

ENGLISH VERNACULAR FURNITURE 1750 -1900
by Christopher Gilbert 1991
Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British
Art. Available from Yale University Press, 23, Pond Street,
London NW3 2PN

INDEX TO THE DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH
FURNITURE MAKERS 1660 - 1840 - published for the
F.H.S. by W.S. Maney and Son of Leeds, 1990.
Available from Dr. Brian Austen, I Mercedes Cottages
St. John's Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 4EH

OLD FURNITURE, UNDERSTANDING THE
CRAFTSMAN'S ART (2nd Revised Edition)
by Nancy A. Smith
Dover Publications, 31 East 2nd Street, Mineola,
New York 11501

PICTORIAL DICTIONARY OF BRITISH 18TH CENTURY
FURNITURE DESIGN compiled by Elizabeth White, 1990
Published by the Antique Collector's Club Ltd.
5, Church Street, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 1DS

BOOK REVIEW

THE TRADITIONAL FURNITURE MAKER
by David Bryant 1990
(305 x 215mm. iv + 219pp.) Published by Batsford,
U.K. Price 19.95

David Bryant's new book is a collection of thirty
traditional pieces of furniture splendidly drawn in
full detail, with back-up photographs and, notably,
full cutting-lists and details of fittings, etc. They are
all taken from pieces in country houses, and the text
is amplified by photographs and historical
notes of their places of origin, so that they can be
studied in situ by the intending furniture-maker.

The range of furniture chosen is comprehensive in
type and period, from a planked chest in
Gawsworth Hall, Cheshire, to a 19th C Rosewood
Centre-table at Arley. David Bryant says in his
preface "....it has been assumed that the craftsman
woodworker has acquired the necessary skills, eg.
joinery, marquetry, wood turning, and so on", and
the constructional notes on each piece are confined
to advice on the order of work and special details
where necessary.

The complexity of the designs ranges from fairly
simple to very complex, so the level of special
advice needed for the more specialised items poses
a problem. I feel that he sometimes omits useful
techniques; for example, he makes no mention of
lamination, which would be historically correct for a

fretwork gallery (Mahogany Silver-table no 6) and
for the edges of the tray (no.12) which in my
experience are always built up from at least three
veneers; anyone who has had to repair the curved
rails of quartetto tables will approve the idea of
laminations to avoid the problems of short grain
when making them (no.15). Again, "paper joints"
are the best method of glueing down thin wood for
cutting out blind frets (the Silver-table again) and
particularly so for making quartered split-turnings
to produce the ribbed mouldings applied to the
Centre table (no.30). If the Whatnot (no.9) is French
polished, as he suggests, this is best done before
final assembly, to avoid working into corners - and
so on, but it would be easy also to exceed the
amount of instruction which it is practical to
include.

His terminology sometimes seems strange, such as
"spigot" for dowel, "swivel flap" for fly-bracket
and "bow-tie pieces" for dovetail keys. The term
"Sausage Chair" stretches terminology too far.

Seriously, none of these faults detracts from the
clarity of David Bryant's work, nor from the
sustained enthusiasm which has provided us with
such a varied and detailed range of pieces to make.
The problems that the aspiring furniture-maker
will encounter are the age-old ones of stability,
particularly in these days of quick-dried, plain-cut
wood. The historically minded student may like to
consult Sheraton's "Cabinet Dictionary", entry for
"Card Tables", where he discusses the problems of
keeping unsupported leaves flat, and conceives the
idea of plywood, which may or may not make us
feel justified in using the modern material for the
drop-leaves of a Pembroke table (no.16) and
Mahogany dining-table (no.19)

Perhaps the greatest value of this book is that by
offering us designs that will stretch our capabilities,
it draws us into the sort of authentic problem-
solving which is the key to understanding the
construction of old furniture. It will send us back to
originals to see for ourselves, and to experienced
colleagues for instruction and advice.
It sets standards too for students who wish to make
their own studies of old pieces and if the generosity
of the many owners and curators who have allowed
David Bryant to study their pieces is anything to go
by, it will send them out into our country houses
and museums to see it all for themselves. It is a
book that should be in every college workshop.

Luke Millar