

1.0 Abandoned Furniture on the island of Stroma by Professor Bill Cotton

Professor Cotton opened the programme for the day with an account of fieldwork carried out on the abandoned island of Stroma in August 1966.

He started by reminding members of the stages in his career which ultimately led to the study of regional furniture and the recognition that there was no systematic taxonomy to give coherence and respectability to the subject as a field for serious study. Such a taxonomy had only emerged from trawling through furniture collections and archives and from practical fieldwork. He praised the work of the Society in helping to achieve this goal.

And so to Stroma! The island is 2½ miles long from north to south by 1 mile wide from east to west. It lies 2½ miles north of John o' Groats in the Pentland Firth. Its name derives from the Norse 'Straumsey' - the island in the stream or current. Intermittent records exist from 1014 and more continuous ones from the early 17th. century. Parish, church and school records give vivid descriptions of life on the island. In 1914 there were 300 people on the island. By 1957 this number had reduced to 45 and the last family left in 1961 leaving Stroma 'abandoned to its memories'. They left behind 71 cottages, a church and manse, a chapel, a school, a cemetery, a mausoleum dated 1677, a lighthouse and the harbour.

Professor Cotton was first made aware of the potential of Stroma for furniture research in 1978 by Elizabeth Beaton, then chairman of the Scottish Vernacular Architecture Group, who sent him slides of cottage interiors following a visit by the Group to survey the buildings. It was not until August 1996 that the team (Bill, Gerry and Gerald) set sail from the mainland aboard the converted trawler 'Stalker' with the present owner of the island Mr. Jimmy Simpson. Mr. Simpson was born on Stroma, at Stroma Mains, and now uses the deserted island for grazing sheep and cattle. •

The team established its base in the former Nurse's cottage. There being no lighting, they went to bed at sunset and woke at sunrise. A wheelbarrow was the only means of transportation. The first task was to visit all the cottages to assess the contents and their condition. They found two distinct groups. One, the remains of 18th century cottages with thatched roofs; the other, substantial 19th century stone built cottages with flagged roofs. In some cases, the one was butted onto the other; in others, the older cottages had become outbuildings. The older cottages had hearth stones not fireplaces.

Since depopulation, all the exterior doors have been removed from the cottages and some of the furniture thrown outside to enable the sheep to shelter inside in bad weather. Much of the remaining furniture is, therefore, buried in sheep droppings to a depth of 2 feet.

The furniture they found consisted of box beds of a type peculiar to the island, dressers, tables, and a variety of chairs including a Shetland chair and chairs stamped 'John Taylor of Edinburgh'. Wall cladding and built-in racks, shelves and cupboards completed the interior furnishings. Much of the

wall cladding and many of the box beds were painted and decorated with stencilled patterns. The condition varied from derelict to good. Some of the cottages had beds in the roof space which were accessed by a ladder. The matched boarding for the interior woodwork had obviously been imported. Some of the better quality furniture had also been imported but most appeared to have been made on the island. Since the island was abandoned, furniture and interior woodwork have been used for firewood.

The small team had to be selective. The best pieces of furniture were removed from the cottages, washed down and photographed in makeshift studios. They were then moved into the church, which is now a garage, for safe keeping pending their possible removal to a heritage museum - ideally the British Regional Furniture Study Centre at High Wycombe.

Gerald Cole

2.0 Shetland Furniture by Cecil Tait

As part of his research for a dissertation paper, Cecil had collected many pictures of furniture from different Museums as well as from many homes in the Shetlands.

Prominent in the Shetlands Islands is the small boarded stool, with a hole in the top, called a 'creepie'. The creepie is simply constructed of sawn boards nailed or doweled together to form the seat, legs and strengthening side aprons. Shapes cut out of the vertical end boards define the legs. We were introduced to interesting features such as the sharl and harl hinges used on doorways and the special snib mechanisms on the built-in press cupboards. The most flexible type of seating was the long seat or settle, on which several people could be seated in the daytime and one person could sleep on at night. Such settles, called a 'langedse', are deep from front to back with an open framework of back and arms.

