

Glasgow Upholsterers' mahogany muniment box dated 1821

Sold by Thomson Roddick, Edinburgh, 29 November 2018, lot 769

The lid has a concave moulding around the top with ebony bead detail. The carcass has a half moon bead around the base and on compressed bun feet. These could have replaced bracket feet or a plinth base which would be more in keeping with the style of the box. Either side has brass carrying handles. Along the back are three brass hinges and three brass locks to the front with countersunk brass escutcheons.

The two upper brass bands, perhaps once silver plated, read: 'GLASGOW UPHOLSTERERS' and although illegible, possibly 'Shelter for the needy'. The shield has the arms of the Upholders (Upholsterers), three tents and the image of St John's lamb holding a cross and resting on a pillow. The next has the motto 'UNITE AND BE STEADY' and below that a plate with the date '1821'.

Three brass locks indicate the box's function. A requirement of three people to be present, with three keys to open, was common practice with Livery Companies, Trade Associations and Guilds, and an



Glasgow Upholsterers' muniment box, 1821. H 17¼ in (44 cm), L 26 in (66 cm), D 15 in (38 cm). *Courtesy of Thomson Roddick*

indication that documents and funds would be secured within.

Clare Thompson, archivist at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, revealed the following: 'I have checked, using the motto, 'Unite and be Steady', and it leads me to the Glasgow and District Upholsterers' Society, for which we have the minutes. The society was formed in 1864 and adopted the slogan 'Shelter for the Needy, Unite and be Steady'. It succeeded the Glasgow Journeymen Upholsterers' Trade Society which had been in existence from 1853 until 1860 and which had itself succeeded the Glasgow Upholsterers' Friendly Society of which there are records dated 1831/2'.

The City of London Upholders Company revealed a possible answer to the gap in the record between 1821, the date on the box, and 1831/2. Although their arms have the same elements, their motto is different, 'Sustine Bona' meaning 'Uphold the Good'. Glasgow and District Upholsterers' Motto in 1864 is 'Shelter for the Needy, Unite and be Steady'. The motto 'Unite and be Steady' is thus retained from the Glasgow Upholsterers of 1821, which strongly suggests a continuum.

Warm appreciation to Laurance Black for bringing the box to my attention and for editorial advice, to Clive Edwards and Clare Thompson for their research, to Sybelle Thomson, Senior Partner of Thomson Roddick for permission to use the image.

Crissie White