

‘QUILLED ON THE CANN’ ALEXANDER HART, SCOTTISH CABINET MAKER, RADICAL AND CONVICT

John Hawkins

A British Government at war with Revolutionary and Republican France was fully aware of the dangers of civil unrest amongst the working classes in Scotland for Thomas Paine’s Republican tract *The Rights of Man* was widely read by a particularly literate artisan class. The convict settlement at Botany Bay had already been the recipient of three ‘Scottish martyrs’, the Reverend Thomas Palmer, William Skirving and Thomas Muir, tried in 1793 for seeking an independent Scottish republic or democracy, thereby forcing the Scottish Radical movement underground. The onset of the Industrial Revolution, and the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars placed the Scottish weavers, the so called ‘aristocrats’ of labour, in a difficult position for as demand for cloth slumped their wages plummeted. As a result, the year 1819 saw a series of Radical protest meetings in west and central Scotland, where many thousands obeyed the order for a general strike, the first incidence of mass industrial action in Britain. The British Government employed spies to infiltrate these organisations, and British troops were aware of a Radical armed uprising under Andrew Hardie, a Glasgow weaver, who led a group of twenty five Radicals armed with pikes in the direction of the Carron ironworks, in the hope of gaining converts and more powerful weapons. They were joined at Condorrat by another group under John Baird, also a weaver, only to be intercepted at Bonnemuir, where after a fight twenty one Radicals were arrested and imprisoned in Stirling Castle. Unusually, they were tried for Treason under English as opposed to Scottish law, Hardie and Baird were hung and, when all movement had ceased, decapitated in the Castle square. The remaining nineteen Radicals who changed their plea to guilty were transported to Australia, two of their number, Alexander Hart,¹ a cabinet maker, and Andrew White, a bookbinder, play a part in this story.

On being sentenced to fourteen years transportation and confined in Edinburgh Gaol, Hart wrote to his brother John, a manufacturer, of 12 Wilson St Glasgow.²

Mr Blackie was here this morning, and when I asked him if I would be allowed to take my tool chest along with me, he assured me that I would. And as I am informed by a lad here who is a cabinet maker, and who was there says that our tools are not only bad there, but are costly and that although we may be under Bondage for a short time, yet even in that state we will be allowed to work a good deal for our ourselves . . . in order that I may be able to send home something to you and Margaret for what you have already done or may do for me I should be very happy to have my own tools along with me you can cause Peter to pack them in the best manner he can, and if you send them I would [ask] Peter to put three corner clasps on each corner and a barr across each . . . it if you choose to put in the violin you may. Blackie says he will call upon you next week at least he said

he was going to Glasgow and I told him he might call if he choosed there is some tools that I am deficient that I would like to take along . . . I can purchase in Edinburgh what is different in tools and I'll have them better . . . I am just well thank God your affectionate B Alexander Hart.

Hart wrote again to his brother from onboard the Speke near Sheerness;³

I now write you from the convict ship which I entered yesterday . . . I have no money now not so much as [to] procure the least necessary. I wrote for my drawing papers in a letter that I sent to my shop mates and that some of them would accommodate me with a few more now if I get none of these drawings I'll consider myself greatly disappointed for there is some of them would be essentially necessary to me if ever I go to that country that I am sentenced to go to . . . I am anxious about my drawings and at present I cannot command a sixpence we will be here above a fortnight . . .

During the voyage to Australia Hart and White befriended Dr Henry Gratten Douglass and his wife, passengers and free settlers, on the convict ship Speke.⁴ On the ship's arrival,⁵ Douglass applied to the Colonial Secretary Goulburn, to have Hart and White assigned to himself and delivered to Parramatta.⁶ Hart and White were placed into the charge of Thomas Dume, Chief Constable of Sydney, by the Master commanding the ship Speke and were to remain with Douglass for the next three years.⁷ At some time in 1835 he was transferred to John Macarthur at Camden Park for he appears in the Camden Park Estate daybook 1823-1828,⁸ where it is noted that their previous foreman, Duncan McFarlane, on an annual salary of £100 payable in advance, terminated his employment on December 31st 1825, to be replaced by Alexander Hart. Hart was paid £12-15-0 on January 6th, 1826, drawn upon the Parramatta account, presumably for work at Elizabeth Farm or Experiment Farm Cottage, until then the headquarters of the Macarthur's farming operations.

