

# Wooden Warriors: A Group of Eighteenth-Century Desks from Northern Ireland

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The focus of this study is a mahogany bureau (or desk, to use the contemporary term) which forms part of the furnishings of the Lismaclosky Rectory building at the Ulster Folk Museum (Figure 1). The desk was donated to the museum in 1966 by Mr Johnson, a clerk in the Belfast linen trade, along with a number of other items.<sup>1</sup> Little else was recorded about the desk at the time of its donation, but newspapers used to line the drawers indicate that it had been in the Belfast area for a number of years prior to it coming into the museum and may have been used by Mr Johnson in the course of his business.<sup>2</sup> During conservation treatment of the desk in early 2012 a number of interesting discoveries were made regarding the materials and construction techniques used, and this in turn prompted further investigation into the desk's history. One of the most distinctive features of the desk is the marquetry figure of a soldier flanked by classical columns that decorates the inner prospect door (Figures 2 and 3). Although distinctive, the use of such an image on the prospect door of an eighteenth-century Irish desk is not without precedent. It is not only the relationship that this image has with an earlier tradition of similar iconography, but also how this tradition had been modified by the maker of this desk, along with a small group of other identified examples, to serve the specific requirements of his patrons, that is of particular interest. To date we have seen a total of nine of these desks which form a distinct group, the Ulster Folk Museum example being the only one in a public collection; the others in the group are either privately owned or known to us only through photographs. In addition, we have also identified a number of similar desks which although not part of this group are worth considering in relation to them. Again, only one of these, the example in the Ulster Museum, is in a public collection, the others being privately owned in Northern Ireland.

A mahogany desk-and-bookcase dating from the late 1740s, in the collection of the Ulster Museum, provides a good example within Irish cabinet-making of an earlier use of the warrior figure on the prospect door. In this example the figure is carved in high relief and appears related to the classical statuary mounts used to decorate the exterior of other comparable cabinets, the designs of which are similarly indebted to Palladian architectural forms (Figures 4 and 5). Except, of course, that in this instance the figure has migrated from the exterior to the interior in order to serve a slightly different purpose. The appearance of a classical warrior standing guard over the inner architecturally-framed stronghold of the desk would have provided an appropriate image of strength and security at a time when these pieces of furniture were used to

<sup>1</sup> Ulster Folk Museum, Day Book 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Copies of *The Northern Whig* and *Belfast Post* newspapers from 1953.



1 Desk in  
Lismaclosky  
Rectory, Ulster  
Folk Museum.  
*National Museums  
Northern Ireland*

2 (left) Detail of  
figure 1, showing  
the marquetry  
figure on the  
prospect door.  
*National Museums  
Northern Ireland*



3 (right) Detail of  
figure 1, showing  
classical column  
decoration on  
projecting  
compartment of  
the desk. *National  
Museums  
Northern Ireland*





4 Desk-and-bookcase, Ulster Museum.  
*National Museums Northern Ireland*

5 Detail of figure 4, showing the carved  
figure on the prospect door. *National  
Museums Northern Ireland*

house both valuables and valuable documents. It is after all this small area of a desk that lies behind two locks, that of both the fall front and prospect door, demonstrating that the need for security was real. In turn, the design and imagery of this piece of furniture can be linked to wider traditions of European cabinet-making in England, Holland and Germany (Figures 6 and 7). Discussing the source of the warrior figure engravings that appear on the hinges and lock plates of a cabinet in the collection of Bristol Museums (Figure 8), the authors of *John Channon and brass inlaid furniture 1730–60* trace the designs to the work of the Dutch artist Hendrik Goltzius and his series of prints *The Roman Heroes*.<sup>3</sup> Intriguingly, these authors also cite evidence of

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert and Murdoch (1993), pp. 103–05.



