A Specimen Wood Workbox of 1808 by Gillows, Lancaster

ADAM BOWETT

In 2005 the Judges' Lodgings Museum in Lancaster acquired a workbox veneered with specimen woods made in Gillows' Lancaster workshop (Figures 1 and 2).[1] The box was made in 1808 for Elizabeth Gifford (or Giffard), of Nerquis Hall, near Mould in Flintshire, and is fully documented in the *Estimate Sketch Book* for that year. Its importance, however, lies not in the documentation, for the Gillows *oeuvre* does not lack documented objects, but in the record it provides of the variety of timbers available in Lancaster in the opening years of the nineteenth century. This article aims to describe and where possible identify the specimen woods employed, and to provide a brief explanation of how and why they came to be used.

Elizabeth Gifford was the eldest daughter of John and Elizabeth Gifford of Plas Ucha, Nercwys. John Gifford, a Catholic, was an established client of the firm and it was natural therefore that his daughter Elizabeth should also have an account with them. The making of the workbox, together with the supply of its original contents, is recorded in the firm's *Estimate Sketch Book* for 1808.[2]

A Work Box of various Woods

4 feet of ½ in Mahogany in Sides &c. 1/-	*4. –*
4 feet of ¼ in Mahogany in inside 6d.	*2. –*
Sundry Pieces of Curious Vinears 72 Different Sorts	*0. 15. 6*
4 Ivory nobs 2/- Pair 1 ½ Hinges 5d	*0. 2. 5*
Pattent lock 6/- Green Baze Bottom 6d	*0. 6. 6*
Velvet 2/- Silk, Collord Braid 1 ½ yd. 5d	*0. 2. 5*
Penknife 7/- Scissors 5/-	*0. 12. 0*
Silver Bodkin 1/- Threadcase 4/6	*0. 5. 6*
Ivory Thimble 1/- Silver Tape Measure 4/-	*0. 5. 0*
Screw Pincushion 1/6 Tape measure Do. 1/9	*0. 3. 3*
Damask leather Cover for whole outside	*0. 6. 6*
Printed Cattalogues p. Minshull	*0. 6. 0.*
Making Francis Dowbiggin 17 Days @ 4/-	*3. 8. 0*
Varnishing and Polishing T.R. One Day	*0. 4. 6*
Varnish 1/6	*0. 1. 6*
James Woodhouse lining Trays &c. 4 Hours	*0. 1. 6*
	£7. 6. 7
Damask leather Cover extra	
Painting J & G Hutton	*1. 6*
	£7. 8. 1

[1] Bought from Lindsay Harris with help from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Art Fund.
[2] 344/99, fol. 1847.

1 (above) Workbox of specimen woods, made by Gillows, Lancaster, 1808. *The Judges' Lodgings Museum, Lancaster*

2 (right) Workbox, open. *The Judges' Lodgings Museum, Lancaster*

The cost price of the box was £7. 8s. 1d., including the leather case. A payment of £10. 12s. 0d. received from Miss Gifford in January 1809 may relate to the box, in which case the firm made a profit of £3. 3s. 11d., or about 35 per cent.[3] Quite why Miss Gifford thought it worth paying such a high price for a workbox is unclear. Perhaps she was a keen silviculturalist.

The workmen involved were all established Gillows craftsmen. The cabinet maker, Francis or Frank Dowbiggin, was born about 1765. He was apprenticed to his father Thomas in June 1780, and was admitted a freeman of Lancaster in 1782–03. His name occurs in the Gillows archives between 1787 and 1816, but he may well also have had his own workshop in Sun Street, Lancaster.[4] He died in December 1832, aged sixty seven. Frank Dowbiggin's son was Thomas Dowbiggin (1788–1854), who set up shop in Mount Street, London, about 1816. He became cabinet maker and upholsterer to the Crown and his business eventually became part of Holland & Son.[5]

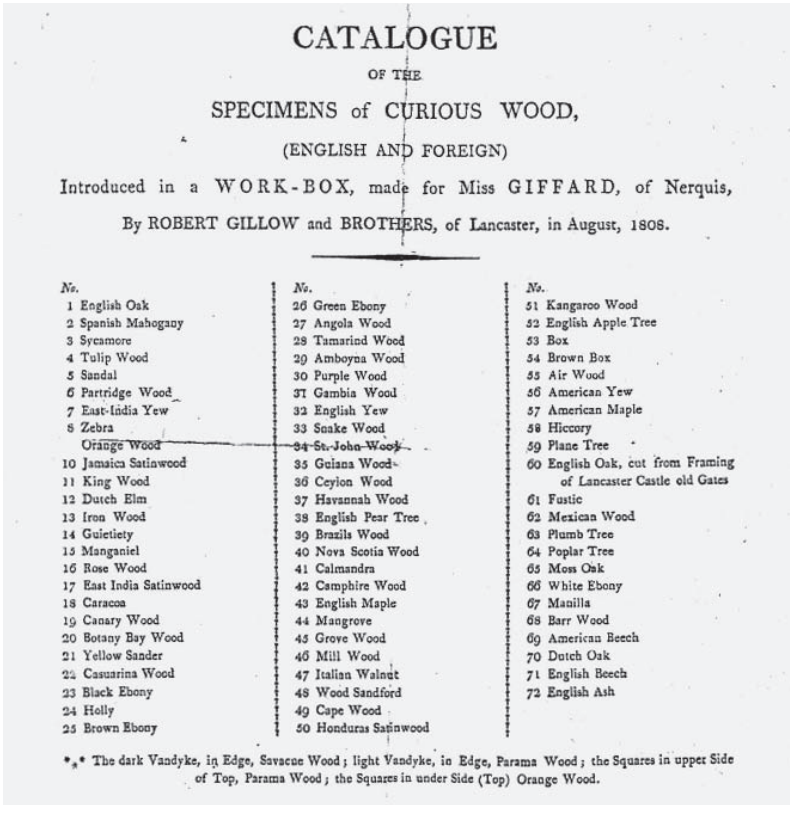
James Woodhouse, who lined the interior trays with baize and velvet, was the son of Robert Woodhouse, a Lancaster joiner. He was apprenticed to Gillows in December 1799 for a period of nine years. When he became a freeman of Lancaster in 1806–07 he was described as 'upholsterer', and his name has been found on a number of early-nineteenth-century chairs produced by Gillows.[6]

The box was varnished by 'T.R.'. This was probably Thomas Romney or Rumney, a cabinet maker first recorded working for Gillows in 1773. He seems to have worked independently at various times and in various locations before finally settling in Lancaster in 1789. His name occurs frequently in the firm's archives in the 1790s and early 1800s, and the workbox is his last known work for them. It seems that in his later years he specialised in varnishing rather than cabinet making. His son, George, was apprenticed to Gillows in 1794, and became a specialist stainer and varnisher in his turn.[7]

John or James Hutton and George Hutton were furniture painters, and were presumably related. George may have had his own shop, and his name occurs in the Gillows archives for 1802–04. James Hutton's name occurs between the same dates, while John became a freeman of Lancaster in 1801–02.[8] The relations between these men are unclear; in this case they were paid to paint the tiny numbers on each specimen which corresponded to the printed list.

