

# ROME REVISITED

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REGENCY & LATER NEOCLASSICAL FURNITURE  
FROM IRISH COUNTRY HOUSES AND CASTLES



PATRICK JEFFERSON

69 PIMLICO ROAD LONDON SW1W 8NE

[PATRICKJEFFERSON.COM](http://PATRICKJEFFERSON.COM)



## INTRODUCTION

This interesting and diverse collection of furniture has been carefully assembled over several decades. Many of the articles were acquired directly from the houses, castles and great estates to which they were originally supplied or, likewise, from descendants of the families who commissioned them. This provides the purchaser with the rare distinction of owning a piece of furniture that has come quietly from the prime source, rather than through the public gaze of auction, thus continuing the strong skein of private ownership.

The unifying thread for the group is the influence of antiquity, promoted by the architect-designer Charles Heathcote Tatham (1772-1842) and the connoisseur-collector-designer Thomas Hope (1769-1831). Tatham, the pupil of Henry Holland, architect to the Prince Regent, later King George IV, first published his sketches as *Etchings, Representing the Best Examples of Ancient Ornamental Architecture; Drawn from the Originals in Rome, and Other Parts of Italy, During the Years 1794, 1795 and 1796*, in 1799. The same year Hope bought a mansion in Duchess Street, which he extended and reconfigured over a period of three years, using Tatham as his architect and, without doubt, *Etchings* ... as a significant source. Hope designed the highly idiosyncratic furniture and furnishings to harmonise with his collection of classical antiquities, publishing a guide to the house and its contents in 1807, entitled *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration Executed from Designs by Thomas Hope*. These two source books, which look back as well as forward, together form the *corpus* of Regency furniture design.

The collection concentrates primarily on Irish furniture designers and cabinet-makers in the golden period of peace and growing prosperity after the Act of Union in 1800, and notably - of the many workshops in Dublin alone - the cabinet-making dynasty of Mack, Williams & Gibton, who were famed for the individuality of their designs, use of the very finest available timbers and a quality of workmanship that eclipsed all of their contemporaries.

There has always been a blurring of lines between which articles of furniture were actually made in Ireland or supplied from London, so I have included two English items from prime Irish sources, *Cat.* nos. 3 and 7, that will have undoubtedly informed the taste of Dublin cabinetmakers, eager to supply their home market with articles in the most fashionable London taste.

To make matters much harder for the researcher, as The Knight of Glin and James Peill observe in their seminal publication *Irish Furniture*, the great families of Ireland often neglected to keep proper records of accounts and bills relating to the architecture, decoration and furnishings of their houses, which makes the identification of cabinetmakers exceptionally difficult.

The Authors quote D. Owen-Madden, *Great Revelations of Ireland in the Past Generation*, Dublin, 1848:

‘There has never existed a taste in Ireland for preserving papers. In this respect, our Anglo-Irish nobility differ very much from the peers of England and Scotland. I was once told by a living distinguished peer, the representative of an Elizabethan family, that he remembered a room full of papers at his grandfather’s seat. Amongst them were the correspondence and letters of a celebrated Irish lawyer of the seventeenth-century, one of the ancestors of the family, and very eminent in history. “But”, said Lord -, “my brother and I made kites of them.”’

I am most grateful to Dr. Angela Alexander, whose pioneering studies were published as ‘A Firm of Dublin Cabinet-Makers Mack, Williams & Gibton’, (*Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, Vol. 11, 1995, pp. 142-48), and who kindly examined in person the majority of pieces that I have attributed to Mack, Williams & Gibton, generously and enthusiastically volunteering indications of authorship based on her extensive research on the subject.

Likewise my gratitude goes to James Peill for his original introduction to Dr Alexander.

I am also grateful to the journalist and author Robert O’Byrne ([theirishaesthete.com](http://theirishaesthete.com)) for allowing me to use his evocative images, as well as for his enthusiasm and generous introductions.

My thanks go to my colleague Emma-Louise Deverell for her patience and good humour throughout this long project.

PATRICK JEFFERSON

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The Bantry House bench (*Cat.* 12)



# 1 REGENCY ORMOLU-MOUNTED ROSEWOOD INVERTED LOW BOOKCASE

**PROVENANCE:** Blayney Townley and Lady Florence Balfour, Townley Hall, Co. Louth, and thence by descent to a former Master of Trinity College, Dublin.