Enclosing a letter from Captain J. Robertson, Hart petitioned a fellow Scot, Sir Thomas Brisbane, formerly of Makerstoun near Largs, south west of Glasgow, the new Governor of New South Wales in July 1822, for a conditional pardon. This was not granted.⁹ He received his ticket of leave¹⁰ on the 1st June 1826, enabling him to leave the Macarthur's at Camden Park and commence business on his own. This document is annotated on the stub 'Granted on the special order of the Governor communicated verbally. Hart's name is in the list received from the engineer's Office in November last for his indulgence.' Across the stub is written, 'Torn up 18th December, 1827, on his receiving Certificate of Freedom.' Unusually Hart and all those surviving Radicals were granted a royal pardon by the King on 2nd February 1836.¹¹

By the 1828 census, Hart was following his trade as a cabinet maker in Macquarie St, Sydney. He had married the illiterate Irish convict Bridget O'Hara at St. John's Church, Parramatta, on the 14th May 1822.¹² Bridget [O'Heara] signed her name with a cross, as did her witness Ann Fitzgerald. They were married by Thomas Hassall, Andrew White, his fellow Radical, was the Best Man. Bridget's ticket of leave states her year of birth to be 1785, so she understated her age on the register by five years. In the 1828 census she is listed as 'housekeeper' (as she was illiterate he would have filled out the census form) to Alexander Hart, and they had no children. Hart was disfigured and

given up for dead by the cut of a sabre blade across his forehead during the Bonniemuir uprising, which may have had an effect on his working life. He owned property in Pitt Street and moved to his workshop to Lower Castlereagh St where he worked until 1837, remaining as a working cabinet maker until at least 1850, before dying on the 28th March 1876 at his house in Elgin St, Glebe. His death certificate¹³ states him to be 82 years old, parents unknown. The Reverend Doctor John Dunmore Lang annotated the church register against Hart's name 'The last of the Bonnie Muir Radicals of 1820.'¹⁴ His fame, amongst his fellow Scots, followed him to the grave.

Hart arrived at the conclusion of Major General Lachlan Macquarie's long reign as Governor of New South Wales. The centre of Macquarie's world was Government House, Sydney. This was to change with the arrival of another Scottish Governor, Sir Thomas Brisbane, who brought with him James Robertson, his Scottish clock maker, and Rumker his astronomer, building at his own expense a private observatory equipped with Regulators by Breguet and Hardy to the rear of Government House in Parramatta.¹⁵ As a result, the seat of Government moved West. John Macarthur took his ideas to Brisbane for disciplining the convicts in New South Wales, wishing to set up a Parramatta committee comprising rich free settlers such as Throsby, Cox, Howe, Oxley, Macarthur, Marsden and his nephew Hannibal, to report to the Governor to ensure the maintenance and employment of the convicts with the minimum of expense to the Crown. Authority over the convicts would be entrusted to the proprietors of their estates to deter convict servants from disorderly conduct and compel them to work industriously. Macarthur was not however permitted by Brisbane's entourage to carry the idea to fruition, in particular Dr Douglass and Colonial Secretary Goulburn took immediate affront to such power being exercised by the 'Old Proprietors' over the affairs of the colony. Some of these gentlemen then conspired to use as a lever the convict girl Ann Rumsby, 'a great beauty recently removed from the Female Factory to Douglass's home,' to bring him down. This celebrated court case in which Marsden, Hannibal, Macarthur and others promised indemnity to Rumsby if she provided evidence to convict Douglass of impropriety, was to have major reverberations within the colony. Rumsby under oath would not incriminate Douglass so the Court convicted her of perjury, sentencing her to a period of hard labour at the convict settlement Port Macquarie and the case against Douglass was dismissed. Brisbane overturned the sentence against Rumsby and threatened to remove those Parramatta Magistrates refusing to sit with Douglass on the Bench. The main evidence for the Rumsby case dismissal was provided by the bookbinder Andrew White, who as a result was pardoned by Brisbane and returned to Scotland in 1824.