William Minshull (1772–1839) was a printer and bookseller, of Great John's Street Friarage, Lancaster. He was also publisher of *The Lancaster Gazette* from its founding in 1801. The entry *Printed Cattalogues p. Minshull* implies that more than one list had been prepared, but only one survives with the box, and this is dedicated specifically to Miss Giffard (Figure 3). It is conceivable that others were printed to use as advertising. This is possibly the explanation for the discrepancy between the date on the printed list (August 1808), and the date of the Gillows estimate, which appears to have been written about October 1808. Perhaps the firm was hoping to arouse interest and

[3] 344/99 fol. 1847; 344/56, fol. 417; see also Stuart (2008), II, p. 139
[4] Stuart (2008), II, p. 231.
[5] Beard and Gilbert (1986), pp. 252–54
[6] Stuart (2008), II, p. 301.
[7] Ibid., pp. 275–76.
[8] Ibid., p. 250.



CATALOGUE

OF THE

SPECIMENS of CURIOUS WOOD,

(ENGLISH AND FOREIGN)

Introduced in a WORK-BOX, made for Miss GIFFARD, of Nerquis,

By ROBERT GILLOW and BROTHERS, of Lancaster, in August, 1808.

No.		No.		No.	
1	English Oak	26	Green Ebony	51	Kangaroo Wood
2	Spanish Mahogany	27	Angola Wood	52	English Apple Tree
3	Sycamore	28	Tamarind Wood	53	Box
4	Tulip Wood	29	Amboyna Wood	54	Brown Box
5	Sandal	30	Purple Wood	55	Air Wood
6	Partridge Wood	31	Gambia Wood	56	American Yew
7	East-India Yew	32	English Yew	57	American Maple
8	Zebra	33	Snake Wood	58	Hiccory
	Orange Wood	34	St. John Wood	59	Plane Tree
10	Jamaica Satinwood	35	Guiana Wood	60	English Oak, cut from Framing of Lancaster Castle old Gates
11	King Wood	36	Ceylon Wood	61	Fustic
12	Dutch Elm	37	Havannah Wood	62	Mexican Wood
13	Iron Wood	38	English Pear Tree	63	Plumb Tree
14	Quietiety	39	Brazils Wood	64	Poplar Tree
15	Manganiel	40	Nova Scotia Wood	65	Moss Oak
16	Rose Wood	41	Calmandra	66	White Ebony
17	East India Satinwood	42	Camphire Wood	67	Manilla
18	Caracoa	43	English Maple	68	Barr Wood
19	Canary Wood	44	Mangrove	69	American Beech
20	Botany Bay Wood	45	Grove Wood	70	Dutch Oak
21	Yellow Sander	46	Mill Wood	71	English Beech
22	Casuarina Wood	47	Italian Walnut	72	English Ash
23	Black Ebony	48	Wood Sandford		
24	Holly	49	Cape Wood		
25	Brown Ebony	50	Honduras Satinwood		

*** The dark Vandyke, in Edge, Savacue Wood; light Vandyke, in Edge, Parama Wood; the Squares in upper Side of Top, Parama Wood; the Squares in under Side (Top) Orange Wood.

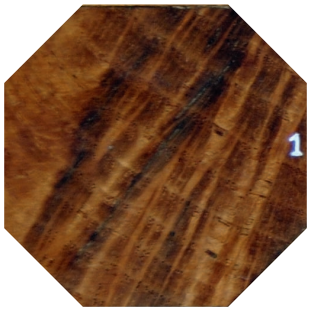
3 Catalogue of specimen woods, printed by William Minshull, 1808.
The Judges' Lodgings Museum, Lancaster

perhaps custom by notifying the public of their commission in advance of its completion.

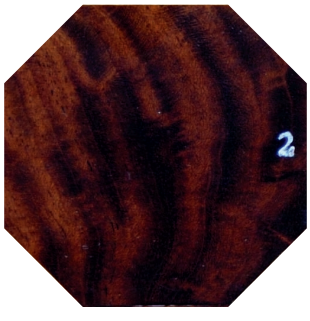
The perspective drawing which accompanies the estimate differs from the completed box in having nine specimens on the long sides and six specimens on the short (the box has six and five). The top is shown with three rows of eight and two of ten specimens, whereas the box has five rows of six. The discrepancies suggest the sketch was not intended as anything more than an impression, especially since the top is shown with rows of both eight and ten octagons would have been difficult if not impossible to achieve.

THE SPECIMENS

The specimen woods were examined with a ×10 hand lens, but were not sectioned for microscopic analysis. All identifications are therefore to some degree speculative. The scientific names cited are those listed by the Germplasm Resources Information Network (GRIN). This is an internationally recognised organisation which seeks to verify and standardise plant nomenclature. Some of the names cited may be at variance with those in the published literature, particularly in older works.



1. **English oak** (*Quercus* spp.). This is a tangentially cut section of fast-grown oak, chosen for its deep colour and rippled figure. Another sample of English oak is shown in no. 60.

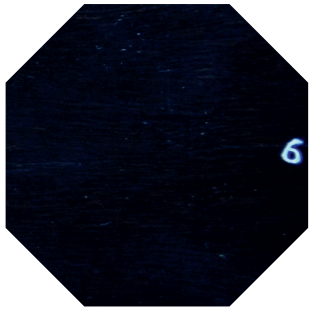


2. **Spanish Mahogany** (*Swietenia mahagoni* (L.) Jacq.). So-called 'Spanish' mahogany was the most commercially important type of West Indian mahogany on the British market at this time. Most was shipped from the island of Hispaniola, either direct from that island or via Jamaica. Gillows first used this mahogany in the late 1760s, and by the 1780s it had superceded Jamaica mahogany as their preferred variety for good quality work. This sample shows the striped or 'roey' figure typical of figured mahogany, but on an unusually small scale to suit the size of the box.

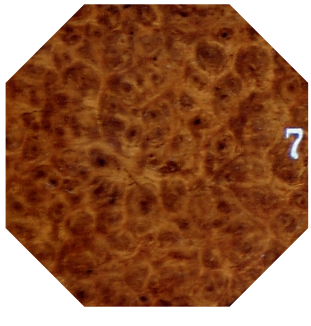
3. **Sycamore** (*Acer pseudoplatanus* L.). A nicely chosen piece of curled sycamore showing its characteristic rippled figure. This is one of several specimens of English sycamore and maple used on the box under different names. While it is possible that Gillows did not know that sycamore, 'airwood', maple and 'plane tree' were all the same genus and essentially the same wood, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that they were practising a deception on the customer, making it seem as thought their selection of woods was greater than it in fact was. See also nos. 34, 40, 43, 55 and 57.