- 6 (above) Desk and bookcase with  
(above right), detail of engraved brass  
inlaid warrior figure on the prospect  
door. *Iveagh bequest, Kenwood,  
English Heritage*
- 7 (right) Marquetry warrior figure on the  
central splat of an eighteenth-century  
Dutch chair. *Private collection  
Co. Down/ The authors*





one of the leading German exponents of this type of furniture, Abraham Roentgen, spending time in Ireland; it is, however, more likely that the cabinet-maker's access to a similar range of printed sources is the significant factor in understanding the design of the Ulster Museum desk-and-bookcase.<sup>4</sup> That this print material represented a valuable resource for wood carvers and other artisans, such as stuccodores, in Ireland during this period has been well demonstrated and its use by cabinet-makers is also to be expected.<sup>5</sup>

Recent research has revealed the important involvement in the production of marquetry work in furniture in Dublin by another German migrant artisan, John Kirchoffer.<sup>6</sup> While recognising the significance of this individual's work in terms of both introducing ideas and setting taste, we do not believe that he was directly involved in the production of the group of desks under consideration. An examination of one of the pieces of furniture associated with Kirchoffer, the desk-and-cabinet in the library of Florence Court House, revealed distinct differences in overall construction and a much greater level of sophistication in both the design and execution of the marquetry work compared to the desks in our group (Figures 9 and 10). We therefore consider that the group of desks discussed in this essay represents a different strand in the tradition of marquetry work in Ireland. The evidence of where the majority of these desks are or have been located would suggest that they were made somewhere in the northern counties of Antrim or Down and by a cabinet-maker working at least one and probably two generations later than John Kirchoffer. And although later generations of the Kirchoffer family remained active in



8 Detail from the Bristol cabinet, showing Publius Horatius, taken from Goltzius's *Roman Heroes* series.  
*Bristol Culture*

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert and Murdoch (1993), p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Crookshank and Glin (2003) pp. 49–66; McDonnell (1991), pp. 1–18.

<sup>6</sup> Glin and Peill (2008), pp. 140–45;

[http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/5702?search\\_no=5&index=3](http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/5702?search_no=5&index=3), last accessed 14/04/2017



9 (left) Mahogany desk-and-cabinet, Florence Court House, Co. Fermanagh. *The National Trust, Florence Court House*

10 (above) Detail of figure 9, showing marquetry decoration. *The National Trust, Florence Court House*

the Dublin furniture and timber trades, there is no evidence to link them to these desks.<sup>7</sup>

The earliest example of a marquetry warrior figure appearing on the prospect door of an Irish desk which has so far come to light is another example where the design of the figure strongly suggests a print origin. This piece of furniture, perhaps dating from about 1735–40, which appeared at auction recently in the north of England, is constructed of mahogany with oak drawer linings and white deal dust boards. The woods in the marquetry work are (probably) holly, stained holly and bog oak. (Figures 11 and 12)

Although the marquetry warrior on this desk bears a distinct similarity to another classical warrior figure within our identified group (Figure 15), we do not believe that it is the work of the same cabinet-maker. The reasons for this are, again, that close examination of its construction revealed important differences. The construction of this piece of furniture has many elements, for instance the mahogany half round mouldings used to face the thin dust boards, which characterise it as what Adam Bowett has termed a transition from ‘first’ to ‘second-phase’ construction.<sup>8</sup> On the

<sup>7</sup> Alexander (1995), p. 142.

<sup>8</sup> Bowett (2009), pp. 56–58.