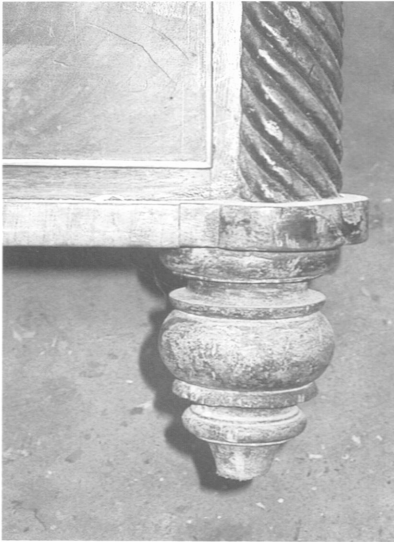
The 'Old Proprietors' referred to in the Rumsby trial and those Parramatta based 'exclusives' noted in McCulloch's letter when combined with Douglass' immediate circle which included Governor Brisbane are, to my mind, candidates for the cabinet making skills of Alexander Hart. In 1821, Sydney was a very small place, with under thirty thousand British settlers,¹⁶ most of whom were illiterate and of convict origin. The arrival of nineteen literate Scottish artisans was a major boost to the skill base of the colony. Dawson, Cleland, McMillan and Murchie were taken into the Government Lumber Yard in Sydney where their skills as blacksmiths kept them for the remainder



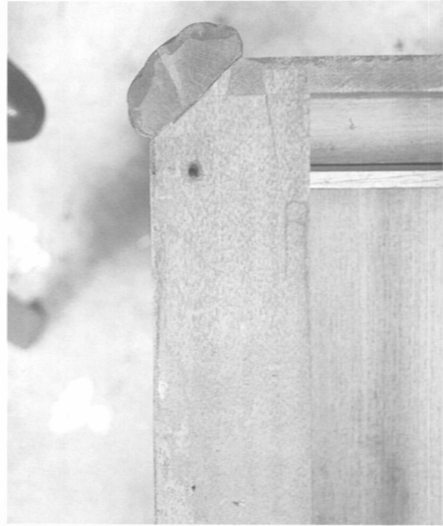
1. Scotch or 'Lum' chest, c1822, cedar.

Provenance: 'Glenfield', Parramatta, NSW, the home of Dr Charles Throsby (1777-1828)

J. B. Hawkins



2. Detail of foot and 'quilled' column



3. Detail with top of chest removed, showing construction of corner column



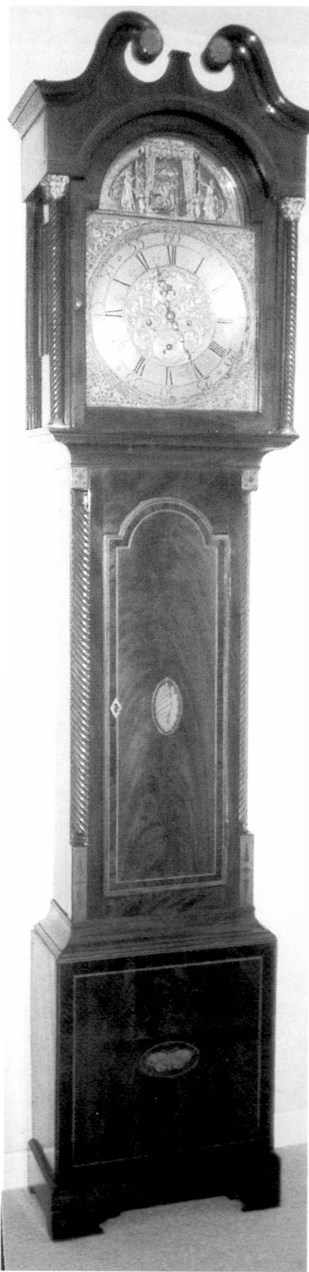
4. Scotch or 'Lum' chest, c1820, cedar.
Provenance: Douglass Park, NSW, the home of Dr Henry Gratten Douglass
J. B. Hawkins



