

Changing Histories: The Life of a ‘Curious’ Table from Durham Cathedral

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On 24 March 1952 Sir William Burrell (1861–1958), a Glasgow collector and former shipowner, wrote to Andrew Hannah at Glasgow Art Galleries and Museum, informing him that he had just acquired an early sixteenth-century oak trestle-type table and expressing his delight:

I have bought a very important table which I have known about for years but which I didn't think would ever come our way as Mr Hunt steadfastly refused to sell. It was made circa 1500 and was formerly the table in the Library of Durham Cathedral. In 1853 it fell into the possession of Edward Greator, sacrist of the Cathedral and acquired from his son by the Hon S. R. Vereker (brother of Lord Gort). I have paid £2025 for it plus the carriage London to Kelvingrove ...¹

The table was transported by road from London by Hoults carriers, and delivered to Glasgow Art Galleries and Museum, Kelvingrove, in early April. Burrell, knighted in 1927, had presented his collection to the City of Glasgow by deed of gift in 1944. He continued to acquire objects and develop the collection on behalf of the museum. Loans he had made to several other British institutions were retrieved and the transfer of objects to Glasgow from his home at Hutton Castle near Berwick started in the late 1940s. The table is part of the Burrell Collection, located in Pollok Park, Glasgow, and is generally referred to as the Durham table. The aim of this article is to describe the table and discuss its varied histories, through looking at its owners, changing uses and contexts. Evidence of earlier restoration and conservation has been examined in order to explain the physical changes that the table has undergone. The approach is broadly chronological.

The table is composed of two parts, a top with folded, hinged boards, supported on a joined trestle-type cupboard (Figure 1). Both the main facades of this base are divided into three horizontal sections by moulded rails. Below the long top rail is a section of panelled construction, with linenfold or ‘parchemin’ panels, five on one side and six on the other, divided by muntins (Figure 2). The five-panel side, regarded as the front, has two doors each with wooden pintle hinges but without handles, which open into two separate long cupboard spaces. The left-hand door pivots on the left side (Figure 3), and the right-hand door pivots on the right side, with a notch (visible in Figure 5) cut into the lower corner of the frame. A repaired area in the frame of the left door indicates the position of a former locking mechanism. The long top rails are joined to broad, moulded end supports, or cross rails, with corbelled ends below, consisting of a curved panel framed with moulded beading. Below the middle rail are

¹ Glasgow Museums Resource Centre, Burrell Archive, GMA.2013.1.2.12. Letter William Burrell to Andrew Hannah, 24 March 1952. Correspondence between Burrell and Hannah and other documents will subsequently be abbreviated to the Burrell Archive, ref. no. and date.

12 A 'CURIOUS' TABLE FROM DURHAM CATHEDRAL



1 The Durham table, oak, c. 1500–40 with later additions; front view showing five linenfold panels. H 33 in (83.5 cm), L 98 ¼ in (249.5 cm), W 35 ¾ in (90.5 cm). © CSG CIC. *Glasgow Museums Collection*



2 The Durham table, rear view showing six linenfold panels. © CSG CIC. *Glasgow Museums Collection*

3 The Durham table, showing left-hand reproduction cupboard door. © CSG CIC. *Glasgow Museums Collection*





4 The Durham table, end view showing the table top and cross rail above the trestle-type cupboard. © CSG CIC. *Glasgow Museums Collection*



5 The Durham table, showing the hinged end in the central position, the exposed channel flanked by guard rails and a cross rail. The notch cut into the lower frame of the right-hand cupboard door can be seen. © CSG CIC. *Glasgow Museums Collection*

two further rails, panelled behind, with pairs of octagonal moulded columns on the ends, flanking a waisted panel. The feet extend to form three-toed claws (Figure 4).

The table top is hinged at the right-hand end with two small iron hinges of different sizes which are reinforced by iron strap hinges nailed into the long edges of the boards. Each half of the table top is made up of two central boards running lengthways with two edge boards which are mitred to the end cleats. To open the table to its full length, the hinged end is pushed towards the centre, revealing a deep channel flanked by guard rails within the superstructure (Figure 5). Two wooden blocks attached to the



6 (above) The Durham table with top unfolded.

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7 (right) The Durham table top showing nailed iron butterfly hinges on the inner end boards.

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underside of the lower board run within a recess cut into the side rails, keeping the boards parallel and running on top of the rails. A stop, which is not visible in the photographs, prevents the boards moving beyond the central position. The upper board can then be unfolded (Figure 6), showing the nailed iron butterfly hinges on the inner end boards (Figure 7).

The channel base board is pitted on the upper surface with woodworm damage. Two adjoining roughly circular holes in the base board (Figure 8) have been shown to connect with holes in the cupboards within the substructure; the latter holes are gouged out of the top of the vertical panel that divides the two compartments.

The table has been described since the 1930s as English, early sixteenth century, but more recently the origin and date of some of the component parts have come under question. Charles Tracy, writing in the 2003 exhibition catalogue *Gothic: Art for England*, commented on the contrasting colour and construction of the table top, suggesting that it may be later in date than the panelled base.² He also commented that there was archival evidence for the doors being modern copies. These two elements of the table will be discussed in the following section that examines the evidence of changes during the last two hundred years of its history.

Although no direct comparisons can be made, folding tables with storage compartments can be seen to have been in use in several northern European countries in the

² Marks and Williamson (2003), p. 312.