11 (left) Mahogany desk-and-bookcase, c. 1735–40. *Paul Beighton Auctions*

12 (above) Detail of figure 11, showing marquetrie warrior figure on the prospect door. *Paul Beighton Auctions*

other hand, the desks in our group all have construction methods and features associated with ‘third-phase’ construction. There are other differences, the fronts of the large drawers on this piece have no moulding at all on the outer edge, where those in our group all have ovolo mouldings, overlapping on the sides and top edge but not the bottom (Figure 13). The layout of the drawers is different, particularly that of the fitted interior, and the thickness of the oak boards used in the drawer construction is also markedly different. The doors on the bookcase are fixed with iron pintles and the fall front of the desk is secured with iron hinges with a cranked axis, whereas all the desks in the group have fall fronts fitted with brass back-flap hinges. If the construction techniques of this particular piece of furniture are of an earlier date to those in our group then the overall execution of the work in this desk-and-bookcase appears to be of a higher standard. This would rule out the possible explanation of it being the work from early in the cabinet-maker’s career, as one would expect their technique to improve with time. What this piece may represent is the work of a previous generation within the same workshop, but unfortunately we have been unable to find any firm evidence for this and so must remain for the moment interesting speculation. The similarity of the marquetrie figures is more likely the result of the same print source for the design being used by both makers. This hypothesis is given weight by the fact that there is a further desk which shares little in common with either of these pieces of



13 Detail of figure 1, showing the edge mouldings on the drawer front. *National Museums Northern Ireland*



furniture which also has a marquetry figure of a classical warrior in a very similar pose (Figure 29).<sup>9</sup>

Within our identified group of desks an example where the marquetry figure is wearing a stylised classical costume, complete with greaves, sash and headgear occurs on a desk that was bought by its present owner at an auction in Belfast in the mid-1990s. Personal papers dating back to 1915 still inside one of the drawers of the desk indicate that it had belonged to a family named Tarlton from Jordanstown in Co. Antrim, close to Belfast (Figures 14 and 15). If we compare this figure to that of the one illustrated on page fifty-four of *Irish Furniture* (Figure 16), we can see that although the profile of the figure is almost identical, the detail in the latter image has altered to that of a contemporary soldier, wearing a uniform depicted in sufficient detail to make it identifiable.<sup>10</sup> This soldier, wearing a kilt, tunic and soft beret, carries both a claymore and round shield known as a targe. Under the Act of Prescription (1747), introduced following the defeat of the Jacobite forces at the battle of Culloden, the wearing of such regalia was made an offence for anyone not serving in his Majesty's forces. The marquetry figure represents a soldier in one of the Scottish regiments of the British army. In seeking to understand this difference in the two figures, it is important to ask what further possible significance the imagery might have had for the people for whom the desks were made. If the first figure represents an image within a tradition that spoke of the owner's knowledge of classical culture and architecture, then the second appears to break with this tradition in favour of an image with much more immediate military and political significance. Understood in this way it could be argued that this kilted soldier, and of course the owner of the desk, are displaying loyalty to the Crown and support for the Hanoverian cause.

The warrior figure on the prospect door of the Ulster Folk Museum desk is also shown wearing contemporary military uniform. His distinctive round mitre hat, shoulder bag and tunic are those of a 'red coat' grenadier of about 1760. He carries a

<sup>9</sup> Sotheby's London, 9 July 1999, Lot 81. Unfortunately it has not been possible to obtain a photograph of the warrior figure.

<sup>10</sup> Glin and Peill (2007), p. 54.





14 Mahogany desk. *Private collection, Belfast/ The Authors*



15 Detail of figure 14, showing the warrior figure on the prospect door. *Private collection, Belfast/ The Authors*



16 Marquetry warrior figure on the prospect door of a mahogany desk, dated 1774. Reproduced from Glinn and Peill, *Irish Furniture* (2007), fig. 55

flintlock musket fitted with a grenade launcher and across his shoulder a pouch containing his grenades.<sup>11</sup> The mitre cap was unique to the grenadiers; regular troops wore tricorne hats, but these got in the way when tossing grenades, which were thrown over-arm, hence the special hats. He is an ordinary soldier, not an officer, and it is unlikely that such a soldier could have afforded to commission a desk that commemorated his military career. A regiment would have had a company of grenadiers, about one hundred men, commanded by an officer of the rank of major; such a gentleman could have commissioned a desk. It is certainly possible that this provides the explanation for the use of such an image — that the owner was a military man with a direct relationship with the soldiers represented on the furniture.