5. Scotch or 'Lum' chest and dressing box, c1820, mahogany, ash and pine.
Provenance: Glasgow, Scotland
J. B. Hawkins



6. Oatley clock no. 16, possibly commissioned by Dr Henry Gratten Douglass, 1822
Private Collection, Australia



7. Longcase clock by
W. B. Young,
Glasgow, Scotland,
early nineteenth century
Private Collection, Australia

of their sentences.¹⁷ Simeon Lord, in receipt of two Radicals, was the richest and most important Sydney trader, and unusually in this circle, an ex-convict. Sir John Jamieson was about to construct a magnificent house on his estate at Regentville, near Mulgoa some five miles from Parramatta. Samuel Marsden, 'the flogging parson,' was Curate of St John's Church Parramatta. The Cox family at Fernhill, Mulgoa, were to commission John Verge to design them a house in 1831. Hannibal Macarthur was to build the colony's finest 19th century house, The Vineyard, at Parramatta in the early 1830s. The Throsbys at Glenfield and John and Elizabeth Macarthur at Experiment Farm Cottage all would have wished to use the services of Dr Douglass's Parramatta-based convict cabinet maker during the period of his servitude to 1826. Whether this connection continued with his freedom during the period of expansion when John Verge designed a series of neo-classical mansions in the early 1830s is open to conjecture, for it should be noted that Verge was the architect to the Sydney cabinet maker Edward Hunt, charging him £100 for plans, estimates and specifications for his home and offices in Jamieson St, Sydney, in November 1831.¹⁸

In a three-part series of articles, 'The Art of the Cabinet Maker from First Settlement to 1820', published in *The Australian Antique Collector*, it was concluded that the three cabinet making workshops in Sydney of Laurence Butler, Thomas Shoughnessy, and Edward Hunt, controlled the Sydney cabinet making trade to 1820. With the arrival of Alexander Hart, and the start of a new decade, we can now add a Parramatta-based cabinet maker to their number. Hart may have worked with the architect Henry Kitchen who designed the extensions to Experiment Farm Cottage for John Macarthur at Parramatta, and on the 13th October 1821¹⁹ received authority to procure 20,000 ft of cedar from the Illawara area using Thomas Ballard and Thomas Miller as his sawyers.²⁰ This cedar seems to be particularly hard and dense, and the cedar Lum chests discussed in this article are noticeably heavy for their size.

In January 2001 I purchased from Miss Dell Throsby, then still living at Throsby Park, a *lum* chest of drawers (Figure 1) which bears many design similarities to the Throsby Oatley clock number 15, signed and dated

1822. Both these items had originated from the first Throsby house 'Glenfield', situated between Camden and Parramatta close to Douglass Park, the home of Dr Henry Gratten Douglass. In March 1821, was placed by Macquarie in charge of the General Hospital in Parramatta and made Superintendent of the Female Factory from whence Ann Rumsby came. With the arrival of Governor Brisbane, Douglass became a regular visitor to Government House Parramatta and soon Throsby's fellow Magistrate on the Parramatta Bench.

The Throsby *lum* chest and the Oatley clock bear in their structure and design peculiarities that enable me to place them within tradition of Glaswegian cabinet making. This form of chest is known in the west of Scotland, and particularly in Glasgow, as a Lum chest, the word 'Lum' being old Scots for a chimney-shaped hat worn by men,²¹ the centre drawer being designed to take this hat. *The Edinburgh Cabinet Makers' Book of Prices for 1811*²² refers most expressively to this form of spiral-fluted decoration as being, 'Quilled on the Cann', or translated, 'reeded on the cant', then applied to handcarved spiral bedposts. This form of decoration also occurs in Glasgow clock cases (Figure 7), Lum chests and a toilet mirror (Figure 5) of the 1820s.

Furniture historians have traditionally sourced this spiral twist decoration to Irish cabinet makers working in the south of Ireland. Cork is often suggested as a source. Claudia Kinmonth²³ states that twisted rope mouldings are frequently used to decorate furniture from East Munster and South Leinster, she then goes on to illustrate four examples of which two come from Limerick and one each from north Cork and Kilkenny, an area some 50 miles wide by 20 miles deep. If we accept this form of decoration originating in Ireland, its arrival in Glasgow was probably caused by a large influx of Irish settlers who attached this type of Irish decoration to local Glasgow furniture form such as the *lum* chest. Time may even find a former Irish cabinet maker working in Glasgow to be the instigator. The forced migration of Alexander Hart, a Glasgow cabinet maker, to Australia to serve out his sentence with an Irish doctor, to whom this style of decoration would not be unknown, may provide a reason for local acceptance. I suggest that Hart constructed designs taken from drawings obtained from his former Glaswegian workshop for Douglass and his fellow Magistrate and next-door neighbour Throsby, a *lum* chest of drawers and the cases for their consecutively numbered Oatley clocks between 1821 and 1822.