4. **Tulipwood**. This is almost certainly a *Dalbergia*. There is some confusion about which species of *Dalbergia* supplied the tulip wood of commerce, but the botanical consensus has now settled on *D. decapularis* Rizzini & Matt., which is indigenous to northern South America. The wood got its name from its colour, streaked with red, yellow and pink like a variegated tulip, but this specimen appears uncharacteristically dark. It could well have changed colour due to oxidisation or to the type of varnish used. The wood was first recorded in the Gillows repertoire in the 1770s, by which time it was in common use among most good English furniture makers.

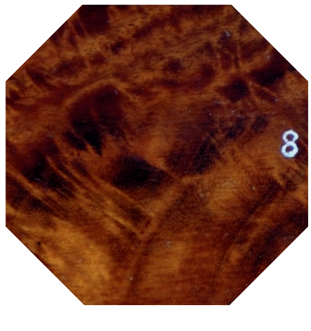
5. **Sandal Wood** (*Santalum album* L.). This wood is the source of the aromatic oil used in soaps, perfumes and cosmetics the world over. Most commercial supplies came from India, where the wood was also widely used to make carvings, boxes and other small items, including furniture. It was not commonly used in British furniture making, except occasionally for the interior fittings of dressing boxes or small cabinets.



6. **Partridge Wood** (*Caesalpinia granadilla* Pitt.). This wood has a wide distribution in the West Indies, Central and South America. It was called partridge wood because of the 'feathery' figure revealed on tangential surfaces, resembling the plumage on a partridge's breast. It is typically found as a crossbanding on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British furniture. In this case the wood has darkened to the extent that the figure is almost wholly obscured. This is a different wood from what is now called partridge wood in the antiques trade, which is in fact one of more species of Australian *Allocasuarina*. Compare with nos. 20 and 22.

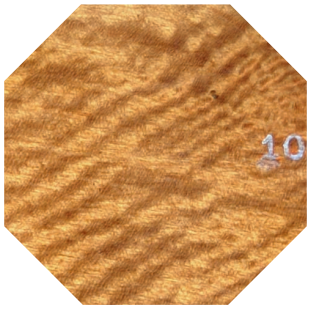


7. **East India Yew** (*Pterocarpus* spp.). This is a tightly knotted burr of what is now called amboyna. East Indian Yew was a trade name, arising from its superficial resemblance to burr yew. It is possible that Gillows were unaware that this wood and the amboyna shown in no. 29 were the same.



8. **Zebra Wood** (*Astronium* spp.). Zebra wood was the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century name for what is now traded as *Goncalo alves*. Gillows first employed this wood in the 1770s, at which time it was imported from Belize and the Mosquito Shore in Central America. At that time they also called it *palmaletta* wood, the name deriving from the Spanish vernacular *palo mulatto*. In the nineteenth century the wood was chiefly imported from Brazil, from where large scale importations commenced with the opening of Brazilian ports to British ships in 1808. The alternative name albuera wood, which occurs frequently in the Gillow archive, was a synonym apparently unique to this firm. This sample scarcely shows the stripe which gave the wood its name. Instead, the maker has chosen a sample with curled and quilted grain, which gives and interesting but untypical figure.

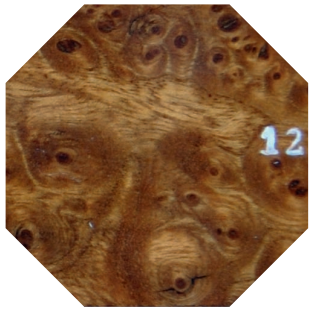
9. **Orange Wood** (*Caesalpinia* spp.) This is one of several species of the genus *Caesalpinia* more commonly marketed as braziletto. They were usually considered dyewoods, but were also occasionally used in furniture making. The name orange wood derives from the bright, fiery orange colour of the wood when fresh. Gillows used the wood as a veneer, for instance as ovals in the tops of table legs, and in the solid, as for an octagon pillar and claw table made in 1795.[9] The wood was also used in conjunction with mahogany and rosewood to veneer furniture made for Stephen Tempest of Broughton Hall in 1803.[10] Other furniture makers are known to have used the wood at this time, including the London firm of J. & A. Semple. A sofa table with orange wood borders made by them in 1809 is at Temple Newam House, Leeds.[11]



10. **Jamaica Satinwood** (*Zanthoxylum flavum* Vahl.) A tightly figured sample of West Indian satinwood, showing a sought-after combination of stripe and rippled figure. Satinwood was first recorded in the Gillow archive in the 1770s. The tree was widespread in the West Indies, but much of Gillows' supply came from the island of St. Christopher, which acted as an entrepot for produce from several West Indian islands. See also no. 50.

11. **King Wood**. This is usually attributed to *Dalbergia cearensis* Ducke., a tree native to the Guianas and northern Brazil. The colour seems rather light, but the grain structure is consistent with a species of *Dalbergia*. It is conceivable that the sample has been swapped with tulip wood (no. 4), which is unusually dark. The first references to this wood in the Gillows archive occur in the 1780s. The wood is obtained from a small tree, which accounts for its use for bandings and other small employments, although furniture veneered entirely with kingwood was occasionally made.[12]

[9] Stuart (2008), II, p. 157.
[10] Ibid., p. 157.
[11] Gilbert (1978), II, pp. 349–50.
[12] Stuart (2008), II, p. 150.

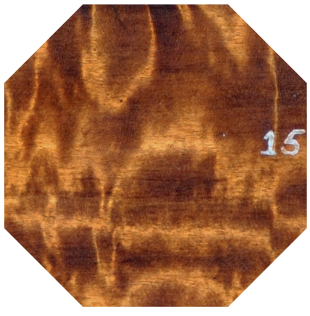


12. **Dutch Elm**. The so-called Dutch elm (*Ulmus x hollandica* Mill.) is a cross between the wych elm (*U. glabra* Huds.) and the East Anglian elm (*U. minor* Mill.). The story that it was brought over with William III is apocryphal, and in fact the species is said to be rare in Holland. Dutch elms became popular with plantsmen and landowners in the early eighteenth century as a parkland tree and are mentioned in several eighteenth-century works on forestry. The timber is identical to that of other elms, although Gillows seemed to take a contrary view. In 1787 the firm wrote to a local timber factor regarding elm to be felled at Stoneyhurst: 'If it be what they call Dutch elm, it will not answer our purpose, as it is English elm we make use of. If you can be of any service in giving him information, about this, we should esteem it a favour'.[13]

13. **Iron Wood**. There were numerous woods known as iron wood because of their extreme hardness. They occur in every part of the tropics, and it is impossible to determine which species is represented here. It is a dark brown wood with a very close texture and slightly striated figure. The only other known occurrence of iron wood in English furniture is on the Percy Dean specimen cabinet at the Lady Lever Art Gallery, which has two specimens, neither of which is the same as the one used here.