Height: 38 ¼" (97cm); width: 58" (147.5cm); depth: 16" (40.5cm)

*The rectangular top of inverted breakfront form, having a pierced three-quarter brass gallery, above a gilt-brass-mounted frieze over a pair of gilt-brass rope-edged doors with mesh grilles, the open outer sections having adjustable shelves, raised on a plinth base; the interior with black wash.*

Townley Hall, commissioned by Blayney-Townley-Balfour in 1794, was the architect Francis Johnston's (1760-1829) first private commission and his acknowledged neoclassical masterpiece, aptly described by the poet laureate John Betjeman, in a survey of the work of the architect, 'I have seen many Irish houses, but I know none at once so dignified, so restrained and so original as Francis Johnston's Townley Hall'.<sup>1</sup>

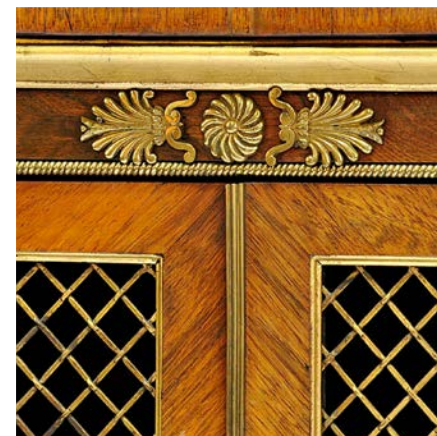
The dramatic circular entrance hall is clearly drawn from both Palladio's Villa La Rotonda and the Pantheon in Rome, as well as the 1772 edifice of the same name by James Wyatt. Indeed Wyatt's influence on Johnson's work at Townley Hall is generally accepted, not least because in 1796 Blayney Townley-Balfour married Lady Florence Cole whose family lived at Florence Court, Co. Fermanagh, not far from Wyatt's Castle Coole, completed in 1798. While Wyatt was emulated throughout Ireland, his connection with the Johnston

brothers is more than tenuous,<sup>2</sup> given that Richard signed drawings for Wyatt at Castle Coole in 1789 and Francis continued Wyatt's work at Slane Castle after the latter's death, writing that he had 'finished the hall, staircase and entrance to the castle'.<sup>3</sup>

Townley Hall, with its fine mahogany doors, cantilevered Portland stone stairs, slender brass balusters and refined stucco work, demanded the very finest neoclassical furniture, perfectly epitomised by this sophisticated cabinet, combining figured, golden rosewood veneers with carefully placed ormolu mounts, notably the central swirling 'catherine wheel' in the centre of the frieze,<sup>4</sup> which appears to relate to the moulded rosettes of the coffered dome above the entrance hall, euphorically described by Christopher Hussey in *Country Life* in 1948 as 'there is nothing lovelier than this rotunda in the Georgian architecture of the British Isles'.<sup>5</sup>

The furniture designed for this exceptional house has long been dispersed with few pieces traceable, however a useful comparison may be drawn with a sofa table photographed in the library in 1948, which was subsequently sold at auction.<sup>6</sup> That table is of a similarly refined neoclassical form and also constructed of rosewood embellished in brass, and ivory. It was designed for the Library, which served as a fashionable living-room and, together with lyre-scrolled chairs, was intended to harmonise with the room's elegant ceiling. The catalogue

notes proposed that 'It is likely to have been executed by a leading Dublin cabinet-maker' and although this may be the case, it is also worth considering the possible authorship of Gillows of London and Lancaster, who enjoyed a long working relationship with James Wyatt, producing related furniture for Tatton Park, Cheshire, and many other houses elsewhere at this period.



1. M. Evans, ed. *The Pavilion: A Contemporary Collection of British Art and Architecture*, London, 'Francis Johnston: Irish Architect', pp. 21-38; reprinted J. Betjeman, C. Lycett-Green, *Coming Home*, pp. 118-19.
2. J.M. Robinson, *James Wyatt Architect to George III*, 'James Wyatt in Ireland VI', pp.103-4.
3. Robinson, *ibid.*, p.347; *q.v.* Armagh Museum: *Quarterly Bulletin*, 2.
4. See images left and below.
5. C. Hussey, 'Townley Hall, Co. Louth, Ireland', II, *Country Life*, 30 July 1948.
6. Christie's, King Street, London, *English Furniture*, 27 April 2006, lot 100.
7. *Ibid.*





## 2 AN IRISH REGENCY MAHOGANY BERGÈRE LIBRARY ARMCHAIR

**PROVENANCE:** a house in Co. Sligo, by repute since the nineteenth-century.

Height: 39" (99cm); width: 25 ¼" (64cm); depth: 24 ¾" (63cm)

*The reeded mahogany cane-inset frame, with swept arms, on inverted vase-turned column supports, above recessed line-moulded tablets, the conforming seat rail raised on baluster-turned tapering legs with brass cup castors; small losses to cane; stamped velvet cushion.*

This handsome library armchair, of distinctive neo-classical form with carved tablet-framed detailing, has provenance from a house in Co. Sligo, possibly since the nineteenth-century.