The Blackett (Figure 8) and Whalan (Figure 9) beds, currently at Old Government House, Parramatta, with their posts 'Quilled on the Cann', are fully described and detailed in an article, 'The Australian Four-Poster Bed'.²⁴ The concept designs, if not the execution, may now be attributed to Alexander Hart. The posts firstly have to be turned to shape and then carved, I suggested then that the turner was possibly Edward Cox and drew a design comparison with the pillars of the Oatley Clock, noting that they were probably by the same hand; 'These spiral posts, Scottish in flavour, are very different to turn as can be seen from the detail of the Blackett bed which is so finely turned that the spiral has to be finished by hand'. As to who was responsible for the hand carving of these quills, I am not sure.



8. The Blackett bed, 1821, rosewood.
This bed is traditionally associated with Governor Macquarie
Collection of Old Government House, Parramatta, NSW



9. The Whalan bed, c1821, rosewood.

This bed is traditionally associated with Charles Whalan, Orderly Sergeant to Governor Macquarie
Private Collection, on loan to Old Government House, Parramatta, NSW



10. Work table, attributed to Alexander Hart, c1825, cedar and casuarina
Private Collection, Australia

RELATED PIECES

Many pre-1835 items of Australian furniture fall within the boundaries of these Scottish furniture designs. They may be a late realisation of Hart's ideas for they do not have that initial inherent simplicity of design so apparent in the previously described six early key works. I list the following items from Australian published sources that may have been designed and/or executed by Alexander Hart in that they have close Scottish connections.

Sideboard, Simpson 142.

Secrétaire Bookcase, illustrated 1988 *Commemorative Collection of Fine Colonial Furniture – The Rustic Charm*, plate 14.

Chest of Drawers, *Colonial Rarities Catalogue – The Rustic Charm*, plate 28.

Chest of Drawers, Simpson, plate 195.

Console or Lobby Table on Truss legs. This form of table is not known in Glasgow furniture and is described only in the supplement to *The Cabinet Makers' Book of Prices Edinburgh 1825*, as noted by David Jones in *Regional Furniture* 1989, p. 33.

Console or Lobby Table on Truss legs, Simpson 524, the back of which is not original.

Sofa, illustrated 1988 *Commemorative Collection of Fine Colonial Furniture – The Rustic Charm*. A similar sofa is depicted in a drawing of William Charles Wentworth. The movement of families such as Cox and Wentworth from the Parramatta district to Tasmania may well account for the so-called Tasmanian origin of this item of furniture.

Work table, Simpson 552.

Work table, Simpson 465.

Hall table, *Colonial Rarities Catalogue Rustic Charm*, plate 4.

Breakfast Bookcase, Simpson 40.

REFERENCES

1. *The Scottish Radicals* by M. C. and A. D. Macfarlane, Wentworth Books, Sydney, 1975. This excellent book lists the 19 Radicals and charts their lives in Australia. They note that Hart, a native of Old Kilpatrick near Glasgow, was born on the 3rd February 1794, the son of Alexander Hart and Rebecca Ker.
2. Letter dated 22nd September 1820 Mitchell Library DOC 1940/B.
3. Mitchell Library DOC 1940/B.
4. Hart is listed on the convict inventory for the Speke as '27/1085 Alexander Hart, convicted Stirling 15th August, 1820, sentenced 14 years. Native of Dumbartonshire, cabinet maker. Age 25, Height 5 ft 8¼ in, hair black, eye colour black.'
5. Through a letter from the Radical Thomas McCulloch to his wife dated 12th October 1821, we can trace the disposition of the other Radicals in Sydney and to some extent assess their thoughts:

Sydney
New South Wales
October 12, 1821

My Dear Wife,

I send you those few lines, hoping they will find you and the children in good health . . . We arrived here on the 18th May, all in good health, after being at sea five months; I was taken off the stores by a Mr. Panton, a native of Scotland, and employed by him as a labourer; but [it] not agreeing with me, he was so kind as to transfer me to a Captain Irvin [sic], and I am to be with him as a house-servant, and I am going to remove about 40 miles up the country.