8 The Durham table, showing two holes in the channel base board. © CSG CIC. Glasgow Museums Collection

late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In his longer text submitted for the catalogue entry, Tracy suggested the table was probably Flemish, citing the painting of a small table with a trestle of framed linenfold panels and clawed feet in the *Jewish Easter* side panel of the *Last Supper*, painted by Dirk Bouts between 1464 and 1468 for St Peter's church, Leuven.³ Comparative examples are cited by Kreisel, who discussed a small fifteenth-century folding table with storage compartments in Germany, in Anger Museum, Erfurt, and another in St Paul's Cathedral, Münster, c. 1500.⁴

In England, the survival of tables with panelled bases incorporating cupboards, dating to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries, provides strong support for the argument that the Durham table is the work of English craftsmen. Macquoid illustrated two such tables, calling them buffets.⁵ The front of each table is divided into three panels which are framed in moulding. One table is carved with tracery and the other with linenfold. Both have small projecting brackets on the ends to help support the top. Cescinsky illustrated an additional table of similar type, referring to it as a sideboard table.⁶ In the revised version of the *Dictionary of English Furniture*, Macquoid and Edwards used the term 'side table' to describe the type.⁷ Chinnery illustrated two tables, comparing the standard form of one with a later example from 1540–50, fitted with a draw-leaf at each end which could be pulled out to extend the length of the top, being different from hinged mechanisms.⁸

Penelope Eames, in her study of medieval furniture in England, France and the Netherlands, discussed the requirement in great households for long tables where a large number of people could be seated.⁹ Tables were made of heavy boards which

³ I am indebted to Charles Tracy for this information; <http://www.mleuven.be/en/old-masters/m-collection/treasury-of-saint-peters/index.jsp>

⁴ Kreisel (1968), p. 36, figs 73–75.

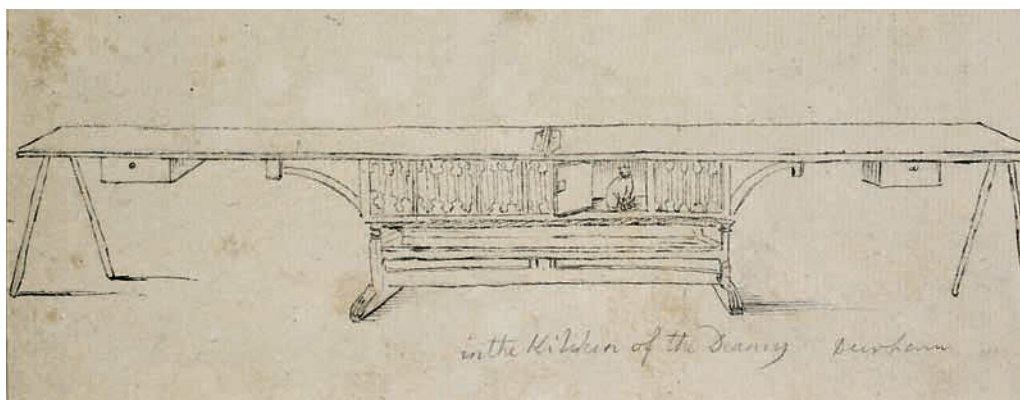
⁵ Macquoid (1919), pp. 4 and 6.

⁶ Cescinsky and Gribble (1922), pp. 102 and 106–08.

⁷ Macquoid and Edwards (1954), III, pp. 274–76.

⁸ Chinnery (1979), p. 288.

⁹ Eames (1977), pp. 217–23.



9 *Durham Cathedral, Deanery Kitchen*, by Samuel Hieronymus Grimm, 1773. The drawing shows a hinged top in open position supported by trestles with cutlery trays below.
 © The British Library Board, Additional MS 15538, f. 167

were supported on trestles and could be removed and stored after meals. This was a useful feature where interior spaces were multi-functional. The usual practice was for diners to be seated on one side of the table, with the other side used for service. Tables could therefore be relatively narrow but needed to be extremely long to seat a large number of people. Eames notes fifteenth-century inventories also referring to the practice in England and France for having folding table-tops fitted with hinges, which made them more functional.¹⁰

The Durham table perhaps can be seen as a response to the requirement for a top which would fold out to give a long surface; the sliding mechanism as an innovation added stability by securing the table top to the base. The panelled base with cupboards has been shown to be part of a tradition in late medieval tables, providing the capacity for storage in addition to the use of the top for display, for serving and for dining.

THE GREAT KITCHEN, DURHAM CATHEDRAL

A pen and ink drawing of the table in the Deanery kitchen, Durham, by Samuel Hieronymus Grimm (1733–1794), is the earliest record, dated to 1773.¹¹ The drawing shows a hinged top in an open position, supported on the base with a trestle at each end; cutlery trays are subtended below (Figure 9). One of the linenfold panels is open, hinged on the left edge, revealing a cupboard space with a cat seated within, the cat possibly included for scale. The panels are sketchily drawn, appearing to be a poor representation of the proportions. Below the row of linenfold panels is an open shelf, supported at the corners by column-shaped legs. The lower rail is raised above floor level. There are several differences between this drawing and the present table but it is difficult to explain them, except as artistic license.

¹⁰ Eames (1977), pp. 222–23.

¹¹ British Library, Additional MS 15538, f. 167.