The early boarded chairs from Shetland were usually made with conventional joints and shared certain decorative features with other Scottish chairmaking traditions. Bearing in mind the Shetlands were part of Denmark until the mid 15th century, their strong historical links probably explain the similarities between furniture from both areas. An example of the Scandinavian influence, still persisting in the late 18th century, is to be found in the carved volutes forming a part of the horizontal back rails of such chairs. Such features were an integral part of the oak frame-work which enclosed pine panels.

Another important tradition, which continued into the 20th century, is the making of Shetland chairs incorporating a tapered chair back woven out of oat-straw attached to the extended wooden seat frame. To take account of the ergonomic necessities of the knitters of Shetland, set back arms were used as one of the basic design options. By contrast the Orkney chair used a more elaborate seat frame enclosing panels in the substructure.

Other interesting articles of furniture included a baby's bed (with adjustable sides to accommodate growth) and a low stool made of whale vertebrae.

An awareness of the Scandinavian influence brought extra interest to our evaluation and understanding of artifacts and vernacular furniture from the Shetlands.

Monica Broscatan

3.0 A New Chronology for English Veneered Walnut Furniture by Adam Bowett

Adam Bowett has been concerned for some time about the accepted dating of veneered walnut case furniture.

Christopher Gilbert's recent book 'Marked London Furniture' shows much labelled walnut furniture by known makers, including some dated pieces. This evidence suggests that the usually accepted dates are too early by as much as 10 or 20 years, and Adam has set out a new chronology based on firmly dated examples of walnut case furniture.

The construction of drawers and carcasses followed a well defined progression, determined by functionality, economy and speed of construction. Drawers were at first constructed with flush bottoms running directly on the dustboard. Later (after about 1700), they were given nailed-up bottoms with runners added, and in the 1720s the raised bottom with rebated runner was introduced. The dovetailing of drawers also changed, with the standard through-dovetails being gradually replaced after about 1710 with lapped ones.

Between c.1670 and 1735 all veneered carcasses had thick sides and thin rails or dustboards. The rails, nominally 1/2" thick, had half round mouldings as standard until well after 1700. From around 1700 the double half-round moulding was also used, and by about 1730 the trenched double-bead. Cockbeading and ovolo drawer mouldings cannot be dated much earlier than 1730 - the earliest known example of the former is on a cabinet signed and dated 'Antrobus fecit 1730'. From about 1700 the dustboard tended to become thinner, behind a 1/2" front rail, but the thick railed carcass was not introduced until about 1735.

Bun feet were still the norm in the 1720s, although the Miller desk and bookcase of 1724 had buns dowelled into brackets. The Antrobus cabinet of 1730 is the first dated example with original bracket feet. At about this time new styles of handle and backplate were introduced with the change from split pin to threaded bolt and nut fixings.

Adam suggested that some of this chronology can be corroborated by reference to contemporary longcase clocks which, unlike most furniture, can be accurately dated by their movements. If the new chronology is correct, then the mismatch in dating between furniture and clock design no longer occurs. However, there is much more work to be done and we look forward to seeing the results in his forthcoming book on English Furniture 1660-1714.

Dr G. Freeman

4.0 S. J. Waring & Sons by Elly Macbeath

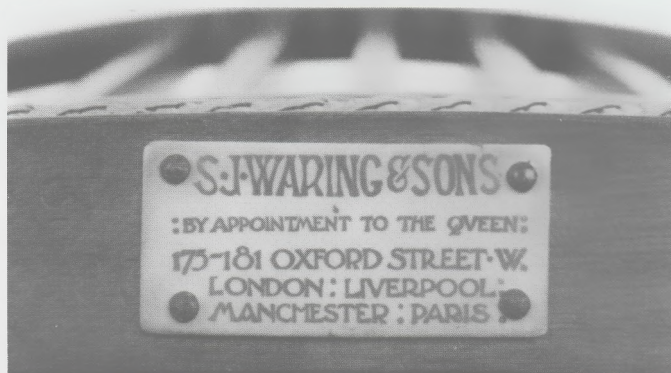


Fig. 11

Our speaker had set out to discover the origins of the name Waring which is not only used on the late 19th century labels of S. J. Waring Ltd but in association with Gillows during the 20th century. Another aspect of this study was to trace the entrepreneurial activity of such families that could accumulate a working capital of £1m by the time of the Triple Alliance in 1897.