Yet the number of these desks that have been identified suggests a broader trend rather than the special circumstances of a particular commission. Within the context of late eighteenth-century Ulster, which is when and where we believe these desks were made, a possible explanation lies in the Volunteer Movement.<sup>12</sup> From the 1760s onwards, in response to the threat of a French invasion of Ireland, a number of Volunteer regiments were established throughout the country. The first of these had been formed to protect the town of Belfast from possible attack after a small French force under the command of General Francois Thurot had captured and held the nearby town and castle of Carrickfergus for a week in 1760. Although the scale of these Volunteer regiments was modest to begin with, following the redeployment of large numbers of the regular army garrisoned in Ireland to fight in the American War of Independence (1775–83), their size and number rapidly increased in the late 1770s and throughout the early 1780s.<sup>13</sup> The real significance of these Volunteer regiments, however, was not as a military force, but rather in how they and the popular support for them were mobilized to press for political reform. Under the leadership of James Caulfield, Earl of Charlemont, the influence of the Volunteer movement was used to press for greater powers for the Irish Parliament and the parading of the regiments was used for mass political rallies.<sup>14</sup> It has been argued that the commissioning, wearing of and identification with military uniforms was a significant element of this ‘politics of appearance’.<sup>15</sup> The high point of the movement’s influence came in 1782 with their successful campaign, in conjunction with Henry Grattan and the Patriot Party, to have Poyning’s Law, which made Acts of the Irish Parliament subject to British Privy Council approval, amended. At its peak there were more than 40,000 men enrolled in Volunteer regiments, with around four hundred separate companies in Ulster. Deep divisions within the movement regarding the extent and nature of political reform, centring on the question of support for Catholic emancipation, were already evident by the time of their convention in Dungannon in 1783. In a reactionary backlash to events in France following the Revolution of 1789, the Volunteer movement was already much in decline outside Ulster, and after a regular militia was formed in Ireland following the conclusion of the American war, the Volunteers were proscribed and disbanded in 1793.

<sup>11</sup> <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-9018> last accessed 14/04/2017

<sup>12</sup> Glin and Peill state that one desk is signed and dated John Bowler May 1774 [Glin & Peill, (2007), p. 55].

<sup>13</sup> Blackstock (2000), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Maguire (1998), pp. 52–53.

<sup>15</sup> Brown (2016), pp. 354–55.



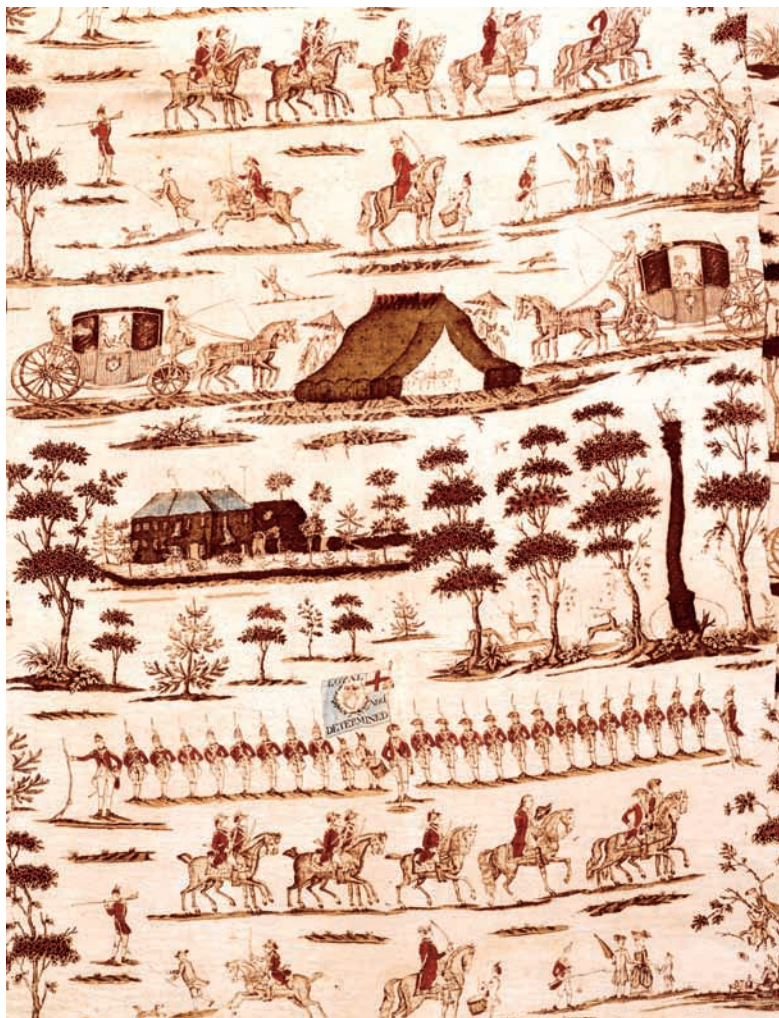
17 Irish Volunteers creamware jug.  
*Claire Magill Conservation*