14. **Guietety**. Species unknown. It looks similar to what is now traded as zebrano (*Brachystegia spiciformis* Benth.), but it is not the same wood. The ground colour is light brown, overlaid with narrow black and dark brown stripes.

[13] Ibid., p. 148.



15. **Manganiel** (*Hippomane mancinella* L.) This West Indian wood usually has rather a bland, café au lait colour overlaid with irregular, wandering lines of smokey grey. This sample is untypical, being golden brown in colour, with a handsome quilted figure. There are several references in the Gillow archives to 'manganill' or 'manginell', the earliest being in 1761, when 22 ft was sold to John Lamb, a cooper, at 8d. per foot. Gillows themselves made furniture of it, such as the buffet made in October 1784, and a dining table in 1786.[14] It is evident, however, that manchineel was less valuable than mahogany, for in 1784 Gillows had cause to complain to John Swarbreck, their Jamaican factor; 'There was a parcel of Mahogany shipped last year per the *Concord* to this town … amongst which there were several fine looking Planks of Mangenill w^{ch} is not worth above half the Value as Mahogany therefore be aware of it by getting some Judge to Examine it before you purchase'.[15]

16. **Rose Wood**. This is *Dalbergia nigra* (Vell.) Allemao ex Benth., commonly known as Brazilian or Rio rosewood. This wood was available in limited amounts in the 1790s, and large scale importations commenced after opening of direct trade with Brazil in 1808.

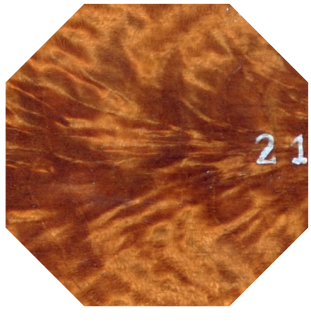
17. **East India Satinwood** (*Chloroxylon swietenia* DC). This specimen shows the typical deep colour and narrow stripe of East Indian satinwood. The species is widespread in Asia, but most commercial supplies at this time came from southern India and Sri Lanka. It was less popular and less widely used than West Indian satinwood (no. 10). Although East Indian satinwood was available in limited quantities in the eighteenth century, the supply was greatly increased by the British conquest of the Dutch areas of Sri Lanka in 1796 and the subsequent Treaty of Amiens (1802), which ceded the Dutch possessions to Britain.

18. **Caracoa**. Species unknown. The name suggests a South American origin. The colour is a warm golden brown, gently striped, with a good lustre.

[14] 344/93, ff. 117 and 453.
[15] 344/170, Gillow to Swarbreck, 8 January 1784.

19. **Canary Wood**. This wood was named after its bright canary-yellow colour. It was imported from Brazil, but the botanical identity is uncertain because several different species were imported under the same name. This sample has a fine, even texture and colour, lustrous but with little figure. The wood saw some limited use in England in the early nineteenth century, notably in the furnishing of Windsor Castle by the firm of Morel and Seddon, but it did not become common.[16]

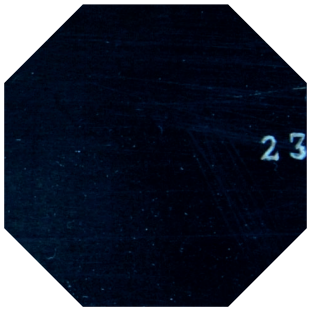
20. **Botany Bay Wood**. Gillows were among the first British furniture makers to use Australian woods imported from the new settlements at Botany Bay in New South Wales. The conspicuous medullary rays of this sample suggest a species of *Allocasuarina* (formerly *Casuarina*), although species of *Cardwellia*, *Grevillea* and *Orites* have a similar appearance. The antiques trade has long called this wood by the misnomer 'partridge wood', which properly belongs to a different wood (see no. 6). Other contemporary names were beefwood and Botany Bay oak. See also no. 22.



21. **Yellow Sander**. Yellow sanders was often a synonym for satinwood, but it could also apply to *Amyris balsamifera* L., a small but valuable West Indian tree whose wood yields an aromatic oil similar to sandal wood oil. This specimen is probably *A. balsamifera*. It has a very tight curl or 'feather' figure taken either from the base of the tree or from the point where the bole divides into two branches.

22. **Casuarina Wood** (*Allocasuarina* spp.). There are numerous species of *Casuarina* native to Australia; most have now been reclassified by botanists as *Allocasuarina*. They were traded under various names — Botany Bay wood, Botany Bay oak, beefwood — and were first imported in the 1790s. This specimen shows the large medullary rays characteristic of most *Allocasuarinas*. Unlike no. 20, which is cut at an angle between tangential and radial, this specimen is cut tangentially, causing the rays to appear less prominent.

[16] Roberts (2001), p. 213, figs. 253 and 262.



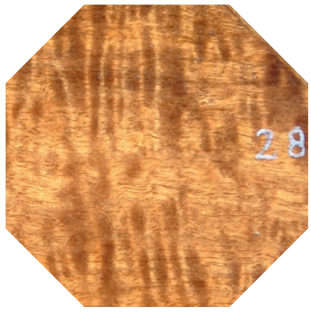
23. **Black Ebony** (*Diospyros* spp.). The name might seem tautological, but there were in fact many different types of ebony, only some of which were black. The fashion for variegated ebonies was in its infancy when this box was made. In the eighteenth century Gillows usually told their suppliers that only the blackest ebony was of interest to them.

24. **Holly** (*Ilex aquifolium* L.). Holly was the whitest wood generally available to British furniture makers. Most was sourced locally, and used for inlay work or veneering, either in its natural state, as here, or dyed in colours. This specimen has yellowed considerably, due to a combination of natural oxidization of the wood and yellowing of the varnish.

25. **Brown Ebony**. There were numerous West Indian and South American woods marketed as brown ebony. This appears to be a member of the rosewood family (*Dalbergia* spp.), or possibly a *Caesalpinia*. It is dark brown, finely striped, with a moderate lustre.

26. **Green Ebony**. As with brown ebony, there were various woods marketed as green ebony. This example looks like cocus wood (*Brya ebenus* L.) also known as Jamaica ebony. It was commonly exported from Jamaica and other West Indian islands, and used for furniture-making, turnery and musical instruments such as flutes, clarinets and bagpipes. The wood is very hard, close textured, dark brown in colour, often with a bronze lustre.

27. **Angola Wood**. This wood occurs occasionally in eighteenth-century furniture makers' advertisements. The name could apply to any wood exported from Angola, on the West Coast of Africa, but the specimen shown here is a variety of what is now called African padouk (*Pterocarpus* spp.). Several species of this genus grow in Angola, and their woods cannot reliably be distinguished microscopically.