10 *Durham Cathedral, Deanery Kitchen*, by Samuel Hieronymus Grimm, 1773. This outline view of the interior shows the working arrangements when it was in use as the kitchen for the Deanery. © The British Library Board, Additional MS 15538, f. 166

Grimm, a Swiss artist who arrived in Britain in 1768, produced topographical and antiquarian drawings for private patrons. His greatest patron was Dr Richard Kaye (1736–1809), an ambitious churchman and antiquarian, whose career included an appointment as a canon of Durham Cathedral from 1777 to 1784, where he was installed to the eighth stall.¹² Grimm toured the countryside in and around Durham with Kaye in the 1770s and early 1780s, recording ‘everything curious’, including buildings, interiors and items of furniture in the Cathedral, the College and the Castle.

A related drawing by Grimm of the kitchen interior depicts a panoramic view of the elaborate design, showing six sides of its octagonal structure, the south-facing windows and high ribbed vault (Figure 10).¹³ The Great Kitchen, built between 1366 and 1374, was designed by the master mason John Lewyn to serve Durham’s Benedictine community.¹⁴ After the Reformation the monastic tradition of communal eating ceased. Grimm’s drawing shows the kitchen when in use as the high-status Deanery kitchen, where meals for the dean and his guests were prepared. John Thacker, one of the eighteenth-century cooks to the Dean and Chapter, documented the rich variety of dishes produced in the kitchen, in his book published in 1758, *The Art of Cookery*.¹⁵

¹² Mussett (1974), p. 67; for further information on Grimm and Kaye see Dolman (2003) at <http://www.bl.uk/ebli/2003articles/article2.html>

¹³ British Library, Additional MS 15538, f. 166.

¹⁴ Brown (2015), pp. 288–89.

¹⁵ Day (2004).

Equipped with roasting ranges, charcoal stoves, ovens, boilers and dressers, the kitchen is typical of great houses of the eighteenth century.¹⁶ The artist's viewpoint is to the west, showing doors to side rooms used for kitchen storage. Although the table does not appear in the drawing, it is thought to have been near the east door leading out to the Deanery. Possibly Grimm was using it to draw on. A third drawing shows a side of meat roasting in front of a fire on the north side, tended by an elderly woman shielded from the heat by a screen.¹⁷ The table is thought to have been ideal for laying out each course of dishes, which were probably checked by the cook before being carried along a passage leading to the Deanery. An engraving of a plan in John Carter's publication of his survey drawings of the Cathedral for the Society of Antiquaries, where the key describes F as 'great kitchen of the monastery, now the kitchen of the deanery' and G the 'curious table', indicates that the table was still in use in the Great Kitchen in 1801 (Figure 11).¹⁸ It seems likely that it remained there until it was removed and entered a domestic setting.

CANON EDWARD GREATOREX, DURHAM

By the mid-nineteenth century the table came to be owned by Canon Edward Greatorrex (1823–1900), who was appointed a minor canon and held the office of sacristan of Durham Cathedral from 1849–1862.¹⁹ He served as the Chapter librarian from 1859 to 1862 and 1866 to 1873, and precentor from 1862 to 1872. He was a keen collector and photographer of architectural subjects, mainly churches and monastic buildings in Britain.²⁰ Greatorrex was one of the first honorary secretaries of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland, founded in 1861, and served alongside Canon William Greenwell (1820–1918), who was president for fifty-five years.²¹ Greenwell, also a minor canon, was widely known for his antiquarian and collecting pursuits. Greatorrex and Greenwell can be seen as typical of a large number of Anglican clergy whose antiquarian interests focussed on ecclesiastical architecture and archaeology.

Edward Greatorrex, born in Newton Solney, Derbyshire, was the son of Thomas Greatorrex, organist of Westminster Abbey. Edward studied at Pembroke College, Oxford, graduating with an M.A. in 1847, and married Elizabeth, daughter of Archdeacon Thorp (1783–1862), first Warden of the University of Durham. Greatorrex is recorded as having acquired the table by 1853.²² He may have bought it from the Deanery. The Dean and Chapter Records suggest that redundant furnishings and fittings were on occasion sold to members of the clergy; for instance, an 1849 entry lists a brass chandelier and candlesticks sold to Archdeacon Thorp, with the income paid into the Fabric Fund.²³ From around 1855, Canon Greatorrex and his family lived at The Grove, in the North End area of the city. It was one of the houses available for

¹⁶ I am indebted to Peter Brears for this information.

¹⁷ British Library, Additional MS 15538, f. 232.

¹⁸ Carter (1801), plate II.

