

THE SITTER REVEALED: A PORTRAIT OF GEORGE SMITH

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The last exciting discovery of a cabinet maker's portrait was that of a small wax bust of Thomas Chippendale Junior (1749–1822), found in the stores of the Victoria & Albert Museum by Leela Meinertas in 1998. This was published in the August edition of the Furniture History Society *Newsletter* later that year. Further excitement is now appropriate as a convincing identification can be made of Chippendale Junior's illustrious contemporary George Smith (c. 1786–1826) as the sitter in an oil painting first published in *Regional Furniture* Volume x 1996. The portrait depicts an animated looking man of about forty with reddish-brown hair, full side burns, wearing a high collar, lace cravat, cream waistcoat and dark jacket. He is shown seated at a baize-covered table making measured drawings from an open volume of designs. At his side, a King Charles spaniel paws for attention.

The furniture and curtain arrangement in the picture is painted in specific detail and can now be seen to be exact quotation of different details from George Smith's *Cabinet Maker & Upholsterer's Guide*, (1826). The chiffonier at his right hand side is from plate VIII of the *Guide*, the curtain drapery on the left corresponds exactly with plate XXXIII and the blue, red and gold colour scheme is identical. The tablet back of the sitter's chair appears to have been taken from plate CXIX, but, significantly, the coloured engraving in the book open before the sitter is plate x from Smith's *Guide*. Plate x is described on page 191 of the text and has four paragraphs, as does the corresponding page shown in the painting. Whilst the possibility exists that the picture could show an anonymous draughtsman making copies from Smith's book, the fact that every single design reference in the scene is from the author's publication would indicate that this portrait is a promoting opportunity for the designer himself.

George Smith is principally known for his influential furniture pattern books, the earliest of which; *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and Interior Decoration*, (1808) was the first publication to popularise the Greek Revival idiom pioneered by Thomas Hope. Christopher Gilbert has described this book as 'important in being the first collection of designs for ordinary furniture in a fully-developed Regency style'.

The portrait of George Smith is currently in the possession of John Evan Bedford, who purchased it from the dealer Andrew Jenkins of Bradford on Avon in 1996.



1. Portrait of George Smith, cabinet maker and upholsterer. Signed T (J?) Bradley, Suffolk. Oil on canvas