

GILLOW FURNITURE DESIGNS 1760-1800

edited and introduced by Lindsay Boynton.

The Bloomfield Press, 1995.

This is a curious book. Curious, because it is difficult to understand why it was published. The introductory essays are useful for those new to the Gillow archive, and contain summaries of the firm's history, its clientele, and its designs. The chief purpose of these essays seems less to inform than to warn. In twenty-three pages there are four minatory references to 'my forthcoming monograph'. This monograph has been expected for thirty years, and as a consequence other scholars have largely steered clear of Gillow. Due to Dr Boynton's untimely death the monograph will not now appear, and others must begin the task anew.

The bulk of the book consists of more than three hundred illustrations, including thirty or so from the marvellous colour book. These we can all enjoy. The quality of reproduction is good, and on the whole the illustrations are large enough to reveal minor but significant detail. Individually and *en masse* they convey something of the richness and the promise of the Gillow archive. Auction catalogues are already appearing, laced with tenuous Gillow attributions made on the basis of a faint resemblance to one or other design in this book. This was entirely predictable, and it does not advance furniture scholarship.

The second half of the book contains three indices - of workmen, furniture types, and the name of client or the customer relative to specific properties, compiled by the late G.F. Osborn at Westminster City Archives. The indices are far from complete, and are therefore of doubtful value. Dr Boynton will have known this, and it is difficult therefore to understand his reasons for publishing them.

The Gillow archive is the most important furniture history source in existence. Its scale, richness and diversity are such that half a dozen monographs would not exhaust its potential. Gillow is a challenge; let us hope that furniture historians are equal to it.

Copies of Lindsay Boynton's book are available from 'The Art and Antiques Service', Scales Barn, 1 Pearces Yard, Grantchester, Cambridge CB3 9NZ. Telephone 01223 846699 (Karen Stark).

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