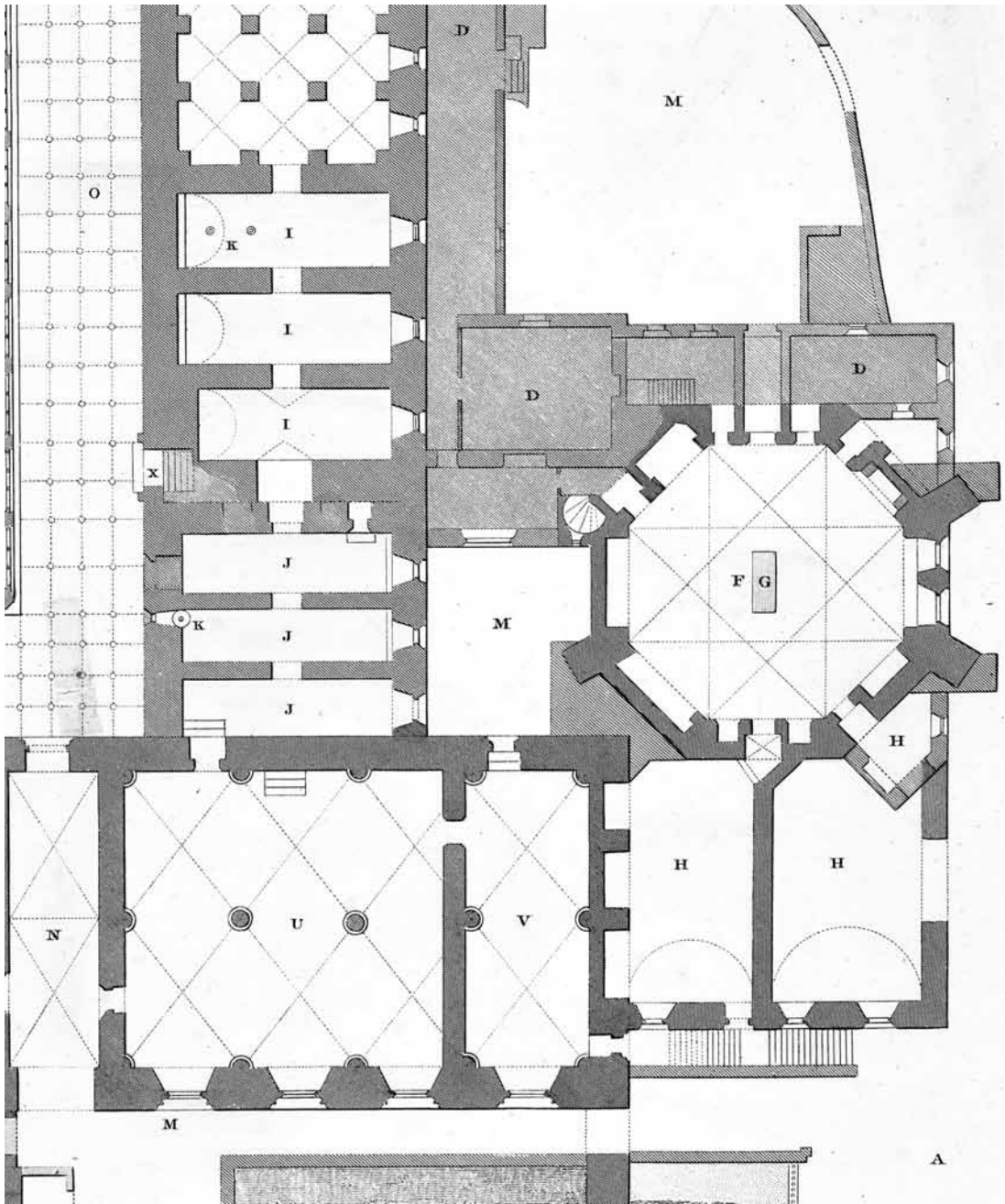
¹⁹ Crockford (1860), p. 245.

²⁰ Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections, GB 033 GTX.

²¹ McDougall (2011), pp. 7–9.

²² Burlington (1936), p. 50.

²³ Durham Cathedral Archive, N/AA/4, p. 91.



11 Plan of part of Durham Cathedral, including the Great Kitchen. From Carter (1801), plate II (detail). The key describes F as 'great kitchen of the monastery, now the kitchen of the deanery' and G 'curious table'. *Reproduced by kind permission of the Chapter of Durham Cathedral*

minor canons. In 1873, he was appointed rector of Croxdale Parish within the Diocese of Durham and moved to the rectory next to St Bartholomew Church, in the village of Sunderland Bridge.²⁴ He retained some of his duties in the Cathedral until shortly before his death in 1900, and was buried in the Cathedral churchyard next to his wife and two infant children.²⁵

THE HON. STANDISH ROBERT VEREKER, HAMSTERLEY HALL,
COUNTY DURHAM

The table was inherited by Rev. Edward Harcourt Greatorex (1854–1945), rector of St John's Church, Low Dinsdale, Darlington, and later vicar of St Hilda's church in South Shields,²⁶ from whom the Hon. Standish Robert Vereker (1888–1975) bought it, sometime before 1934. Vereker, descended from an Anglo-Irish family, was the second son of the fifth Viscount Gort and of Eleanor, daughter of Robert Smith Surtees (1805–1864), of Hamsterley Hall, Rowlands Gill, County Durham. Educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge, Vereker served in the First World War, was mentioned in despatches and awarded with the Military Cross. Vereker served as Sheriff of Durham in 1934,²⁷ and in 1946 inherited the title of seventh Viscount Gort of Limerick.

In 1931 he had purchased Bessie Surtees House, a sixteenth and seventeenth-century group of buildings on Sandhill, on the quayside of the River Tyne in Newcastle.²⁸ Vereker's wife, Bessy, was a descendent of a wealthy merchant, Aubone Surtees, whose daughter Bessie eloped from the house in 1772. Vereker restored the property in a Tudor style and in 1934 an exhibition was organised to celebrate the work, with distinguished lenders headed by the Duchess of Northumberland and the Marchioness of Londonderry. The rooms were furnished to represent different historic styles, described by Vereker as 'an attempt to reconstruct the domestic background of our forefathers from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth centuries'.²⁹ It was so popular with the public that its two-week run was extended.

In Room C, an example of an early sixteenth-century merchant's interior was created with linen-fold panelling, said to be from a house on the quayside, an Elizabethan-style fireplace, sixteenth-century floor tiles, and furnishings associated with the period of Henry VIII. The table was described as a 'Linen-fold trestle table, early 16th century. At one time in the Deanery of Durham and probably part of its early furnishing', statements that were repeated in a *Country Life* review.³⁰ An illustration in the catalogue provides the earliest published photograph of the table.³¹ Another contemporary photograph (Figure 12) documents the table more clearly, showing five linenfold panels, and a top of single thickness, but with filled holes, perhaps from the nails of a former strap hinge, visible on the side of the board at its

²⁴ Ibid., p. 126.