To date, two labels, one copper with black lettering on white enamel and one plastic attached to furniture have been identified with the following captions.

'S. J. Waring & Sons Ltd
Cabinet Maker & Upholsterer to H. M. Queen
Bold Street, Liverpool

and

S. J. Waring & Sons
By Appointment to the Queen
171-181 Oxford Street W
London, Liverpool, Manchester, Paris (fig.11)

The Waring family can be traced back to their Nordic and Irish origins and more specifically to John Waring and his eldest son William (1619-1703). In 1658 William Waring bought the Clanconnel estate and subsequently built Waringstown House in 1667/68 and the parish church. His 6th son by his second marriage to Jane Close was named Samuel of Downpatrick and Lisburn. John Moore Johnson Waring (b.1805), son of Samuel, moved to Liverpool in 1835. By the time of his death in 1866 he had established a wholesale cabinetmaking firm at 65 Upper Beau Street, Everton. His son, Samuel James, born 1838, established his own cabinetmaking works in St Anne Street, a fashionable area of Liverpool at the time. In 1881 S. J. Waring acquired R. Anderson and Sons of Bold Street, Liverpool where he established showrooms to display his products and objets d'arts sourced globally. In 1886, the firm was awarded the Gold Medal for Artistic Furniture at an International Exhibition held in Liverpool and opened by Queen Victoria.

By 1893, Waring had established showrooms in London and in 1897 the 'Triple Alliance' was formed between Waring, Gillows, Collinson and Locke. In 1907, S. J. Waring died and was remembered in the Liverpool Courier and the Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury as a distinguished Liverpool businessman.

Investigations continue into furniture made by the firm of S. J. Waring. It is known that the firm fitted out Newsham House in Liverpool, prior to the visit of Queen Victoria in 1886.

John Boram

5.0 Investigating upholstery with a borescope

by Peter Brewer

Peter introduced us to a new method of inspecting and recording upholstery techniques and construction. He emphasised that such investigations may be limited by conflicting study objectives whilst preserving the object. Furthermore, access to furniture is only appropriate if one is able to demonstrate that damage is not to be inflicted.

The borescope

The borescope is an instrument that allows the user to view inside an object. It uses fibre optic light-guides for illumination and to take the inside image to the eyepiece of the instrument. There are many variants and most people are familiar with the endoscope, which is used by the medical profession for internal examinations and 'keyhole' surgery. They often use a flexible endoscope in conjunction with a CCTV monitor and tiny instruments that can be fed down the same tube. This was the basis of the first trial but was rejected as the flexible shaft could not take the sharp turns and was not strong enough to force its way into the upholstery stuffing materials. The borescope was developed in engineering for use in inspecting voids, in buildings, jet engines, etc. The lens is mounted near one end of a stainless steel tube and the other end has a handle and viewer. The light source is plugged into the handle.

The tip and shaft.

The length and diameter of the borescope can vary considerably. The stainless steel tube casing is completely sealed and waterproof. The centre contains the fibre optic strands that transmit light down their length with very little light loss. The central grouping is concentric which ensures that the image is faithfully reported at the other end! It is like looking down a series of minute telescopes grouped together. Around this another set of fibre optics transmit light to the tip to illuminate the scene. A 6mm tube was chosen as this gave good output; with a size that can be worked safely into upholstery and without bending the tube. A shaft length of 320mm was selected to providing the maximum depth into the upholstery without the instrument becoming too unwieldy.

The configuration of the tip is such that it has a rounded end and the light output is below the lens. The lens is angled at 45 degrees. The tube can be rotated through 370 degrees which gives a wide field of view (fig. 12). It can focus from infinity to within 5mm of the lens; at this point the magnification is 8X. The shaft is secured to the handle with the rotation collar at the front. The eyepiece is at the back with a focus control in front. In the base of the handle there is a socket to take the fibre optic light-guide cable that provides the light.

