

Gillows and the Timber Merchants and Upholsterers of Liverpool

Saturday evening, 26 July

Susan Stuart gave a talk and slide presentation on the Liverpool connections with Gillows of Lancaster. She explained that in the 18th and early 19th centuries Liverpool was a major port and Lancaster a small county town. Records show there were 18 cabinet makers working in Liverpool in 1818, rising to 80 by 1850, whereas the most recorded in the same period in Lancaster was 12. Richard Gillow was acutely aware of the need to compete in this nearby market. To gain publicity he even acted as agent in 1785 for the celebrated balloonist Vincent Lunardi who planned balloon flights in Lancaster and Liverpool. Although the flight was unsuccessful the contact inspired

Gillow to design a 'balloon' back chair, which became a best-seller.

Susan referred to correspondence, in the Gillow archive, with Liverpool timber merchants, suppliers, cabinet makers, upholsterers and retailers. These included timber merchants such as Thomas Beetham, the Rathbones, and Henry Sharples who acted on behalf of Gillows at timber auctions. The Edmundsons, Matthew Gregson and Jonathan Bullen all purchased work from Gillows and were asked to assist in finding new staff and journeymen. They even helped to pay workers who were sick and checked the credit-worthiness of clients. In 1801 they all acted together against a strike by journeymen.

Susan's long awaited book on Gillows of Lancaster is due for publication in September.