²⁵ Anon. (1900), p. 8.

²⁶ Thanks to Janet McDougall for this information.

²⁷ Anon (1934), p. 6.

²⁸ The buildings are now the North East Regional Office of Historic England.

²⁹ Surtees (1934), pp. 6–7.

³⁰ O[swald] (1934), p. 438.

³¹ Surtees (1934), p. 23.



12 The Durham table in Surtees House, Newcastle, in the loan exhibition of 1934 showing Room C, a reconstructed interior representing an early sixteenth-century merchant's house. © Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums

left end.³² The top was three boards wide, with an odd short rectangular block on the end of the right-hand cross bar, below the table board.

Vereker was a collector of art and antiques, known for his work in restoring historic buildings, notably his home, Hamsterley Hall, Rowlands Gill, Durham, where he added in about 1932 some early seventeenth-century fragments from Beaudesert, Staffordshire to the Gothic-style house of c. 1770. Christopher Hussey wrote eloquently of the house in *Country Life*, illustrating the drawing room hung with tapestries and with other objects loaned to the Surtees House exhibition, including 'a very fine oak credence or buffet ... of the Henry VIII period, which, though probably renewed in parts, is among the best surviving pieces of that age', further demonstrating Vereker's taste in early oak.³³

JOHN HUNT OF DATCHET, WINDSOR, AND POYLE MANOR, COLNBROOK,
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Soon after the exhibition Vereker sold the table to John Hunt (1900–1976), an antiques dealer specialising in medieval art, who opened his gallery in 1933 in Bury Street, St James's, London. Vereker and Hunt may have known each other through their Irish family connections, or through their shared collecting interests. Hunt bought the table for his personal collection, not for stock, and it appears in a photograph of an interior of the Hunts' home at Southlea Road, Datchet, near Windsor, Berkshire (Figure 13), where they moved sometime after June 1933.³⁴ The photograph reflects the collecting interests of Hunt and his wife Putzel.

Hunt lent the table to the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition of Gothic Art in Europe, held in London in 1936. The catalogue entry gave its provenance as Durham

³² Thanks to Michelle Tones of Historic England for the photograph.

³³ Hussey (1939).

³⁴ O'Connell (2013), p. 59.



13 The Durham table in John Hunt's home at Southlea Road, Datchet, near Windsor, Berkshire, c. 1934–36. From O'Connell (2013), p. 59. *Reproduced by kind permission of Trudy Hunt*

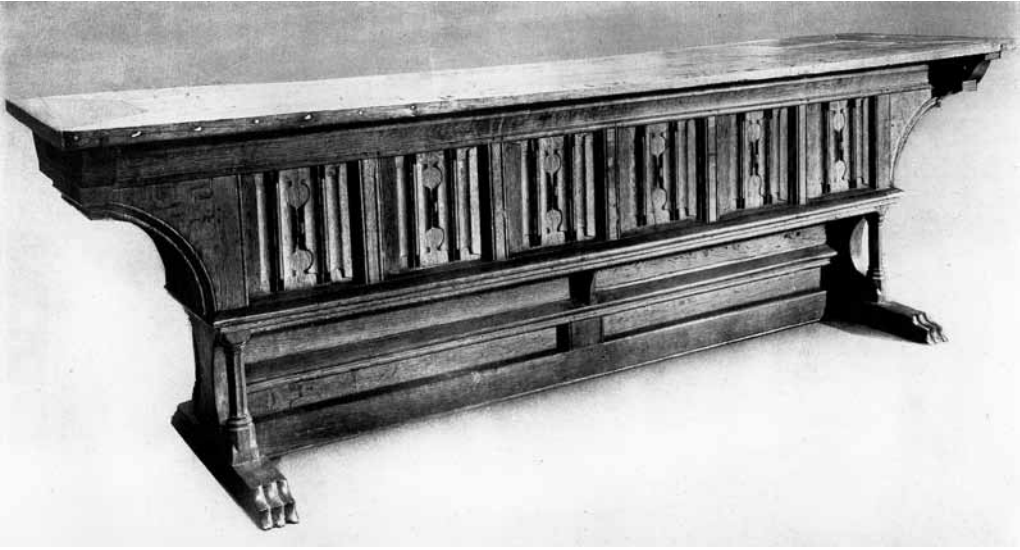
Cathedral Deanery, adding the name of Greatorrex, details presumably provided by Vereker.³⁵ Hunt's loan was anonymous, but the lender is made apparent by a certificate of thanks addressed to Hunt.³⁶ The catalogue photograph shows the table with a single top three boards wide, but with small iron brackets at each end of the long sides, holding it in place (Figure 14). Writing in *The Connoisseur*, James G. Mann (1897–1962), the exhibition organiser, emphasised the nature of the exhibition, stating:

... preference has here been given to objects with which they [the public] would be less likely to be familiar. These are not easy to find, but it is a tribute to the long history of the amateur that there are still treasures to be discovered in forgotten collections made many years ago. The existence of the Durham Cathedral table, for instance, was previously unknown to students of English furniture.³⁷

³⁵ Burlington (1936), p. 50.

³⁶ In the Hunt Museum Archive, Limerick.

³⁷ Mann (1936).



