears on page eight. Four feet six inches square, with a cock beaded drawer in each side, this table was designed to occupy the centre of an advocate's consulting room, and could be raised on castors to enable movement to one side if necessary. Progressing in order of appearance, the next furniture type worthy of mention is the chest of drawers. Chests with three short drawers across the top front were common in Edinburgh, if not indeed, standard items.[11] But the Glasgow volume is the only price book to specify this distinctive configuration as an option. Considering the enormous popularity of the design, often known as the 'Lum' chest, in the west during the nineteenth century, it is tempting to attribute its origin to the area. As far as construction detail is concerned, it will be observed that it was standard Scottish practice for long drawers to be strengthened at their base by provision of a batten running from back to front. In Edinburgh this was known as a 'munting'; in Glasgow as a 'mounter'. The secretary, a much-deployed case type in Scotland that was frequently to be found in the bedroom, is specified on page seventeen. Its main component, the fitted drawer with prospect, is called a 'till' drawer in Glasgow where it

8. Press bed, Miller & Miller, Glasgow, 1939
The Mitchell Library

is found, also, as an extra in a clothes press. The use of the word till alludes to the way in which a secretary drawer could be used and perhaps reflects a more obvious commercial sensibility in Glasgow than in Edinburgh at this time. A trivial, but nevertheless distinguishing difference between secretaries made in the two cities lies in the detail of fitting. A Glasgow secretary had five letter holes and seven small drawers while the Edinburgh version had seven letter holes and only six small drawers.

The Glasgow Book of Prices is a small volume with a relatively limited repertoire but its text answers questions that may have perplexed furniture historians - or about which we may never have thought. One particular feature might seem obvious when pointed out but is only revealed by the link between specifications for bookcases on page nineteen and the plate showing astragals on the final page. It demonstrates that bookcase doors are designed to have more open glass, bigger panes and fewer astragals than other kinds of glazed cabinet door. This allows book spines to be seen and read more clearly.

Press beds, made to look like cupboards, are routinely specified, reflecting their wide usage in urban Glasgow. Two types, 'common deal' and 'mahogany' are offered, presumably for use in kitchen and dining or drawing room respectively. They present one of the best examples of furniture continuity in a city context, as very similar models were still being made and sold in Glasgow in the late 1930s.[12] Many items in the book could be made in various qualities by using the standard specification, but the item with the most obvious vernacular source is the cradle. Like the deal press bed, the cradle is something that would most likely have been made for the small home – either urban

working man's dwelling or rural cottage – rather than the larger, genteel house. The inclusion of such a familiar item of furniture illustrates the link between the *Glasgow Book of Prices* and the common tradition, something that is not apparent in its Edinburgh counterpart. Listed immediately after the cradle is a 'Bamboo Swing Crib', clearly a fashionable infant's bed.

A short specification such as that for a 'Pot Stand', (known in Edinburgh as a 'Pot Cupboard'), is surprisingly divulgent. It reveals a local preference for a 'scolloped' top and stipulates that an extra sum of 3d should be charged if less than three stands are made. This provides evidence that the price book could be used as a guide to batch production of certain types of furniture. Knife boxes, for example, were produced in this way. A Glasgow cabinet maker would have been especially familiar with this item, as it was one of the standard essay pieces for apprentices in the Incorporation of Wrights.[13] According to an Incorporation minute of 24 February 1792; 'A knife box, fifteen inches long at the top and bevelled both ways, by ten inches and not below four and one half inches deep', was a required test piece, to be made out of rough wood in a dedicated 'essay room' maintained by the Glasgow wrights. Interestingly, the description of the same piece is worded very differently from that in the 1806 book of prices. It demonstrates that the price book was a fresh document, compiled for a new purpose and not necessarily dependent upon old Incorporation rubric.

Part of the Scottish cabinet maker's standard repertoire, whether in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee or Aberdeen, was the window blind, or Venetian blind, so important in cities of tenement dwellings where overlooking could invade privacy. The Glasgow book specifies a standard size of 3ft 9in X 1ft 8in. More evidence of the Glasgow book's broad scope is given by the specification for clock cases. Clock making was a well-established trade in Glasgow by the early nineteenth century; the first clocksmith or 'knoksmith' was admitted to the city's Incorporation of Hammermen in 1649.[14] But the cases in which clocks were contained were the products of a different trade. The cabinet makers' specifications for long cases are rather basic, including plain corniced or round headed models. However, the corniced long case with very tall hood was a characteristic and enduring type in the city. The area between the cornice and the clock face was often decorated and this is alluded to in the specification for 'veneering the pannels above the arch' on page 33. Decorated columns, occasionally on all four corners of the trunk, were also a feature of Glasgow clocks.[15] In the second half of the eighteenth century it was fashionable to embellish these with rope twist carving – 'quilled on the cann' in Glasgow terminology – but the 1806 specification gives way to more fashionable straight reeding. Further evidence of particular social custom in the city is given by conspicuous omissions from the Glasgow book. Firstly, the volume is written in very plain English , with fewer instances of Scots terminology than in the later versions of the price book. Nor are there any Gaelic words or descriptions, despite there being a substantial number of Gaelic speakers, and indeed Irish Gaelic immigrants, employed in the city's trade.

