

JOHN M WHELAN

THE WOODEN PLANE: ITS HISTORY, FORM AND FUNCTION

With over 1,000 illustrations by the author, Nov.1993
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illustrations, 90 simple and 300 complex line drawings
of mouldings, £27.50 net

If the reader has ever examined a woodwork detail and asked the question 'How did the craftsman produce that?', this book could provide the answer.

The scope of Whelan's book is huge and with over 1,000 of his own illustrations he describes and classifies wooden planes from the common to the rare and unusual. He traces their development and explains their uses. Included are not only American and English planes, but also French, Dutch, German, Japanese and Chinese. He sets out to examine planes used by trades other than cabinet-makers, carpenters and joiners and includes coopers, coachbuilders and wheelwrights amongst others. Tools, which may not be termed planes in the strictest sense of the word such as scrapers, shaves and routers are also covered in detail.

The waving engine described by Moxon in his *Mechanick Exercises* (1703)* and an example of a machine of similar design used to produce straight mouldings dated 1565 also find a place. Interestingly for the reviewer (who has faced the conundrum recently) a modification of this type of machine was used to cover wooden mouldings with a thin layer of brass so typical of French furniture.

Before describing and illustrating nearly four hundred moulding profiles the author introduces the reader to the elements of architecture, a fundamental subject that is all too often overlooked by modern furniture history students and perhaps could have been more fully explored.

The Appendixes contain an extremely well written chapter on the cutting action of planes with a very lucid explanation of the advantages to be gained by 'spring' and 'skew' angles. This will undoubtedly appeal to the practical reader who is fortunate enough to use such tools for the purpose for which they were intended. The book has been organised into sections that are written to stand on their own without reliance on material found elsewhere. Though this means some repetition, it makes the book more useful as a work of reference.

RFS readers may find the five glossaries in (English, English/French, English/Dutch, English/German, and English/Japanese) a trifle excessive. This, no doubt reflects the many cultural influences on the other side of the Atlantic and the burgeoning interest in Japanese craftsmanship, tools and accompanying ethos over the past decade in the USA. The system the author has devised for naming and classifying moulding profiles and identification based on physical shape may prove of use to collectors and curators. However, the book's greatest appeal is to the restorer of historic buildings and furniture and all those whose study begins with the craftsman and his method.

Colin Piper