18 Ballymoney Volunteers  
creamware jug and mug.  
*Ballymoney Museum*

One result of the widespread involvement of large sections of the population in the movement, including many, such as the Presbyterians in the North, who had hitherto been excluded from military or political office by the Test Act (1704), was the production of an array of commemorative artefacts. These ranged from the monumental, such as Francis Wheatley's huge canvas of the *Dublin Volunteers meeting on College Green* (1780) and the construction of a sixty-foot stone obelisk on the Castle Dillon estate in Co. Armagh, to the individual, such as the commissioning of portraits of officers in their uniforms, the production of engraved regimental medals and glassware, through to the manufacture of relatively inexpensive creamware jugs by Wedgwood (Figures 17 and 18). In relation to the marquetry figures on the desks perhaps the most interesting parallel is a range of printed chintz fabric, believed to have been designed by Gabriel Beranger and produced by the firm of Thomas Harpur of Leixlip, which





19 Volunteer  
Furniture printed  
cotton chintz  
fabric. *National  
Museums  
Northern Ireland*

was marketed under the name of ‘Volunteer Furniture’ (Figure 19).<sup>16</sup> For in this we are presented with an example of the depiction of soldiers in contemporary uniform, as a form of political expression, being used as ordinary house furnishings.

It is not so much that we are arguing that the desks can be linked to particular individuals or even regiments, but rather that the evidence provided by these other artefacts demonstrates that the convention of depicting contemporary soldiers as a political signifier existed and its meaning was understood at the time. Thus the desks worked as another means of demonstrating the owner’s political allegiance at a time in Irish history when many considered it important to do so.

In addition to the Ulster Folk Museum desk there are a further three which have marquetry figures of almost identical profile, and likewise are flanked by classical

<sup>16</sup> MacLeod (1983), pp. 1–38.





20 Mahogany desk with marquetry figure. *Victoria and Albert Museum*

columns. Of these three, the one most similar to the Ulster Folk Museum example, which again depicts a figure recognisable as a contemporary grenadier, is a desk that for many years had been in Glenveagh Castle in County Donegal. Unfortunately it is no longer there and its current whereabouts are unknown, but it is recorded both in John T. Kirk's book *American Furniture and the British Tradition to 1830*, and by a photograph held by the Victoria and Albert Museum (Figure 20).<sup>17</sup> The back of this photograph is inscribed with the name 'McIlhenny' Mr. Henry McIlhenny was a wealthy American who bought Glenveagh Castle in 1937 and who was likely to have purchased the desk as part of his refurnishing of the castle which was built in the late nineteenth century. A photograph of a desk-and-bookcase in a private collection in Ireland, that we have seen, likewise shows a marquetry grenadier of also most identical appearance on the prospect door (Figure 21). Although the form of this desk-and-bookcase appears to have been much altered, the desk's fitted interior again shares many similarities of design and construction with the Folk Museum example. Another warrior figure of matching profile appears in the interior of the only other example of a desk-and-bookcase that occurs within our identified group of furniture (Figures 22 and 23). This piece of furniture was sold recently by Dreweatts & Bloomsbury

<sup>17</sup> Kirk (1982), p. 206, fig. 610.



