

## TWO BRISTOL CHESTS

An unusual opportunity has arisen to publish two late 17th century chests of drawers of similar form, each inscribed in ink on the lining of the top drawers by John Hollister, at the sign of the Star in Horsestreet, Bristol. The *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers 1660-1840* records the fact that Hollister was apprenticed to Thomas Fry, a joiner, in 1650 and was made a burgess of Bristol in 1657. He and his wife Edith took on several apprentices and appear in a rate assessment for 1690 and so were still active at that date.

The chests share a good deal in common, in their dimensions, their drawer linings of oak, the layout of their marquetry and in their mouldings, both the single bead on the carcasses round the drawers and round the top and bottom edges. The presence of a flat top and moulding on the underside, rather than the more usual ovolo moulding on the top edge, is often thought to imply a chest that originally stood on a low stand. However there seems to be no evidence to suppose this in the present case and this feature may have been a workshop practice. On the face of it there are no obvious features that differentiate either of these chests from London work, although closer inspection of secondary timbers and interesting construction might reveal variations.

The chest shown in fig 6, which is currently on the market, has panels of floral marquetry on the ebonised grounds with arched panels of conforming marquetry on the ends, set into walnut veneer, while the drawer-front panels on the other (fig. 7) show scrolled palm fronds with central flowers on walnut ground, and the ends ovals of addorsed grotesque masks in profile, set into oyster veneers, probably of cocus wood. Adam Bowett, in his *English Furniture 1660-1714*, suggests that the new style of marquetry used on the second chest was introduced in the mid-1680s, although perhaps both these examples date from around 1690, towards the end of Hollister's career.

It is clear that the inscriptions (figs. 8 & 9) are in different hands. The second chest with a less adept script, has similar inscriptions in each of its small drawers, as well as some false starts that have been hastily sanded out. A third chest is recorded (in DEFM) at Wythenshawe Hall, Manchester apparently similarly inscribed on a label. However the practice of a maker inscribing thus, whether on a label or directly on to the wood, is certainly a rare one at such an early date. The idea perhaps copied the habit of fixing printed makers' labels onto London-made pieces, although this too was very much in its infancy, one of the earliest known being on the earliest known being on the walnut scriptor by John Guilbaud of c1690-1710 now at the Geffrye Museum.



Fig 6. Width 38 inches, depth 23 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches, height 36 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches  
Courtesy of Wakelin & Linfield



Fig 7. Width 38 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches, depth 23 inches, height 35 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches  
Courtesy of Harris Lindsey



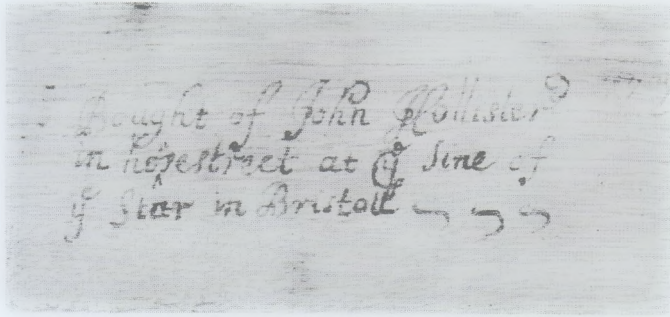


Fig. 8 Inscription on a Bristol chest (fig 6) reads 'Bought John Hollister in Horsestreet at sign of the Star in Bristol'



Fig. 9 Inscription on a Bristol chest (fig 7) reads 'Bought John Hollister at the Star in Horsestreet, Bristol'

### A BARNSTAPLE CHIFFONIER

This early 19th century mahogany chiffonier (fig. 10) is labelled by William Hutton of Barnstaple in North Devon, who is recorded by 1815 with 'cabinet and upholstery warerooms' at 93 High Street, moving in 1829 to 102 High Street. This label (fig. 11) does not specify a number.

In 1836 he advertised to sell his business on retirement, mentioning a saw pit, timber yard, drying sheds and workshops in which fifteen people were employed. The sale included about 7000 feet of mahogany, 2000 feet of birch and beech, 4 tons of rose, zebra and satin woods and 4000 feet of veneer.

A toilet mirror and a commode chest are also recorded in the *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers* as labelled by him. Hutton was clearly a furniture maker of some standing in the area and was perhaps typical of many successful makers in provincial towns, making fashionable types of furniture for the gentry at this time of considerable house-building activity.

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Fig. 10

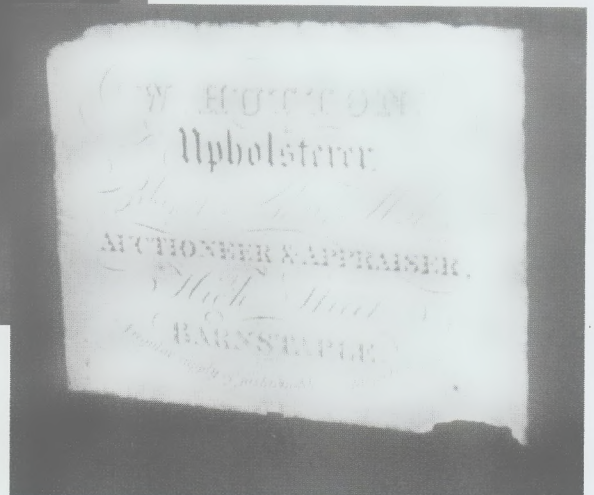


Fig. 11