If you think of coming here, there shall be nothing wanting on my part to bring you, as I have every encouragement from several Gentlemen that can enable me to do so, as your presence here will free me from bondage; as any man's wife that comes out here as a free settler, can take her husband from Government employment or being a servant to any man. Captain Irvin [sic] has promised to do every thing for us to make us comfortable . . .

Sir Thomas Brisbane arrived here two days ago; he is to be our new Governor and the Governor can pardon any man he thinks proper; a great many have obtained their liberty since we arrived here; Captain Irvin. Mr. Wyeems

[sic], Commissary-General, and other Gentlemen, have promised to befriend us; and the whole of our party is much respected here by the most respectable people in this country, and if you will only come out, a steady man and women can do very well, as they are very rare articles to be found here.

Andrew Dawson, James Cleland, John McMillan, and Allan Murchie, are kept in Government employment, on account of their being blacksmiths, who are very valuable in this part of the world; W. Clarkson and John Anderson is with Mr Lord, a respectable Gentleman, who much esteems them. Alex. Johnson is principal servant to the Commissary-General; Thomas McFarlane and Thomas Pink are with the Barrack Master; James Wright is shopman to a Dr. Phillips; Benjamin Moir, John Barr, and David Thomson is with Sir John Jameson [sic] Andrew White, Bookbinder and Alex Hart, cabinet maker, are in Parramatta with Dr. Douglas; Wm. Smith is also at Parramatta with Mr. Marsden; Robt. Gray and Alex. Lattimer, is in Van Diemens Land with Mr. Mulgrave . . . ”

6. Letter to Colonial Secretary's Office 21st May 1821, Society of Australian Genealogists reel 6008;4/3504 pp. 46-47.
7. The alphabetical list of convicts in the employment of Doctor Douglass for the years 1823-1825, Society of Australian Genealogists microfiche 3129; 4/1841B no. 224 . 457, proves Hart to be employed by Douglass to 1824.
8. Unpaginated Mitchell Library A4176.
9. Society of Australian Genealogists, microfiche 3218; 4-1965 p. 105.
10. Archives Office 4/4060.
11. Archives Office 26/186 reel 890.
12. St. John's Church Parramatta; church marriage register entry no. 880.
13. Archives Office V1876/1020/102.
14. R.G.O. Register of Presbyterian Burials 1874-76 no. 1020, vol. 102.
15. J. Hawkins *Australian Antique Collector*, Sir Thomas Brisbane's private observatory?
16. 1822 Muster.
17. *The Scots in Australia*, published by The National Archives of Scotland, publishes a list of employment wages. 'Blacksmiths 24s.-42s. per week – may always find employment, cabinet makers 5s.-7s. each day – good workmen find ready employment.'
18. *John Verge, Early Australian Architect, his Ledger and his Clients*, by Will Graves Verge, Wentworth Books, 1962. Hunt was also a trustee of the Baptist Chapel designed by Verge in 1835 and partially funded by himself.
19. Archives Office Colonial Secretary's Letter book 1821, p. 418.
20. On the 25th May 1821, Edward Hunt received permission to cut 5,000 ft, again using Thomas Miller as his sawyer. (Archives Office Colonial Secretary's Letter Book 1821, p. 51). On the 10th July, Laurence Butler's widow received permission to cut a further 20,000 ft of cedar in the same area. (Archives Office Colonial Secretary's Letter Book 1821, p. 153).
21. *The Edinburgh Cabinet and Chair Makers' Book of Prices 1805-1825* by David Jones, Kirk Wynd Press, Cupar, 2000, p. 11.
22. I am most grateful to David Jones for providing me with a photocopy of this publication and for the benefit of his learned discussions on the subject of Scottish regional furniture.
23. *Irish Country Furniture 1700-1950*, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 14.
24. 'The Australian Four-Poster Bed' 1810-1850, *The Australian Business Review* 1988.