21 (above) Detail of a desk, showing prospect door with grenadier figure. *Private collection, Dublin/James Peill*



22 (right) Desk-and-bookcase. *Dreweatts and Bloomsbury Auctions*

23 (below) Detail of figure 22, showing the marquetry figure on the prospect door. *Dreweatts and Bloomsbury Auctions*





24 (above) Prospect door of a mahogany desk.  
*Private collection, Belfast / The Authors*

25 (right) Comparisons of the marquetry columns on two  
of the desks. *The Authors*



auctioneers in Berkshire.<sup>18</sup> The relationship between the three grenadiers and this figure appears to bear the same comparison as the relationship between the kilted soldier and classical warrior, in that although the profile and much of the detail are the same, in the latter examples the costume is stylised rather than that of a contemporary soldier. Without further research it is impossible to say if this represents an evolution in the design of this group of desks or alternative options to meet the desires of different patrons. Interestingly, however, within the group the only desk that has full width lofers, usually considered a later feature, is the classical warrior figure (Figure 14). We have also seen a desk, purchased by its current owner from an antique shop in Co. Down (reputedly from a house in the Glens of Antrim), which while sharing many of the features of those in our group, has a plain prospect door, which could either be a matter of economy or a commission for a less politically inclined customer (Figure 24). A comparison of the marquetry work of the columns of this piece with those of the classical warrior desk shows a significant similarity of design and construction (Figure 25). A desk which sold at auction recently in Los Angeles, can also be confidently identified as belonging to this group. In this example, however,

<sup>18</sup> Dreweatts (2013), Lot 146





26 Desk with false book spines in the prospect door. *Bonham's*

instead of a marquetry warrior figure the prospect door is decorated with false book spines (Figure 26). There is a further example of a mahogany desk-and-bookcase with marquetry decoration in a private collection in Belfast, illustrated in an article by Desmond Fitzgerald, that while appearing to fit our group lacks a warrior figure on the prospect door.<sup>19</sup> What does seem clear, however, is that the origin of the kilted warrior found on Irish desks was classical rather than Celtic as has sometimes been assumed.

<sup>19</sup> Fitzgerald (1997).



The Ulster Folk Museum desk is constructed from a range of timbers, the principal one being mahogany. The visible characteristics of the mahogany used for this desk, and for the others in the group that we were able to examine, suggest that it is most likely to be Honduras mahogany. In line with the wider trend described by Adam Bowett, advertisements appearing in both Dublin and Belfast newspapers during the period between 1760–80 for the sale of mahogany often identify it as Honduras.<sup>20</sup>

The secondary timbers used in the construction of the desk are oak and deal. The bulk of the oak found in the desk, used to construct all the drawer linings, is a very clean, even grained timber and is probably wood imported from the Baltic. There is some evidence to suggest that in the eighteenth century the appellation ‘Danzig’, after the principal Baltic timber port, was used in Ireland in somewhat a similar manner in which the term ‘wainscot’ was used in England, to denote a timber of superior quality to locally sourced oak. In his will of 1756 Bishop Edward Maurice left to the Ossory Diocesan Library his ‘Books and Danzig oak bookcases’.<sup>21</sup> The wood from which the dust boards and back boards of the desk are made is the variety that would have been imported under the name of fir or white deal. The most commonly mentioned origin for these at the time was the port of Memel in East Prussia, though other ports on the Baltic trade routes also supplied white deals into Ireland.<sup>22</sup>