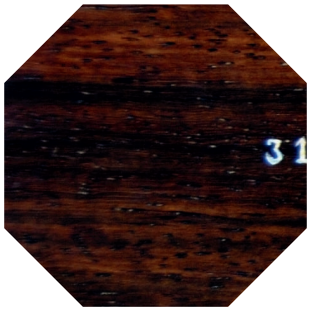


28. **Tamarind**. The true tamarind, *Tamarindus indica* L., is a native of Madagascar and Africa, and has long been naturalized in Asia. There are also a number of West Indian trees known colloquially as tamarind, of which this appears to be a specimen. 'Tamarind', 'Red Tamarind' and 'White Tamarind' occur on specimen tables made by the Kingston cabinet-maker Ralph Turnbull in the 1820s and 1830s, all obtained from trees growing on the island of Jamaica.[17] In 1791 Gillows made a Pembroke table of 'tamarind' wood, with solid wood in the legs and a veneered top. In 1802 two 'Tamerine wood' card tables with zebra wood crossbandings were also made.[18]

29. **Amboyna Wood** (*Pterocarpus* spp.). This wood is the same as No. 7, but less tightly knotted. Amboyna wood is the burr form of what is now called padouk. It was occasionally available to British furniture makers in the eighteenth century, but became much more widely used after 1800. Between 1795 and 1810 all the Dutch possessions in the East Indies were taken by the British, including the island of Ambon from where this wood was chiefly obtained. See no. 7.

30. **Purple Wood** (*Peltogyne* spp.). Purplewood was one of Gillows' favourite woods in the 1790s and early 1800s, much used as banding to offset bright yellow satinwood. The first supplies came primarily from Trinidad, but were soon augmented in the nineteenth century by woods from Brazil, the Guianas and Venezuela. The original bright purple colour has faded to a deep reddish brown.

[17] Woolley and Wallis, 8 January 2002, lot 170; Cross (2003).
[18] Stuart (2008), II, p. 161.



31. **Gambia Wood** (*Baphia nitida* Lodd.). This was more commonly imported as cam wood. It was a dyewood, used chiefly in the cloth industry for red dyes. The wood is dark red when fresh, usually darkening to brown or almost black with age. It was not commonly used by furniture makers (being more valuable as a dyewood) but samples do occur on specimen boxes and Tunbridgeware.

32. **English Yew** (*Taxus baccata* L.). A typical yew burr.

33. **Snake Wood** (*Brosimum guianense* (Aubl.) Huber). This wood came from the Guianas. It was commonly used for fashionable furniture in the second and third quarters of the seventeenth century, and had recently returned to favour after the capture of Demerara from the Dutch in 1796. Its small size and extreme hardness meant that it was rarely used except for small decorative objects, caddies, workboxes and violin bows.

34. **St John Wood**. This is a variety of North American maple (*Acer* spp.), presumably sourced or exported from St Johns, Newfoundland. The naming of woods after their place of origin or export was common practice in the timber trade. See also nos. 40, 55 and 57.

35. **Guiana Wood**. Species unknown. The specimen has the colouring, figure and grain structure of a type of rosewood (*Dalbergia* spp.).

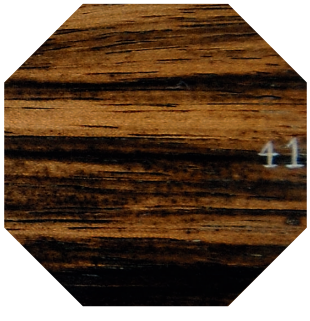
36. **Ceylon Wood**. Species unknown. This is a tightly figured cut of a handsome, rather coarse textured golden brown wood, presumably obtained from Sir Lanka. Perhaps jackwood (*Artocarpus integer* (Thunb.) Merr.), a mahogany-like wood widely used for furniture making and other purposes in southern India and Sri Lanka.

37. **Havannah Wood**. Havannah wood was sometimes a synonym for Cuban mahogany and/or Cuban cedar, but this specimen is neither. It resembles fustic (*Maclura tinctoria* (L.) D. Don ex Stead. subsp. *tinctoria*), a common West Indian dyewood commonly imported into Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

38. **Pear** (*Pyrus* spp.) This could be either wild or cultivated pear — the wood is identical. Dyed or black-stained and varnished pear wood was traditionally used as a substitute for ebony. It was also employed as a ground for japanning (because its smooth texture meant it required little preparation). This sample is characteristically plain with a very fine texture.

39. **Brazils Wood**. The name of this wood clearly indicates South America as a source. It appears to be the same as what some nineteenth-century sources called 'tiger wood'. The ground colour is golden brown, overlaid with narrow black and brown stripes. The most likely candidate is a species of *Paramachaerium*, a genus widespread in northern South America. This wood was only rarely employed by British furniture makers, although specimens were exhibited at the 1851 Great Exhibition.

40. **Nova Scotia Wood**. This is another North American maple (*Acer* spp.), this time sourced from Nova Scotia. The tightly curled 'fiddleback' figure was highly sought after. See nos. 34 and 57.



41. **Calamandra** (*Diospyros* spp.). This is one of the earliest British usages of the name *calamandra* or *calamander*, which derived from a Singahalese term meaning 'black flowering'. Variegated ebonies of several different species first became widely available in Britain after the capture of Sri Lanka from the Dutch in 1796. The Dutch possessions were permanently ceded to Britain in 1802 and the whole island came under British control after 1815. These events account, in part, for the great popularity of variegated ebonies in the Regency period.

42. **Camphor**. Probably *Cinnamomum camphora* (L.), J. Presl., although there were numerous substitutes. This is the true camphor, a tree which was once abundant in Asia and highly valued for its scented wood and aromatic oil. It was little used by British furniture makers, except occasionally for interior fittings of dressing boxes etc. It is most commonly found in the form of sea-chests and campaign furniture made in Asia.

43. **English Maple** (*Acer campestre* L.). There is only one native English maple. It was once a common tree, and highly regarded by furniture makers. Maple is typically a hedgerow rather than a woodland tree, and supplies have consequently been badly affected by the wholesale destruction of hedgerows since 1945. This sample has a tight curl or 'fiddleback' figure.

44. **Mangrove**. Species unknown. This is presumably one of the many species of mangrove indigenous to the tropical regions of America, Africa and Asia. This is only known example of the wood's use by an English furniture maker, although the Jamaican cabinet maker Ralph Turnbull used specimens labelled 'wild mangrove' and 'red mangrove' in his specimen wood tables made in Kingston, Jamaica, in the 1830s.[19]

45. **Grove Wood**. Species unknown. Another variety of mangrove?

