

Noël Riley, *Penwork: A Decorative Phenomenon*
Oblong Creative Ltd, 416B Thorp Arch Estate,
Wetherby, LS23 7BJ, 2008 (£35).

This book is an illuminating introduction to the subject of penwork, a decorative technique particularly associated with the Regency period. One of the numerous fascinating aspects of the history of penwork revealed by Noël Riley is that the fashion for penwork is a late Regency phenomenon and was at its peak in the 1820s and 1830s. Equally informative is her investigation of the various contemporary terms used to describe the technique in the 19th century and the fact that 'penwork' is a relatively modern word, probably developed, like other furniture terms, in the antiques trade in the early 20th century. The numerous illustrations supplied by dealers and salerooms indicate the continuing attractions of penwork for the trade and for collectors.

Her book explores the origins of penwork in European 17th century ivory inlaid furniture and in the Indian ivory-inlaid goods prized by collectors, before investigating the influence of lacquer and japanning on penwork as well as discussing other similar techniques used for furniture decoration. There are chapters covering the trade and retail outlets, techniques and materials, printed design sources, and the different styles popular for penwork. Neo-classical, chinoiserie, Indian, African and naturalistic motifs are all discussed and illustrated with a carefully balanced mixture of printed designs and the objects with decoration inspired by such sources.

The attraction of penwork for amateurs, particularly women, and the marketing techniques involved in encouraging them to patronise showrooms such as The Temple of Fancy in Rathbone Place, London, is an interesting aspect of this study. Although many of the amateur and professional practitioners of penwork cannot be identified, one particular group of cabinets with similar chinoiserie decoration is discussed in great detail and the author's research reveals an intriguing common link to the Bristol area.

Both author and publisher should be congratulated on the large number of colour and black and white illustrations. There is also a useful list of dated pieces and an extensive bibliography divided into primary and secondary sources. This is a detailed and informative investigation of a relatively short-lived phenomenon, the popularity of which is well represented by the numerous examples illustrated and discussed in this attractive and reasonably priced publication.

Frances Collard