14 The Durham table in *Gothic Art in Europe c. 1200–1500* (1936). The dimensions of the table were given as: H 2 ft 7½ in, L 8 ft 2½ in, W 2 ft 2½ in (80 cm × 250.2 cm × 67.3 cm)

Clearly Mann was not aware of the earlier Newcastle exhibition.

The Burlington Fine Arts Club (1866–1951) was a private gentlemen's club, founded by collectors, and based at 17 Savile Row. Burrell, who was a member, loaned two tapestries, a boxwood sculpture of the Virgin and Child and a Gothic drinking horn to the 1936 exhibition, pasting an annotated label of these loans on the front of his copy of the catalogue.³⁸ He may well have seen the exhibition in late May or June 1936 and, if so, his interest in acquiring the table could date from this event. He and his wife Constance had returned from Jamaica, where they had spent the winter,³⁹ and may have stayed in London before they left in early July for the thermal spa town of Bagnoles de l'Orne in Normandy, for treatment for Lady Burrell's phlebitis.⁴⁰

After the close of the exhibition, it seems that Hunt had the table widened by inserting an additional longitudinal board in the centre, replacing the end cleats, restoring the folding top, and re-modelling the substantial moulded cross supports. These alterations can be seen in a photograph of the Hunts' rear reception room at their new home of Poyle Manor, Colnbrook, Buckinghamshire, which they acquired in July 1936 (Figure 15). In this photograph, an early sixteenth-century Southern Netherlandish tapestry, *Exploration of the Indies: The Camel Caravan*, hangs above the fireplace; the tapestry was sold to Burrell in October 1937.⁴¹ Hunt had been an important source of late medieval objects for Burrell from 1933, negotiating with sellers

³⁸ Burrell Archive, GMA.2013.1.6.971.

³⁹ V&A Archive MA/1/B3568, notification of Burrell's travel plans for January to March or April 1936.

⁴⁰ Burrell Archive, GM/BC 52/56, 12 July 1936.

⁴¹ Burrell Collection, 46.94; O'Connell (2013), p. 107.



15 The Durham table in John Hunt's rear reception room at Poyle Manor, Buckinghamshire, c.1936–37. The early sixteenth-century tapestry *Exploration of the Indies: The camel caravan* (46.94) was bought by Burrell in October 1937. From O'Connell (2013), p. 107. Reproduced by kind permission of Trudy Hunt

and bidding on his behalf in London, Paris, Lucerne and Vienna. The table remained in Poyle Manor until 1952, latterly stored in the garage after the house was sold in 1946. It was too large to move to the Hunts' home in Ireland, and was offered to Burrell in February 1952.⁴²

SIR WILLIAM BURRELL, THE BURRELL COLLECTION, GLASGOW

Burrell announced his purchase by letter to Hannah, Keeper of the Burrell Collection from 1947 to 1956, in March 1952, recording the details in his purchase book in May.⁴³ His knowledge of the dimensions and history of the table seems to have been based on the Burlington Fine Arts Club catalogue of 1936, as he recorded the top as having three boards and made no reference to the folded element. The table that was delivered

⁴² O'Connell (2013), p. 106.

⁴³ Burrell Archive, 52.25, pp. 1–2.

to Glasgow Art Galleries had a folded top four boards wide, $9\frac{1}{8}$ inches (23.2 cm) wider than the 1936 measurement. As soon as Hannah had inspected it, he wrote to Burrell enquiring about a missing door panel.⁴⁴ There were two openings to the double-compartment space, but only one door had been sent, wrapped separately. In his letters Hannah referred to the table as the 'Durham table', the name commonly used in the museum. Burrell telegraphed Hunt asking about the second door, and Hunt responded:

I think I told you in my first letter that two small original doors about one foot square, each consisting of, I presume, a linenfold panel, were missing. These had always been missing in the modern history of the table. One opening, however, was closed by a Victorian door, carved like a linenfold panel, and this door I included when sending the table. We personally thought that as it was a Library table, the openings looked nicer filled with books, so we did not use the later door at all.⁴⁵

Burrell had made a point of questioning Hunt about any restoration of the table, telling Hannah there had been no mention of the second panel: 'I was meticulous in asking for a note of all replacements etc. and in reply to my letter he wrote "The existing small door to the cupboard beneath the table is apparently an early nineteenth century replacement"'.⁴⁶ On 20 April Burrell asked Hannah his opinion on having a panel made, and again on 20 May when he proposed 'a new part, cleverly made'. Hannah replied, sending photographs which showed that the table was displayed without the single door, and saying '... it looks well enough that way ... It might, however, be advisable to copy the existing replacement door so that both could be attached if desired ... It does not look well with one missing.'⁴⁷

The table was selected by Hannah to occupy a prominent position in the central hall in Kelvingrove, in an exhibition of highlights of the Burrell Collection, which opened on 19 May 1952 (Figure 16). In late July, Burrell visited the exhibition, thinking it 'exceedingly good'.⁴⁸ As Hannah was away at the Museums Association conference in Oxford, he wrote to him:

I mentioned to Miss Dunlop [Mary Dunlop, Hannah's secretary] that I was strongly of [the] opinion that a new door should be made for the Durham Table. Mr Surgey is the only man to guide us so that the new door will not be detectable from the old one. He had in his employment craftsmen of the highest order and although he is out of the antique business now he will be sure to know where some of his men are ... if you send him the loose door you have & the measurements of the one you require he would do the rest.⁴⁹

Hannah agreed to write to Surgey, who replied saying he would try to locate 'an old carver who would do justice to the replacement door panels for the Durham Table'.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Burrell Archive, GMA.2013.1.2.12, 15 April 1952.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 April 1952.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 20 April 1952.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 May 1952.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 27 July 1952.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 27 July 1952.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 29 July 1952. Frank Surgey (b. 1893) and Murray Adams-Acton established the firm of Acton Surgey Ltd c. 1920–40, specialising in architectural renovation and interior decoration. Burrell bought sixty-nine items of furniture from the firm between 1925 and 1942, mostly for the refurbishment of Hutton Castle, Berwickshire, for which Surgey was the main contractor. Surgey had retired to Bow, near Crediton, Devon, by 1952.

