

A Secrétaire Bookcase Made in Kendal, 1872

The imposing secrétaire bookcase in Fig. 1 was bought earlier this year at an auction near Charlottesville, Virginia, USA. Its central section includes a detailed representation of the parish church of the Holy Trinity, Kendal, Westmorland, and the date 1872 is carved into the front of the top centre drawer.

When the bookcase was first sold at Sotheby's, London, in 1987, the auctioneer stated that the piece was 'believed to have been made by Joseph Rowand as a wedding present for his daughter at a cost of £150 in materials in 1872'.¹ However, the imposing size, ambitious design and

technical complexity of the bookcase is suggestive of an exhibition piece, and the date coincides with the Kendal and District Industrial Exhibition of 1872. Consequently, the present owner enlisted the help of the Cumbria Family History Society to discover if there was any link, and one of their researchers came across the following report of the exhibition in the *Lancaster Gazette* of 10 August 1872:

This exhibition, which has been in course of projection for the last twelve months, was opened on Thursday last under very favourable auspices ... The exhibition embraces in its scope the whole of the county of



Fig. 1 A secretaire bookcase made in Kendal, dated 1872

Westmorland, and those portions of the counties of Cumberland and Lancashire, which include Penrith and Keswick, Lancaster and Ulverstone, Kendal being the centre. The more remote districts furnish a considerable proportion of the competitors – as large a proportion as could reasonably be expected; indeed some of the best articles are those of competitors from a distance. From the catalogues we learn that, including the non-commissioned objects, there are no fewer than 913 entries, representing 303 exhibitors – 160 male and 142 female. There are, in the general section, 55 classes, including extra classes; and the ladies section comprises 23 classes, including seven for children. . .

In the room marked Class Room No. 1 we meet with a very attractive display. The classes for carved and inlaid work, cabinet-making, and carving in wood comprise an admirable collection of rare artistic productions, notably a massive and elaborately-carved cabinet *escritoir*, made by Joseph Rowand, workman to Mr. Hastwell . . . [my italics].

Could this be the same cabinet? Furthermore, who was Joseph Rowand?

Further research has uncovered the following information: Joseph Hodgson Rowand was born in Kendal, probably in December 1837. He was the son of John Irwin Rowand and Elizabeth Hodgson, who married on 22 December 1822. In the 1841 census John Rowand was listed as a hairdresser, aged thirty-five, with wife Elizabeth and six children: William (14, apprentice weaver), Ann (12), John (10), Elizabeth (8), Anthony (6) and Joseph (3). Ten years later John Jnr, aged twenty and still living at home, was a cabinet-maker's apprentice while Joseph, aged twelve, was an errand boy. John Jnr died in April 1851, shortly after the census was taken. It was perhaps this event that allowed his younger brother Joseph to take up an apprenticeship a few years later and himself become a cabinet-maker and if so, he would have served out his apprenticeship by 1860 or 1861.

Joseph Rowand's employer in Kendal was the cabinet-maker George Hastwell. Although Hastwell was probably born in Westmorland, he had worked for some time in London before setting up in Kendal. His reason for doing so was probably his marriage in December 1856 to Margaret Jones. The event was recorded in the *Kendal Mercury*: 'At our Parish Church, on Wednesday last, by the Rev. J. W. Barnes, vicar, Mr. George Hastwell, of London, to Margaret, eldest daughter of the Rev. David Jones, of this town'.

In April 1861 Hastwell set up business in Kendal market place, as advertised in the *Kendal Mercury* of 23 March 1861:

FURNITURE, OF EVERY DESCRIPTION. AT LONDON PRICES. GEORGE HASTWELL (From London) HAVING taken Premises in the MARKET PLACE, KENDAL, will Open them in April, with a large and well selected [illegible] of CABINET FURNITURE, BEDSTEADS, BEDDING, PAPER HANGINGS . . .

Another advertisement of 30 May 1863 described Hastwell as a cabinet maker, upholsterer and general house furnisher who 'BEGS to call the attention of Persons Furnishing to his large and well-seasoned Stock of CABINET FURNITURE, BEDSTEADS, BEDDING, DAMASKS, CARPETS, FLOOR CLOTHS . . .'. There are a number of others in a similar vein. It seems Hastwell operated a sizable cabinet-making business in Kendal and probably employed a number of craftsmen, one of whom was Joseph Rowand. When he died in July 1895 George Hastwell 'of Sandes Avenue, Kendal, Westmorland' was described as a retired cabinetmaker. His will was probated on 26 October 1895 and his estate was valued at £630 12s 10d.

For Joseph Rowand, the 1872 Exhibition probably represented the pinnacle of his professional career, as well as perhaps the high point of his personal life. In autumn 1874 a newborn daughter died, followed in December by his wife Hannah and son Joseph. His son John, aged six, died in spring of 1875 and Joseph himself died in June 1877. The bookcase presumably descended in either Rowand's or Hastwell's family, but that story has yet to be uncovered.

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1 Sothebys' New Bond Street, 10 July 1987, lot 133; the bookcase is currently with Beck's Antiques, Fredericksburg, Virginia.