The light source.

The flexible light-guide cable is attached to the light source. This has a tungsten lamp with a shutter that allows you to vary the amount of light emitted at the working end of the borescope.

A dedicated camera was fitted onto the viewer to record the image. The limitations of the camera compared with the quality of our eye are graphically highlighted. The sensitivity of the

equipment to the slightest movement and exposure time (anything up to a minute), combined with severe depth of field limitations, means that the photo image seems indifferent when compared with the stunning view by eye.

The borescope can aid furniture analysis in a variety of ways and the following case studies demonstrate the type of results obtainable.

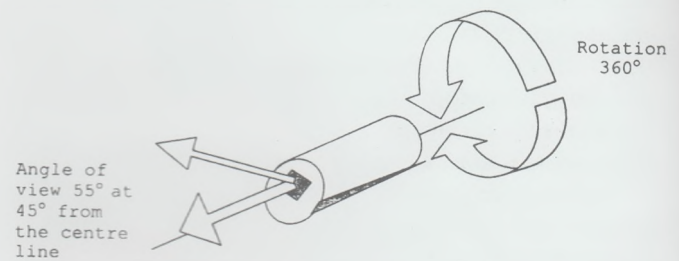


Fig. 12 Angle of view from tip of rotation

Chamber horses. An important part of my study is to map the evolution of upholstery systems and the coil spring plays an important part.

It is well recognised that first evidence of the use of springs in furniture is to be found in exercising chairs or 'Chamber horses' in which boards separate three or four layers of springs. Usually they are covered in leather and have a padded seat. The springs are often intact and provide an informative resource. The borescope is easily inserted through the vents cut into the leather.

The Brighton Couch. Brighton Pavilion recently purchased a couch with a brand on the underside probably from Buckingham Palace. Research is ongoing but it is likely to be one of a pair of couches noted as being at the Pavilion prior to being sent to Buckingham Palace. The initial assessment is that the top cover is modern twentieth-century and poorly applied, the seat platform and arm upholstery are probably replacements. The back panel may have some original elements. My role was to investigate using the borescope to provide detail that would assist with the analysis. The brief was to keep invasion to the minimum (e.g. no tack or staple was lifted).

Brief outline of the findings; From underneath I was able to work the borescope next to the webs and found the evidence of tack holes from at least one earlier set of webs. The moveable arm, which allows the couch to be right or left handed, is located by pins and then secured by a bolt. The borescope was used to record the inside of the holes revealing several details. The provision to move the arm had not been used as the inside of the guide bush on one side showed wear and thread marks whilst the unused side did not. By comparing the two borescope photos one can see that the thread marks made by the bolt in the first one are absent in the second (figs 13 and 14).

The 'finger' clearly seen in the second photo is a modern staple and gives an indication of the magnification. The existence of a threaded metal insert indicated that the current location pins were not the originals, though they had been on the couch for a long time.

Figure 15 is a borescope photo of a spring in situ.

Figure 16 shows mixed hair and gives an idea of the magnification when close up.

These examples illustrate the type of information that can be obtained using the borescope; it replaces none of the current investigation processes but does add another. The study of upholstery construction will clearly be advanced and should, in time, help us to elevate this sadly neglected area of furniture studies.

Further to my recent request for assistance I would welcome any help, access to furniture, samples, photographs, etc.