16 The Durham table in the central hall at Kelvingrove, Glasgow, in an exhibition of highlights of the Burrell Collection, 1952. The photograph shows the table with a fifteenth-century early Ming celadon jar, from Longquan, China (38.315) but without the existing single door. © CSG CIC. *Glasgow Museums Collection*



Eighteen months later, Hannah was able to report on Surgey's progress to Burrell, writing that 'after a lengthy search and some disappointments, suitable wood for the Durham Library Table doors has now been found, and these are being carved'.⁵¹ The two doors which are fitted on the table are similar in colour and in the relatively low relief of the carving. A small unmarked pine panel in the museum store may be a trial sample.⁵² Although only a partial representation, it is of the same height and is annotated for corrections in the detail of the linenfold.

The Durham table served as a support for an important sixteenth-century tapestry, the Luttrell table carpet, in two exhibitions, firstly in Glasgow in 1969, in *Carpets and Tapestries from the Burrell Collection*, in Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, and then in 1975, in the Arts Council exhibition, *Treasures from the Burrell Collection*, in the Hayward Gallery, London. The tapestry was probably woven in the Southern Netherlands, or in England by Netherlandish workers, and was intended to be used as a table cover, with its borders hanging down from the edges of the table. With the hinged top folded out, the table was thought at the time to provide a suitable support. Included in both exhibitions as part of the installation, the table was not included in either catalogue.⁵³

From 1976 until 1983 the table was part of a large consignment of 29 items of Burrell Collection furniture and metalwork lent to Leeds Castle, Kent, to furnish the interiors of the medieval keep restored by the Hon. Lady Baillie (d. 1974). In the illustrated guide, where it is described as 'the most important English table of its period to have survived', it can be seen in the Queen's gallery displayed in a central position with the hinged top folded out, and with oak chairs including a box-seat armchair with

⁵¹ Burrell Archive, GMA.2013.1.2.13.11, 14 January 1954.

⁵² Burrell Collection, Temp. 29476.

⁵³ Cleland and Karafel (2017), pp. 254–60, fig. 1 shows the Luttrell table carpet (47.3) as it was exhibited on the Durham table in 1969.

linenfold back panel, c. 1540.⁵⁴ The loan was recalled in March 1983, six months before the opening of the new museum in Glasgow.⁵⁵

In 1981 Richard Marks, Keeper of the Burrell Collection from 1979 to 1985, noted the Durham table as being a possible object for the planned Medieval Domestic Room, re-named the Gothic Domestic Room.⁵⁶ By the time the museum was declared open by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on 21 October 1983, the table was displayed in the long Tapestry Gallery, within the Medieval and Post-Medieval section.⁵⁷ An early idea to continue its use as the support for the Luttrell table carpet, as had been previously done, did not come about. Instead a longer oak dining table was temporarily used for that purpose.⁵⁸

Marks told the story of the table's purchase in *Burrell: A Portrait of a Collector*, published in 1983, writing of its earlier location in the kitchens of the monastic quarters of Durham Cathedral, thus correcting the long-held view that the table was from the Cathedral library.⁵⁹ In the following year, in an article on recent discoveries of provenance, he qualified this, writing that as Greatorrex was Chapter librarian in 1859–62 and 1866–73, he may have kept the table in the library.⁶⁰ The table featured in *The Age of Oak: British Furniture c. 1500–1700*, in the temporary exhibition gallery at the Burrell Collection, opening on 23 May 1985 and scheduled to last six months but extended until 1989.⁶¹ Most recently, in 2003, it was exhibited at the V&A in *Gothic: Art for England 1400–1547*, displayed in 'The Table and Feasting' section and described by Tracy in the catalogue.⁶²

INTERPRETATION OF RESTORATION

It is clear that the table has been altered considerably since it was drawn by Grimm in 1773, then perhaps in its original state (Figure 9). Additional photographic and archival evidence has come to light during recent research. Following a thorough examination of the object, a timetable of alterations can now be proposed. The earliest surviving photograph, from 1934 (Figure 12), shows that although the cupboard base was essentially similar to Grimm's drawing, the hinged table top, with its cutlery trays and trestles, had gone. In its place was a single top three boards wide, with the edge boards mitred to the end cleats. It was supported by substantial moulded cross rails of a similar width; the photograph suggests a new end cleat and repairs to the cross rail at the right-hand end, which may be attributed to an early phase of restoration during Vereker's ownership.

⁵⁴ Geoffrey-Lloyd, Wilson and Bryant (1980), p. 49, where the text has been transposed. The table was displayed in the Queen's gallery, illustrated p. 55.

⁵⁵ Burrell Archive, BC/LO/LEEDS CASTLE.

⁵⁶ Burrell Archive, BC/LO/LEEDS CASTLE, note April 1981.

⁵⁷ Burrell Archive, GMA.2013.1.4.4.