There are no chairs in the book, indicating that this was a separate trade in the city. Whether or not the chair makers ever issued their own separate price book is unknown, but they probably did not, because by 1890, in the *List of Prices as agreed to by the Operative Cabinet and Chair Makers of the Glasgow Nos 1 and 2 Branches of the United Operative Association of Scotland*, the two trades are represented in the same

publication. The lobby table is also completely absent, a glaring omission when one considers the importance of this item in the repertoire of the Edinburgh maker. This peculiarity could be explained by the differences in house deign in the two cities. Late eighteenth century Edinburgh was a city of rented houses in which the necessity for entertainment during the season assumed high priority in the architectural plan. The lobby table in the New Town house occupied a capacious room designed to receive large parties of guests, so the furniture had to be convenient and fashionable, but it needed to be arranged around the walls to allow space for circulation. In Glasgow, where this transient population of party-goers was not so much in evidence, entertainment tended to be more intimate and lobby furniture did not require such particular design.

To the Glasgow craftsman, a price guide that allowed artisans and masters to reckon the labour cost of cabinet wares made in the city was clearly of value. Copies were coveted and the few early editions of the *Glasgow Book of Prices* that are known to survive are carefully inscribed with their owner's names. The 1806 edition, from which the following re-print has been made, is inscribed 'James M'Intyre his book of prices Anderstoun'. Anderstoun was an old burgh strategically situated between the Clyde and the city's west end; the latter being an area that was beginning to be developed as a residential area during the early nineteenth century. M'Intyre would have been well placed to exploit the needs of the new house dwellers from his manufacturing base near the river. But not all copies of the book were bought by wrights in urban Glasgow. A copy of the 1809 book of prices, now held in the Glasgow Collection of the Mitchell Library,[17] was owned by an Irvine cabinet maker named Thomas Garven, who signed his copy twice. He can be identified as Thomas Garven of Bridgegate, Irvine, Ayrshire, who died in 1837. Judging by the quantity of anonymous furniture in Ayrshire, and the other western counties, that approximates to Glasgow patterns, Garven can probably be seen as representative of a number of West Country craftsmen who depended upon the Glasgow book as a guide. Although attempts were made to draw up more local wage agreements in centres such as Dumfries,[18] marked work from the south west, such as that by Walter Newall, still follows specifications laid down in Glasgow.

The *Glasgow Book of Prices* followed hard on the heels of the first Edinburgh price book of 1805 and was clearly prompted by the capital's initiative. Plate 1 from the Glasgow book, which shows claws, stump feet and sideboard table legs, is traced from plate 3 in the Edinburgh book but this is the only part in which the volume is obviously derivative. The Glasgow cabinet makers' earliest venture into piece rate agreement can be seen as an original document that will prove to be of value to the inquisitive furniture historian. The book's greatest uses lie in its illustration of the forgotten social functions of pieces that are now obsolete. It is to be hoped that its re-printing might open the gates to the identification of further Glasgow furniture that has remained, hitherto, anonymous.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

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3. See Céline Blair and David Jones, 'Furnishing the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow Style, 1809', *Regional Furniture,* vol. V, 1991, pp 86-92
4. R Chapman, *The Picture of Glasgow or Stranger's Guide,* 1812. Plate showing interior view, ware rooms of Messrs Cleland, Jack, Paterson & Co., Trongate, Glasgow
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6. This information on the various achievements of Dr James Cleland is taken from the chapter 'Noteworthy Members' in *Historical Memoranda Connected with the Incorporation of Wrights in Glasgow,* James C Erskine and Sons, Glasgow, 1890
7. See David Jones, 'An Early Cabinet Makers' Club in Belfast and their Book of Prices, 1822' *Regional Furniture* vol. IV, 1990, pp100-12
8. There is an excellent description of a West of Scotland dining room press in John Galt's *The Last of the Lairds,(*1826),1936 edition, John Grant, Edinburgh, pp222-4. Elsewhere, Ian Gow has written on the architectural history of the dining room press or 'buffet niche' in 'The Buffet Niche in Scotland', *Furniture History,* vol. XXX, 1994, pp105-16. Examples of dining room presses in the Glasgow area can be seen at Pollock House and Greenbank House.
9. See David Jones and Jacqueline Urquhart, 'Gillow in Scotland 1770-1830', *Regional Furniture,*vol.XII,1999, p125, for detail of a mahogany corner buffet supplied to Matthew Campbell of Wigtown, 1786
10. 'Trio-table, a sort of small work table, made in three parts, to be shut up into each other, and which may be used either jointly or separately'. Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Dictionary,*1803, p323
11. See David Jones, 'Scotch Chests', *Regional Furniture,* vol.II,1988, pp38-47
12. See Miller & Miller Ltd, 24-28 Mitchell St, Glasgow, Furniture Catalogue, *The Home of Solid Value,* c1935 and David Jones, 'The Press Bed in Scotland', *Scottish Society for Art History Yearbook*, 1988, pp. 28-35
13. 'The Essay', *Historical Memoranda Connected with the Incorporation of Wrights in Glasgow,* James C Erskine and Sons, Glasgow, 1890
14. Felix Hudson, *Scottish Clockmakers,* Dunfermline Press, 1984 p6
15. Full front and quarter rear columns appear also on Aberdeen clock cases, without rope twist carving
16. See David Jones, *The Edinburgh Cabinet and Chair Makers' Books of Prices* 1805-25, Kirk Wynd Press, Cupar, 2000
17. The Glasgow Book of Prices was re-issued in 1809 with the same preface as the first edition of 1806. Cabinet makers in the county town of Ayr were centred around the Fish Cross, the best recorded firm being the partnership of Gordon and Watson.
18. Stephen Jackson has noted that the Dumfries Squaremen met to compile a *Table of reasonable wages to be paid to Journeymen. Squaremens' Minute Book*, SQ2, 13 September 1811, Ewart Library, Dumfries