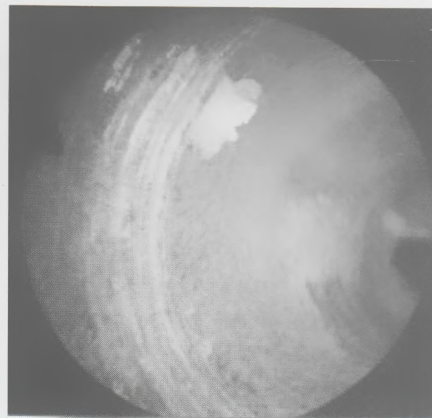


Fig. 13

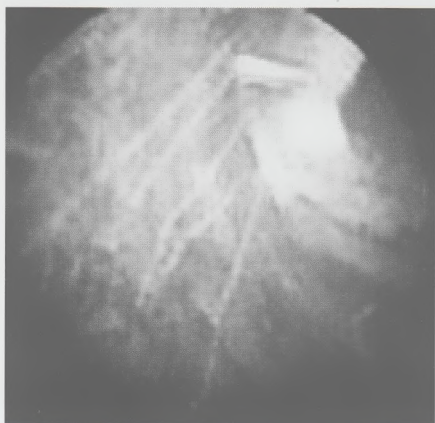


Fig. 14

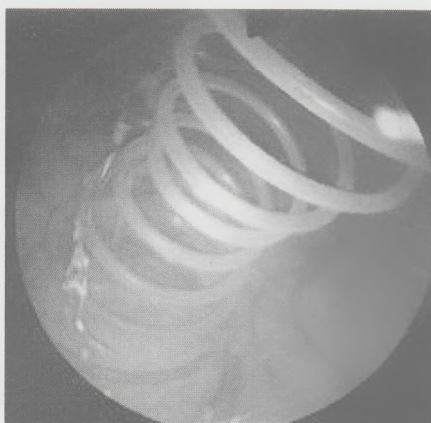


Fig. 15



Fig. 16

6.0 Northern Forms: The Scots in America by Mary Ann Apicella

Mary Ann Apicella, a scholar of decorative art from New York, and a collector of New York Federal period furniture for some 20 years presented a resumé of her research-in-progress into the influence of immigrant Scots on the Northern forms of American furniture. Her interest in this particular topic was instigated by observing furniture in London salerooms that appeared to possess Federal New York design elements but were in fact Scottish in origin. Geographically, this research is focussing on the known Scottish colonies in Canada and in the states of the Eastern seaboard of the USA, from 1780 to 1820. The research has so far highlighted comparative design features in the longcase clock, the chest of drawers, sideboard, several chair types, and the pattern of glazing bars on breakfront bookcases. All forms were illustrated with a variety of examples which were as recorded and photographed by the author. Comparison was drawn between the East Coast Scottish longcase clocks typically with a divided trunk, and those of late 18thC New York, New Jersey, Vermont and Canada, all of which are linked to Scottish settlements. For example, the late 17thC had seen an influx of emigree Scottish Covenanters and Quakers into New Jersey. The population of New Hampshire in the late 18th century was one fifth Scots and Irish, and of the 28 cabinet makers in Charleston, S. Carolina between 1785-1820, half were Scots. After 1784, many Scots migrated into New York city: Anderson, Bell, Black, Ferguson and

Cruikshank are a few of the names found, many listed as gilders or turners, and who would have brought decorative ideas, and influenced forms. One such is the chest of drawers with an oversized upper drawer with 2 or 3 small drawers above. The 18thC Scottish preference was for a chest with 3 small drawers at the top and two deep drawers side by side immediately below them, whereas the New York version had a single long deep drawer, typically finished in very dark mahogany and decorative veneer. Vermont had a similar popular form dated to the 1850s. Variations on the deep upper drawer are found in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and in Canada. A deep apron with a rectangular dropped panel is common to both Scottish and New York chests and is a major feature of New Hampshire furniture of the Federal period. A characteristically 19thC Scottish-style lum chest with single large rectangular top drawer set with two small drawers either side, had light stringing with dark figured veneer and all the secondary woods in it were American. An early example of a lum chest from 1760s Connecticut begs a similar early example from Scotland. Both Scots and Virginian sideboards were shown to use inlay in a characteristic cup and dot motif, and the Scottish staged sideboard was adopted by the Charleston cabinetmakers. This talk reflected on work very much in progress, with a lot of material still being processed, but it would appear that the pools of immigrant Scots cabinetmakers could be a reason for the highly regionalised nature of East Coast American Federal period furniture.