⁵⁸ Burrell Archive. GMA.2013.1.5, Tapestry Gallery display file (1982–83); GMA.2013.1.1. Barry Gasson, Architect, Photograph file of the building and galleries (c. 1983). The Burrell Collection reference for the substitute table is 14.259.

⁵⁹ Marks (1983), p. 179.

⁶⁰ Marks (1984), p. 14.

⁶¹ Burrell (1985).

⁶² Marks and Williamson (2003), p. 312.

A photograph from around 1934 to early 1936 (Figure 13) shows the same single top, three boards wide. Small iron brackets had been added to the ends of the cross rails when the table was exhibited at the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition in the summer of 1936 (Figure 14). Between the close of the exhibition and the date of the photograph of Poyle Manor, between late 1936 and late 1937 (Figure 15), it appears that Hunt had the table altered, probably through his contacts in London. These alterations involved widening the table top to four boards and replacing the end cleats, adding a new second leaf with hinges and re-modelling the cross supports. There is no evidence that either Vereker or Hunt knew of the Grimm drawing, though they did know the story of the table's former history in Durham Cathedral Deanery. It is possible that knowledge of the existence of an earlier folding top may have been transmitted by Greateorex's son to Vereker, and on to Hunt. Alternatively, they may have deduced the original configuration from the construction. The filled holes along the left-hand edge of the top, visible in the photographs dating from 1934 to 1936, match the measurements between the nail heads in the iron straps now present, suggesting that the outer boards were previously part of a hinged top and may have survived from the original top. This remains a puzzle though it does seem that these were re-used boards, as there are other pegged holes along their outer edges. Interestingly, the newly restored folding top was hinged at the opposite end, perhaps to secure a stronger hold for the strap hinge nails.

There are still many questions about the changes that have taken place. Woodworm damage in the channel base board suggests it is either re-used timber or has been tight up against another board, forcing the woodworm to work between them. It is thought that the holes through the base board into the cupboards below were used to operate a locking mechanism, perhaps securing the single table top in place. Evidence of historic damage to the tenons of the side rails at the right-hand end might have been caused by too much force applied each time the heavy top was pushed back into its closed position.⁶³ There is an alternative interpretation, as at the left-hand end of the table the side rails shows similar loose joints with the cross rail. It seems that one or both cross rails have been removed in the past to slide the whole top off and turn it 180 degrees, before sliding it back on and re-fixing the cross rails. A comparison of the photographic evidence suggests that this has occurred at least twice, firstly after the hinged top was recorded in Poyle Manor (Figure 15), and secondly at a date some time after 1952, when it was pictured in Kelvingrove (Figure 16). Removing the heavy top may have been for ease of transport.

Papers in the archive recently discovered during cataloguing have led to a different interpretation of the date and source of the two cupboard doors. Whereas it was previously known that one was commissioned in 1952 from Frank Surgey, it is now clear that he arranged for both doors to be carved in 1954. There is no trace of the door Hunt described as an early nineteenth-century restoration.

⁶³ Burrell Archive, 14.312 object file.

DISCUSSION OF PROVENANCE

It is interesting to speculate on who made the cupboard base, and for whom. It is possible that it may have been commissioned by a pre-Reformation prior of Durham. An inventory made on the death of Prior Wessington, in 1446, of his newly restored lodging, details well-furnished interiors, for instance in 'The lower chamber ... a bed, tapestry "to ornament the walls" ... A table of "prusia" with leaves'.⁶⁴ The Burrell's 'curious table' may have been part of the furnishings of the lodgings, perhaps in a simpler form with a narrow, hinged board top, used for display, as a serving table, for storage and opened out and supported on trestles to make a long table for meals. In line with the practice in many great households, it may have been removed from the lodgings when more fashionable furniture was acquired, and placed in the kitchen where, as depicted by Grimm (Figure 9), it was fitted with cutlery trays by a Cathedral joiner. It fulfilled a need for a long work surface where dishes of food were gathered in preparation for carrying them to the Deanery. The Carter plan (Figure 11) suggests it may have remained as a functional piece within the Great Kitchen into the mid-nineteenth century.

There is no further reference to the table in Cathedral inventories. It was known to have been acquired by the churchman and antiquarian Canon Greatorex at least by 1853. It is argued here that it probably entered his family home in Durham and later was transferred to the rectory in the village of Sunderland Bridge, passing by descent to his son, and from there to Robert Vereker, at Hamsterley Hall, a late eighteenth-century country house in County Durham. It was first recorded in a public exhibition at Bessie Surtees House, Newcastle, in the context of a sequence of recreated historic interiors furnished with loans from local private collectors. It was then acquired by John Hunt, a London art dealer, for his own homes in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, where it was placed within his collections of medieval and later art, and used to accommodate books. The Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition of 1936 brought it to the attention of a wider audience in London. With Burrell's purchase it was transferred from private to public ownership, to Glasgow's public museum service, and was on view in a series of exhibitions in Kelvingrove, as part of the newly-acquired Burrell Collection. At Leeds Castle in Kent it was displayed in a restored medieval keep, in a reconstructed historic interior. Finally, with the opening of The Burrell Collection art museum in 1983, it became part of the display of Sir William Burrell's internationally renowned collection of medieval and post-medieval art. The most recent exhibition to which the table was lent was *Gothic Art for England 1400–1547*, the major V&A exhibition of late medieval English art and architecture, in 2003.

⁶⁴ Raine (1833), pp. 100–03.

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<http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/Pages/home.aspx> Glasgow Museums

<http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/Burrell-Collection/pages/default.aspx> The Burrell Collection

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