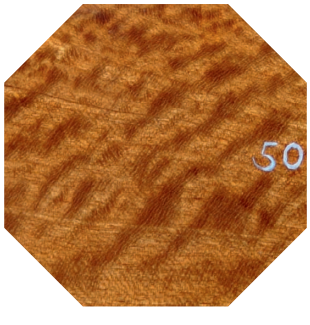
46. **Mill Wood**. Species unknown.

[19] Cross (2003).

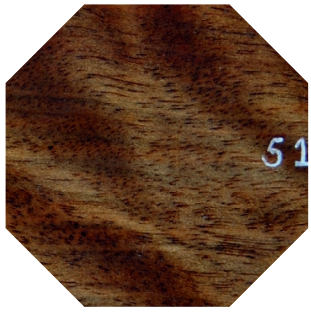
47. **Italian Walnut** (*Juglans regia* L.). This is an unusually early use of the term 'Italian walnut'. Italy had been a source of walnut for English furniture makers since at least the beginning of the eighteenth century, although there are no known references specifically to 'Italian' walnut prior to 1808. However, the trade in Italian walnut did not become significant until the middle of the nineteenth century, by which time Italian or 'Ancona' walnut commanded a high price on the English market.

48. **Wood Sandford**. Species unknown. The massive medullary rays suggest a species of Australian *Allocasuarina* but the colour is appreciably paler. It resembles one of the Australian 'silky oaks' (*Cardwellia*, *Grevillea*, or *Stenocarpus* spp.) or even a *Banksia* from New Zealand. All these woods are members of the *Protaceae* family, as are the *Allocasuarinas*, and have large medullary rays in common.

49. **Cape Wood**. Probably stinkwood (*Ocotea bullata* (Burch.) E. May). This wood was highly regarded by Dutch settlers at the Cape of Good Hope and much used for furniture there. The capture of the colony by the British in 1806 allowed it into the British market in limited quantities.



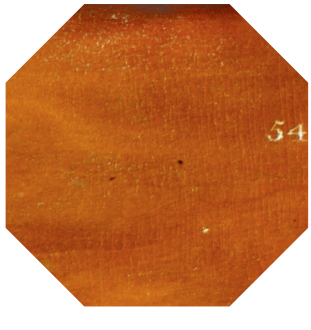
50. **Honduras Satinwood**. This appears to be a variety of West Indian satinwood (*Zanthoxylum* spp.), but the name suggests it was sourced from Honduras rather than the West Indies. Compare with no. 10.



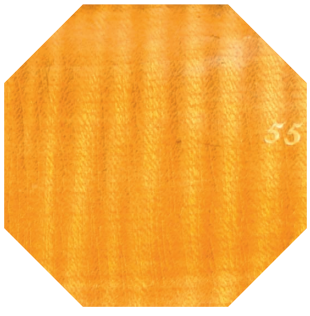
51. **Kangaroo Wood**. Species unidentified, but presumably an Australian wood. The sample is fine textured, now mid brown in colour but with a residual reddish hue that suggests an *Acacia* or *Eucalyptus*, both of which genera were abundant in Australia and widely used there. This is the only known use of the term 'Kangaroo Wood' by a British furniture maker. Neither *Acacia* nor *Eucalyptus* found much favour among British furniture makers until the twentieth century, although repeated attempts were made to interest the trade at the many international exhibitions from 1851 onwards.

52. **English Apple Tree** (*Malus* spp.). This could be either cultivated or wild (crab) apple. The wood is very hard, compact and close-grained, and virtually indistinguishable from pear except for its slightly darker colour. Apple was very little used in furniture making, but had some limited use in turnery and in engineering applications; it was reputedly used for the teeth of mill gears because of its hardness.

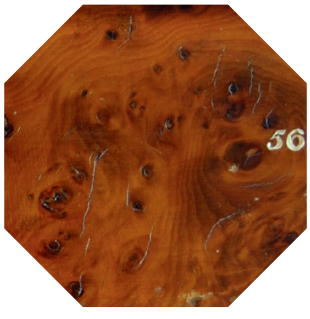
53. **Box** (*Buxus sempervirens* L.). This appears to be piece of figured common boxwood, although there were numerous substitutes available, including spindle tree (*Euonymous europaea* L.) and various West Indian 'boxwoods'. Boxwood was little used in furniture making, partly because of its extreme hardness, but also because it was more valuable for engraving, instrument and tool-making. Most of what is described in the antiques trade as 'boxwood' is holly or sycamore.



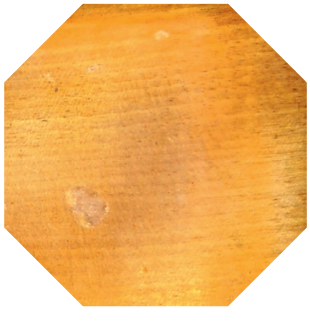
54. **Brown Box**. Species unknown, but this could be one of the several West Indian or South American 'boxwoods'.



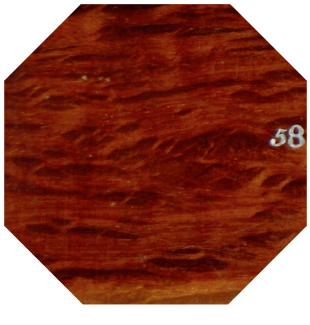
55. **Air Wood** (*Acer* spp.). Air wood or harewood originally implied the curled maple or sycamore used in making stringed instruments. It was also used widely by furniture makers, usually stained in colours. It was particularly favoured for silver-grey (sometimes called silver wood), which was obtained by dying with iron oxide. When dyed in this way the wood quickly oxidized to a grey-brown colour, which is how it usually appears on historic furniture. This example is undyed and consequently indistinguishable from the other species of *Acer* represented on the box. See nos 3, 34, 40, 43 and 57.



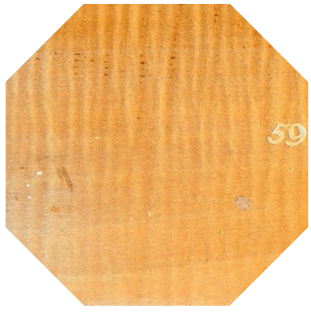
56. **American Yew** (*Taxus canadensis* Marshall) This wood is similar in all important respects to the European yew (*Taxus baccata* L.), and indistinguishable from it. There is no obvious reason why Gillows would use the wood, other than as a novelty.



57. **American Maple** (*Acer* spp.) This one of the several North American maples which were imported in large quantities from Canada from *c.* 1800 onwards. The most sought-after was the sugar maple (*Acer saccharum* Marshall), widely used in cabinet work until the end of the nineteenth century.



58. **Hiccory**. This is not hickory. The massive medullary rays suggest one of the Australian *Allocasuarinas*.