Margaret Roberts

7.0 Spinning wheels by Alan Raistrick

Alan attributes his interest in textile machinery to his own family's involvement in the worsted textile trade in the West Riding of Yorkshire and more recently to Bill Cotton's references to Manx Wheels and the Callister family of spinning wheel makers in the Catalogue of the Manx Museum Furniture Collection.

Based upon an in depth appraisal of over twenty 19th century spinning wheels from the collection of the Manx Museum, he has developed a computerised data base and programme to cross reference up to 200 specific components or details of construction (e.g. timbers used, turning features, number of spokes, dowel points, cross sections of rims, profile characteristics of the stock, surface finish).

His description of just a few case studies quickly enlightened us as to the relevance of his approach and its potential application in the longer term to furniture history research. One such study which was discussed in some detail, related to a reassembled spinning wheel (made by a member of the Callister family) comprising components made entirely out of bog oak. The legs, stock and distaff were intact and readily fitted together. The remaining loose pieces were photographed and reassembled into the drive wheel using a computer graphics program.

It was interesting to note that the drive wheel was constructed quite differently to a wheelwright's cartwheel, even though there was a tradition of wheelwrighting in the family. The drive rim (47cm outside diameter) comprised four flat segmented pieces. The jointing of the segments, using two dowels, may prove to be a useful diagnostic aid to wheel identification.

A lively discussion followed this lecture including a transitory slide-show of transparencies by David Bryant who introduced his systematic regional survey of traditions of spinning wheel manufacture throughout Britain, based upon an appraisal of provenanced and name stamped spinning wheels.

In the future we will be informed of progress and the developments resulting from these research exercises, especially with regard to his use of computer cluster analysis techniques.

J. Boram

8.0 Painting the Regional Interior: Artistic Licence and Ideological Constraints by Adrian Bland

Adrian's PhD research has so far located an astounding 2,000 images of nineteenth century regional interiors which he estimates are only the tip of the iceberg. Before we all rush out to start analysing the furniture in these paintings, however, he warns that we should exercise extreme caution in treating them as historical documents. We should know the contexts in which the pictures were painted, the significance of artistic convention, ideology, and the expectations of consumers.

David Wilkie set the example for rural genre painting throughout the nineteenth century. The fact that he kept detailed journals makes him a suitable case study for contextualisation. Although he painted humble interiors and came himself from lowly origins, he became a financially successful artist who moved in fashionable circles. His paintings represent a sanitised version of rural life which was bought by middle class consumers.

Wilkie's journal of his painting 'The Cut Finger' (1808-9) describes the development of the composition over a period of nine months. During this time, he substituted a window for a door, added various utensils, and ornaments to the ceiling in order to make the composition more interesting. The painting is not, as it appears to be, the interior of a specific cottage, rather it is an artistic construction.

The type of work that the influential *Art Journal* critics liked and encouraged was that which reminded them of their own rural boyhoods. It was likely therefore that much of the furniture in these paintings was selected for its picturesque and old fashioned appearance, rather than being necessarily authentic to any specific contemporary interior. That artists also used 'studio props' is also evidenced by Wilkie's journals; he describes buying old chairs in a London broker's shop for use in his regional paintings. Furniture in these paintings plays a supporting role to the main composition and paintings were criticised if the background furniture was too distracting. Therefore we should be wary of assuming that the layout of furniture is typical of a specific time or location.

We should also be aware that for ideological and political reasons, Irish and Scottish homes were likely to be depicted as hovels. The English peasant, though poor, was usually shown as being happy, clean and healthy. However, even Scottish and Irish interiors exhibited at the Royal Academy could be criticised for showing poverty which was too disagreeable.

This paper represents the first part of Adrian's research. His next task is to examine water colours and drawings, particularly those by amateur and female artists, which did not have the same constraints as those offered for sale and for display at institutions such as the Royal Academy, and may well represent more authentic views of interiors. Many of us have questioned for a long time whether and to what extent we should trust the views of regional interiors represented in paintings. Adrian's paper was well researched, closely argued and illustrated by specific examples and relevant quotations.

Catherine Weston