The wood predominantly used in the marquetry work is holly, along with some small sections in oak and possibly sycamore veneer, with a combination of shading by means of scorching and staining used to achieve colour toning and contrast. In the examples that we were able to examine first hand there was no visible evidence in the marquetry work of the use of colour dyed veneers; however, the tunic of the kilted soldier in the example illustrated in *Irish Furniture* does appear to have a red hue and the possibility that the colour may have faded with time must be considered. Given what is known of the practice of using brightly coloured veneers in marquetry work, it is most likely that all our grenadiers started out with bright red coats. In addition to these more commonly employed woods, the marquetry of the desks also makes use of bog oak. Although this timber had long been associated with Ireland and was, during the Celtic revival of the nineteenth century pointedly used to signify this, its inclusion in this instance would not seem to carry these connotations.<sup>23</sup> The dimensions of the sections used means that it is not readily identifiable as bog oak and the manner of its use, in common with other examples of its use in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Irish cabinet work for banding or stringing, is fairly indistinguishable from the use of ebony. As one would expect there are records of ebony being imported into Ireland during the eighteenth century, so it was probably also the case that bog oak, as a naturally black wood, offered a readily available and less expensive alternative.<sup>24</sup> It is perhaps safest not to read too much into its use in the marquetry panels, but rather to simply take it as a good indication of their likely provincial Irish origin. Its use in the marquetry of the Ulster Folk museum and other ‘grenadier’ desks is an important

<sup>20</sup> Bowett (2012), pp. 139–41; *Belfast Newsletter*, 25–28 October 1774; *Faulkner’s Dublin Journal*, May 1774.

<sup>21</sup> Casteleyn (1984), p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 24–27 May 1774.

<sup>23</sup> Carragher (1999); Austen (1996).

<sup>24</sup> McCracken (1971), pp. 117 and 124.

indicator of their distinct nature, as it is not a material associated with the more sophisticated marquetry work of eighteenth-century Dublin cabinet-makers.

The evidence suggests, although there is nothing conclusive, that this group of desks is the output of a single cabinet-maker or workshop. We had considered the possibility that the marquetry panels were made separately and sold on to different cabinet-makers to be incorporated into pieces of furniture, but this does not seem likely for two reasons. First, the strong similarity and idiosyncrasies of the pieces of furniture are not limited to the marquetry work, but also extends to such features as drawer construction and layout, profile of arcading and mouldings. All the desks in the group have the distinctive feature of having a shallow three-quarter length drawer positioned between the lopers and above two short drawers. This was not a standard layout and seems curiously old fashioned for the time as it appears to refer back to the panel found in this location on earlier desks fitted with wells. An example of one such earlier burr yew and walnut warrior figure desk from Mount Panther in County Down, which was sold at Sotheby's, displays this arrangement (Figure 27). Unfortunately, both the



27 Burr yew and walnut desk. *Sotheby's*



28 (above) Walnut desk, dated 1756.  
*Private collection, Co. Antrim/ The Authors*

29 (right above) Detail of figure 28, showing marquetry warrior figure on the prospect door. *The Authors*

30 (right below) Detail of figure 28, showing marquetry decorated inner compartment of prospect. *The Authors*

brassware and bracket feet on the Folk Museum desk are later replacements, which although sympathetically done do not offer points of comparison with the other desks.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, we have been unable to locate similar marquetry panels on any other types of furniture, which one would expect if the maker of the desks and the marquetry panels were not the same person.