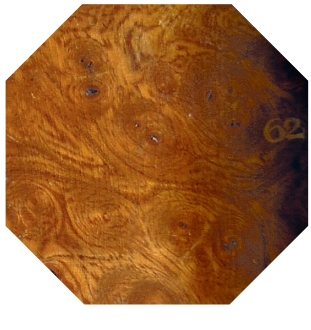


59. **Plane tree**. Not a true plane (*Platanus* spp.) but sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus* L.), which in much of northern England and Scotland was commonly called plane or 'great plane'. The same nomenclature still applies in North America. Gillows used large quantities of 'plane' or sycamore for their Windsor chair seats. This is a sample has a decorative curl or 'fiddle-back' figure.

60. **English Oak** (*Quercus* spp.). An unremarkable piece of straight-grained, fast grown oak.

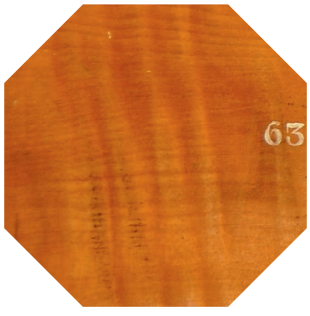
61. **Fustic**. Species unknown. This is not West Indian fustic (*Maclura tinctoria* subsp. *tinctoria*) nor European fustic (*Cotinus coggyria* Scop.). Several other West Indian and South American woods were traded as fustic because of their yellow colour. The only other mention of fustic in the Gillows archive occurs in a letter of 1764. The firm was asked by a London correspondent to try a parcel of fustic in their workshops. The cautious language of their reply reflects an innate conservatism which is characteristic of the firm:

> … how it might take wi[th] us is Uncertain, however shou'd be glad you w[ould]d send us about half a Dozen Planks of it by way of Sample & we'll make Trial thereof, pray let it be of the most beautiful sort.[20]



62. **Mexican Wood**. Species unidentified. This could be the same wood as the 'Mexico Peach' found on the Percy Dean specimen cabinet at the Lady Lever Art Gallery. Peach wood was a synonym for a Central American dyewood, *Haematoxylum brasiletto* H. Karst, otherwise called Nicaragua wood. The name derived from the peach coloured dye obtained from it.

[20] 344/165, Gillows to Thomas Powell, 2 December 1764.

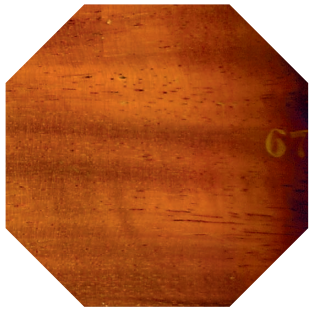


63. **Plumb Tree.** (*Prunus* spp.) This is presumably a cultivated plumb, as distinct from the wild plum or blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa* L.). The colour is somewhat pale, since most plum used by furniture makers was chosen for its deep red colour.

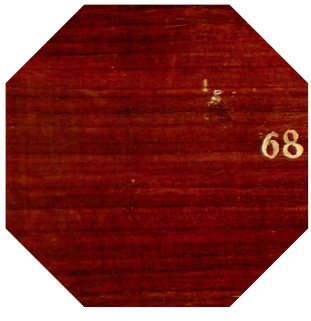
64. **Poplar Tree.** This is not poplar. The specimen resembles a quarter-cut piece of American locust wood or false acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia* L.).

65. **Moss Oak.** (*Quercus* spp.) 'Moss' was a north of England term for bog, hence this was the equivalent of what a London furniture maker would call bog oak.

66. **White Ebony.** Possibly a species of ebony (*Diospyros* spp.) North American persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana* L., a true ebony) was sometimes called white ebony. Alternatively it could be one of the many variegated ebonies, a section selected in this case for its lack of dark pigment.

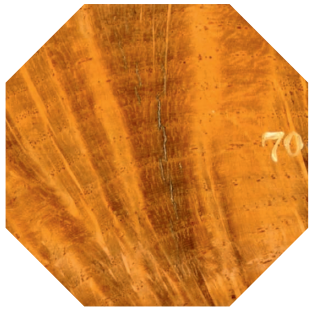


67. **Manilla**. Probably *Vitex parviflora* Juss., now usually traded as molave. This wood resembles East Indian satinwood in many respects, but usually has a somewhat coarser texture. It is widely used in the Philippines, both for furniture making and general joinery. The earliest known citation in England occurs in a bill for 'a manilla wood Tea Chest with 3 Tinn Canisters' supplied to David Garrick by Vile and Cobb in 1766.[21] The 1793 edition of *The Cabinet-Makers' London Book of Prices* states that 'All work, either solid, or veneer'd with satin or Manilla wood, to be extra in the pound … 0. 2. 6.'.[22]



68. **Barr Wood**. Species unknown. This name was usually given to variety of African padouk, commonly imported in small sticks or bars for dyers' use. However, this specimen appears to be a different wood.

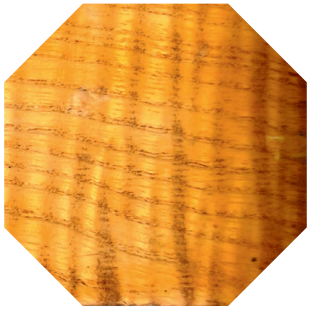
69. **American Beech**. This is not beech but hornbeam, presumably American (*Carpinus caroliniana* Walter). In North American the tree was sometimes known colloquially as the blue beech, because of its blue-grey bark. Like the European hornbeam, the tree is very similar to beech in its leaves and bark, but the wood lacks the characteristic numerous medullary rays of beech. Hornbeam was rarely used in furniture making; in Britain it was usually reserved for engineering applications for which its extreme toughness suited it. See no. 71.



70. **Dutch Oak** (*Quercus* spp.). This was not a different species of oak but oak imported from Holland. It was generally imported in the form of quarter-cut wainscot, but this is a piece of figured end-grain timber. It was presumably deemed worthy of inclusion because Dutch wainscot did not usually find its way to the far north west of England.

[21] Beard and Gilbert (1986), p. 184.
[22] Anon (1793), p. 263; (1811), p. 369.

71. **English Beech**. As with no. 69, this is not beech but hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus* L.). Beech and hornbeam trees were easily confused by the layman, having similar bark and foliage and often growing in the same soil.



72. **English Ash**. *Fraxinus excelsior* L. A cut of native ash with a decorative curl in it.

In addition to the numbered specimens, the printed catalogue relates that the bands of dark and light triangles around the outside of the box are of 'Savacue Wood' and 'Parama Wood' respectively. The former is sabicu (*Lysiloma sabicu* (L.) Benth.), a tree widespread in the West Indies but at its best in Cuba. As the restrictions on trade with Cuba began to break down towards 1800, due to the increasing inability of the Cuban authorities make their prohibition effective, sabicu was imported in sufficient quantities to be mentioned as 'Safico' alongside 'Havannah Wood' in *The Cabinet-Maker's London Book of Prices*. Working it was charged at three shillings extra in the pound compared to mahogany, because of its hardness.[23] The identity of Parama wood is unclear. The printed catalogue is the only historic citation known, and there are no modern woods traded under that name. It is conceivable that the wood came from one of the numerous South American regions and towns named Parama. The same wood is used for the small squares which fill the interstices between the octagons on the lid of the box. Orange wood is used for the same purpose on the lid interior. The dark and light stringing which borders the bands of sabicu and parama triangles is made of holly and a species of *Allocasuarina*.

