

'Artists and Craftsmen of Hull and East Yorkshire'
by Arthur G. Credland, published by Hull
Museums and Art Gallery, Hull, 2000, £ 9.25

This meaty soft-back, of compact landscape format, was published as an accompaniment to the exhibition at Hull Maritime Museum (on view until May), and it draws together many threads in the commercial history of this once thriving port. We are reminded, for example, that John (marine chronometer) Harrison hailed from East Yorkshire, while the 19th century architect Cuthbert Brodrick and the builder George Myers both lived in Hull and carried out important work there. The crafts of silversmithing, clockmaking and gunsmithing flourished exceptionally, and pottery and wallpaper-making were established local industries. Hull had its fair share of artists, particularly marine painters, and sculptors too.

For our purposes, the sections on furniture and wood-carving are of particular interest, and the author's illustrated record of a group of mainly privately owned 19th century mahogany pieces by known makers is most valuable. In view of the rarity of stamps or inscriptions on furniture in general, it seems that Hull had more than the average share and these pieces - stamped, stencilled, labelled or signed by their makers - are evidence of a thriving cabinet-making industry which clearly benefited from the availability of high-quality mahogany coming into the port.

From this small and diverse group, produced in the fashionable styles of an eighty-year period, it is impossible to draw conclusions about local characteristics, but it is interesting to note that one of the chests of drawers, stamped by Robert Wright of Bond Street, Hull (circa 1810-30), has false drawer fronts for the top two tiers and a lift-up top in a similar arrangement to Lancashire chests.

The chapter on wood-carvers focuses on several craftsmen who contributed to the decorations at Burton Constable Hall. Pre-eminent was Jeremiah Hargrave during the 18th century and Thomas Ward, Thomas Brooks and Thomas William Wallis during the 19th century. Wallis eventually set up his workshop in Louth and specialised in prizewinning compositions of dead birds and foliage, leaving no doubt that Hull should be added to the list of provincial centres celebrated for virtuoso carving during the Victorian period.

The book has some irritating quirks, not least of which is the skimpy editing: the punctuation leaves much to be desired, and there is some unnecessary repetition across the different sections; textual references to the illustrations would have been helpful and an index a bonus; the 'Forword' (sic) listed in the contents is missing altogether. The contextual information to each section is sometimes superficial while techniques may be inadequately explained, as in the reference to 'composition' (p 87); the author is needlessly parsimonious with dates and detailed descriptions for the furniture he records.

However, there is many a plus in this pioneering provincial excursion. One of them occurs when the author rightly questions the accuracy of the assertion (by a local historian) that the Hull furniture-making firm of Richardson was the biggest in Britain (1864). In evidence he includes a lengthy quote from J H Pollen's description of Jackson & Graham's factory in London (in G. Phillips Bevan, *British Manufacturing Industries*, 1876). It is a gem.

Noël Riley

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