We would like to close this survey with the consideration of two further desks which, although not part of our group, do seem to bear some relationship to it, even if the nature of that relationship is not fully clear. The first of these is a walnut piece of furniture with the bulk of the carcass and drawer linings in white deal and just a small amount of oak used in the linings of the small drawers of the fitted interior. This has a marquetry figure of a warrior on the prospect door of the desk and in addition behind this door there is a simple parquetry layout of walnut, bog oak and holly above which is another small marquetry panel of a flower flanked by the initials S T and with the date 1756 beneath (Figures 28–30). Although, as previous contributors to this

<sup>25</sup> Ulster Folk Museum Conservation records, January 1973.



journal have rightly pointed out, we should be cautious about interpreting the significance of dates on items of furniture and likewise of simply assuming that pieces of walnut construction will be earlier to those of mahogany, it seems that in this case the desk predates those of our identified group by 15–25 years. The marquetry figure in this example is one of a Scottish Highland warrior dressed in a tartan outfit and armed with a claymore and studded targe, which only a few years after the Jacobite defeat at the battle of Culloden and the subsequent outlawing of the wearing of traditional tartan, would have been a politically contentious image. If this is the case then it must be accepted that we have at least one earlier example of a cabinet-maker supplying a piece of furniture that reinvented the warrior figure imagery in a way that spoke of the owner's personal political allegiances. Of course, because all the warrior figures can easily be concealed behind the fall front of the desk, the owner had easy control over the extent to which they wanted to make this a matter of personal or public display. This particular desk has belonged to the same County Antrim family for three generations and the family tradition is that it was at one time part of the furnishing of Dunlambert House on the northern outskirts of Belfast; it is very possible therefore that it was made in the north of Ireland within an Ulster Scots tradition. It



31 Desk, nineteenth century. *Private collection, Co. Antrim/ The Authors*



may even be that despite the many differences, such as the use of walnut, the carved rather than marquetry columns and the naïve nature of the marquetry figure, that this desk represents an early example of the work of the cabinet-maker responsible for the other desks in our group. If this is the case then we would also have to consider that another theme of the warrior figures could be the different forces present at the battle of Culloden and that the political significance is the conflict between supporters of the Jacobite and Hanoverian cause. This is a rivalry that has remained a constant theme of political life in Northern Ireland even to the present.

Our final example is one last desk with a marquetry soldier, which although it bears many similarities to the Ulster Folk Museum desk, in terms of the layout of the desk, the arrangement of the marquetry figure flanked by classical columns and the drawer forming a hood where the inner compartment juts out, other evidence including the materials used in its construction, the machining marks still visible on the surface of the boards and joints of the drawers, clearly point to it dating from the second half of the nineteenth century (Figures 31 and 32). The existence of this piece of furniture indicates that our original group of warrior figure desks was sufficiently well known in the nineteenth century for them to inspire revivalist copies. However, the pointed



32 Detail of figure 31, showing marquetry warrior figure on the prospect door. *The Authors*

political significance of the earlier group of desks does not appear to have been picked up or at least continued by the revivalist work, for this figure is very much in the vein of stock soldier image wearing an unidentifiable and somewhat fanciful uniform. Within a group of these later revivalist desks the soldier figure is only one of a number stock characters and motifs, others include father time and shells.

In conclusion we think that Ulster Folk Museum desk, along with the other related desks, represents an example of a cabinet-maker putting a new interpretation on the tradition of representing warrior figures on the prospect doors of desks. The purpose of this new format was to meet the demand for forms of popular political expression in Ireland from those that were either involved with the Volunteer movement or otherwise wished to display their political loyalties by means of identifying with and displaying specific military figures. It is also our belief that these desks were the output of a workshop in Counties Down or Antrim, with Belfast seeming the likeliest location, and we hope to continue our research in order to find evidence for this.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Adam Bowett and Elizabeth Davison for their helpful advice and assistance in the writing of this article. We would also wish to thank all those who supplied images or allowed us to photograph their furniture; Claire Magill, Kim Mawhinney, Siobhan Stevenson, Boyd and Norma Quiery, John Stewart, Bob Christie, James Fennell and James Peill. National Trust Florence Court House, National Museums Northern Ireland, Iveagh Bequest Kenwood House, Ballymoney Museum, Bristol Culture, Victoria and Albert Museum, Sotheby's, Dreweatts & Bloomsbury Auctions, Paul Beighton Auctions and Bonham's.

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