[23] Anon (1793), p. 263.

ANALYSIS

Leaving aside British and European woods, of which there are eighteen, the largest single contribution comes from the West Indies, Central and South America, with twenty one specimens. Many of these had long been familiar to British furniture makers — mahogany, satinwood, kingwood tulipwood, purple wood and green ebony or cocus wood. But alongside these are a number of Central and South American timbers which had only recently become commercially available. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century all Spanish and Portuguese possessions in the Americas were closed to British shipping, except in very particular circumstances. Although the grip of the Spanish authorities, in particular, had become increasingly feeble towards the end of the eighteenth century, British vessels were still notionally restricted to trading only with the British West Indian islands, or with those areas on the coast of Central America to which Spain had granted limited access, namely the east coast of Yucatan whence Honduras mahogany and logwood were obtained. However, Napoleon's attack on Portugal (1807) and Spain (1808) drove both nations into the receptive arms of the British, and in return for British military assistance both opened their American territories to British ships for the first time. One of the consequences of this was the supply of a wide variety of new timbers to the furniture trade. From Brazil came rosewood and zebra wood. From the Guianas, the Spanish Main and Central America came canary wood, partridge wood, snake wood and 'Mexico' wood, while from Hispaniola and Cuba came Spanish mahogany, sabicu and Havannah wood.

The next largest contributor was Asia, which provided at least nine woods (it is difficult to be specific, because some woods, such as ebony, were also sourced in Africa). The war against France transformed Britain's position in Asia, largely at the expense of Holland, which was effectively a French client state and ally between 1795 and 1813. Holland's overseas possessions thus became fair game, and between 1796 and 1814 British forces occupied all of Holland's African and Asian territories. The Gillows box has specimens of calamander, east Indian satinwood, 'Ceylon wood' and tamarind, all probably from Sri Lanka. Amboyna, 'east India Yew' and camphor came from the Dutch East Indies, and black ebony probably came either from Sri Lanka or Mauritius. On the way to and from Asia British ships now routinely called at Cape of Good Hope, taken from the Dutch in 1795 and again in 1806, after which it remained in British hands. By this date the Cape had become a net importer of wood, chiefly from Asia, but there were still some indigenous timbers available to furniture makers, represented here as 'Cape Wood'.

The seven North American woods came not from the United States but what was then known as British North America, a collection of provinces and territories which officially became Canada in 1867. The sudden expansion of the North American timber trade was again the direct result of Napoleon's activities in Europe. His repeated attempts to close the Baltic to British shipping, whence the Royal Navy got almost all its naval supplies (timber, hemp, tar, iron), induced the British government to look to its North American possessions to supply the shortfall. From 1803 onwards a series of Acts of Parliament were passed which encouraged the importation of all kinds of American wood while at the same time inhibiting importations from northern Europe by imposing increasingly punitive duties. This system of preferential tariffs, as it was

known, was a resounding success; as well as naval stores, large quantities of American timber of all kinds were imported, and among the chief beneficiaries were Britain's furniture makers. Maple and birch, in particular, were of little interest the Royal Navy, but became staples of the nineteenth-century furniture trade in both primary and secondary roles.

While wood from Asia, Africa and North America had always in theory been available, in the sense that most varieties were at least known to the furniture trade, even if the supply was scarce or non-existent, the four Australian woods were an entirely new phenomenon. The 'First Fleet' had gone out to New South Wales in 1788, and the first supplies of Australian timber arrived in Britain in the early 1790s, either sent for official evaluation or as private freight. Gillows were among the first British furniture makers to experiment with Australian wood, and by 1808 they must have been reasonably well acquainted with them.[24] The most important were the so-called 'oaks', named by British settlers after their massive medullary rays which resembled those found in European oak. Most of these were species of *Allocasuarina* (formerly *Casuarina*). The quantities imported were never large, because of the high cost of shipping from the far side of the world, but when converted into veneers, as most was, a little wood went a long way.

In contrast to the relative novelty of many specimens, most of the African woods (with the exception of Cape Wood) were longstanding articles of trade. Angola wood, Gambia wood and bar wood were regularly imported from West Africa under a variety of names, and used chiefly for dyeing.[25] Finally, ten of the specimens remain unidentified, at least by this author.

One puzzling feature of the list of woods is the number of specimens duplicated under different names. Sycamore is represented by two specimens, 'Plane Tree' and 'Sycamore', while the virtually identical maple is represented by 'English Maple', 'American Maple', 'St John Wood' and 'Nova Scotia Wood'. 'Air Wood' could be either sycamore or maple. All these woods are varieties of *Acer*, and are in practical terms interchangeable, varying only slightly in colour. All but the American maple have been cut to show a curled or fiddleback figure. Similarly, three of the Australian specimens are species of *Allocasuarina*, differing very little in colour, texture or figure. While it is possible that Gillows were unaware that these woods were either the same or very similar, it is also possible that Gillows did not have on hand enough different timbers to make up the full seventy-two specimens and therefore included several woods more than once, under different names. They could presumably rely on their customer's ignorance of furniture woods to avoid discovery. Moreover, if the printed catalogue of specimens was indeed used as a form of advertising, then there was a clear commercial incentive to create as impressive an array of specimens as possible.

It could be argued that specimen wood furniture is by definition exceptional, and cannot be taken to represent the materials generally available to furniture makers in general. It is also true that Gillows probably held a position of unrivalled dominance among provincial furniture makers, and their involvement in the trade in exotic timbers

[24] Stuart (2008), II, p. 142–44.
[25] The *Daily Advertiser* of 10 February 1744 carried an advertisement for 'a great Quantity of Chairs made of Walnut-Tree, Mahogany, Rosewood, Angola or Guiney wood'.

went back to the earliest days of the Robert Gillow's business. But in fact the great majority of the woods shown on Miss Gifford's box were in common use within a very few years of its making. Woods from Canada, from the newly opened markets of Spanish and Portuguese America, from former Dutch possessions in Asia, and from the newly settled territories of Australia were available throughout Britain by 1820. In material terms (and allowing that no wood came close to rivalling mahogany in its abundance and versatility) fashionable British furniture of the early nineteenth century can be defined by its use of these new woods, so radically different from the relatively restricted repertoire of the eighteenth century. At the same time, improvements in road and canal transport meant that no furniture maker, however rural or remote, necessarily wanted for exotic materials, provided, of course, he had the clients to pay for them.

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