

# Curiosities

By way of a postscript to Mark Westgarth's wonderful 'Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Antique and Curiosity Dealers' (*Regional Furniture*, 2009) we are publishing here two images that have recently come to our notice. One, from the Spanton Jarman photographic collection, Bury St Edmunds, shows a 19th century view of Fenton's Old Curiosity Shop in the centre of Bury St Edmunds (see Westgarth, p102), and the other, illustrated in *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, January 1929, shows an 'old' view of Ebbutt's furniture warehouse in Croydon, with accompanying text describing the history of the firm.

Thanks to the Bury Past & Present Society for permission to publish the view of Fenton's shop and to Keith Pinn for alerting us to its existence; and to Sarah Medlam and Nick Humphrey for digging out the Ebbutt image from the V&A archives.

## Two Centuries of Progress An Old Croydon firm

A very rare document for firms in the furnishing industry is that which is in the possession of Messrs Ebbutt, the well known furnishers of Croydon, whose day book for the year 1718 contains the following entry: –

"To furnishing ye Towne Hall with Cocoanut Fibre Matting and Benches for ye Assizes and ye Judges of his most gracious Majesty the King."

It is believed that the firm is the oldest in Croydon. A wood-cut in their possession showing the original premises is very interesting, in fact grotesque. Mr. Ebbutt has in his private office an indenture of apprenticeship for an ancestor of his, Mr John Ebbutt, dated November 10th in the forty-first year of the reign of our Sovereign the late King George III.

The firm's development has coincided with the development of Croydon. They have furnished several of the notable premises and institutions of the district, such as the Gas Company's offices, built in Katharine Street, and Addington Palace for the Archbishop of Canterbury. The up-to-date stocks and styles of furniture were illustrated in the Croydon Home Life Exhibition held lately at the Public Halls, which was such a marked success, and their exhibit was greatly admired.

They have developed in their removal and warehousing departments equally with the furnishing. The vast depositories in the main road are their own property and no expense has been spared in providing every convenience and up-to-date method for the storage and safe custody of all classes of goods.

Mr Ebbutt remembers the introduction of the first pantehnicon removal vans which at the time caused

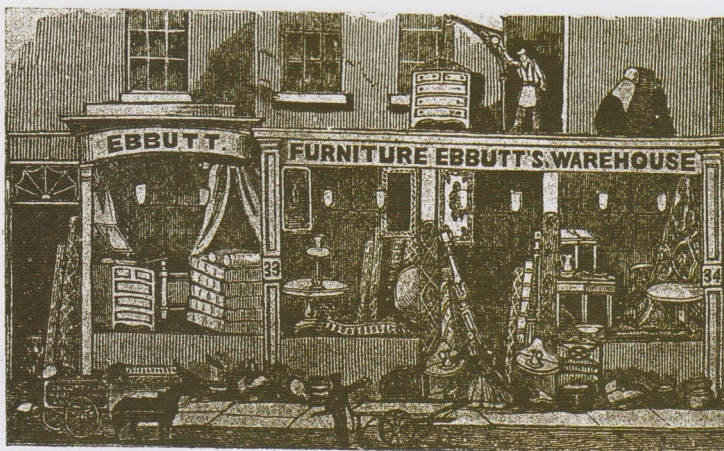
quite a sensation. These, of course, are now superseded by the present-day motor pantehnicons.

Mr Ebbutt's son, Mr H. Bertram Ebbutt, is responsible for the development of the modern business, and his knowledge of the furnishing trade, both in its artistic and purely utilitarian sides is extensive.

In commemoration of their two centuries of progress the firm recently put before the public, in their windows, furniture and furnishings of the time of King George I, dated 1718, and new contrasts showing their progress and development to the present moment and illustrating some of the newest productions of the cabinet maker's art.



The front of Fenton's Old Curiosity Shop, Bury St Edmunds, late 19th century



'Ebbutt's as it used to be. A quaint woodcut showing the old premises of the firm at Croydon'