It retains what may be the original horsehair-stuffed crimson rosette-stamped *gaufrée* velvet cushion, trimmed in violet.<sup>1</sup>

This chair pattern was immensely popular in the Regency period; first illustrated by Sheraton<sup>2</sup> and described by him and by Thomas Chippendale Jnr<sup>3</sup> as 'hunting chairs', variants were produced by Gillows from 1803.<sup>4</sup>



1. The violet *passanterie* appears to be *en-suite* to that on the set of Regency red wool curtains from the Drawing Room at Audley End House, near Saffron Walden, which passed through our hands in the 1980's.
2. Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Dictionary*, 1803, notes that such seats 'formed a temporary resting place for one that is fatigued as hunters generally are'.
3. Ralph Edwards, *The Shorter Dictionary of English Furniture*, 1964, p.169, pl. 3.
4. Gillows *Estimate Sketch Book*, pattern no. 1721, dated 31st March 1803, describes a similar chair as *Ashburton* after the eponymous Earl, and in 1807 as *Uxbridge*, likewise. The firm supplied variants to many clients, including a pair to Broughton Hall between 1811-13 (C. Hussey, *English Country Houses: Late Georgian*, p. 95, fig. 166).

## 3 A REGENCY BROWN OAK AND MAHOGANY OCCASIONAL TABLE BY GILLOWS

**PROVENANCE:** The Vane-Tempest-Stewart family, Marquesses of Londonderry, Mount Stewart, Strangford Lough, Co. Down.

Height: 29 ¾" (74.5cm); width: 21 ¾" (54cm); depth: 19 ¾" (41.5cm)

*The mahogany-framed table with an ebony-banded burr-oak top, having a rebated rising fire-screen, over a deep frieze, inset with mahogany-lined drawers and a writing slide, the corners with 'stacked-coin' carving, raised on turned and tapering fluted legs with leather castors; suede later; drawer slide deficient.*

This crisply-executed occasional table, equipped with a fitted stationary compartment and pull-out writing slide, is framed in turned mahogany with a golden brown oak and ebony-banded top.<sup>1</sup> It is stamped by the leading English cabinetmakers Gillows of London and Lancaster, who were at their peak at this period, supplying furniture to a vast client list throughout Great Britain including the Crown. Charles William Vane, 3rd Marquess of Londonderry, is recorded as a client of Gillows in the *Estimate Sketch Books* between 1822-25.<sup>2</sup>

The firm's exemplary work is evident in this highly adaptable table with its array of woods, lockable compartments and the 'tassel'-topped, pilaster-form fluted legs with 'stacked coin'-topped feet, seen on other pieces by the firm including a chest of drawers dated 1810-15.<sup>3</sup> These turnings are a feature often associated with Cork furniture, which proposes the interesting possibility that this is a very rare example of Gillows copying an Irish furniture design for their client's Irish seat rather than the opposite, as is universally considered the case.<sup>4</sup>



1. For further information on brown oak, see *Cat.* 10.
2. Susan E. Stuart, *Gillows of Lancaster and London 1730-1840*, Vol. II, p. 186.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 28, pl. 561.
4. See *Cat.* 8.



# 4 AN IRISH REGENCY ORMOLU-MOUNTED COLLECTORS CABINET

POSSIBLY AFTER A DESIGN BY JAMES WYATT

**PROVENANCE:** George de La Poer Beresford, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Tyrone, 1<sup>st</sup> Marquis of Waterford, Curraghmore, County Waterford, thence by descent.

Height: 36" (91.5cm); width: 24 1/4" (61.5cm); depth: 14" (36cm)

*The rectangular top with a three-quarter fret-arcaded brass gallery, above a slim frieze, over a pair of silk-backed brass-trellis doors on button-headed shaped, fluted and wrythen stiles, opening to a fitted interior comprising 11 cruciform-shaped trays, above a moulded frieze and raised on over-scaled gilt-brass lion paw feet; retaining the original steel bow key; in original unrestored condition.*

This exquisite neoclassical cabinet is designed in transitional Louis XVI/Empire taste and envisaged to house a collection of small objects such as coins, medals, pocket watches, gems, intaglios, boxes or *objets vertu*. The decoration, which is grained to imitate coromandel wood, has been painted to an extraordinary degree of virtuosity and appears indistinguishable from that exotic Sinhalese timber, which would have been extremely difficult to obtain in Dublin at this period. Likewise the construction is unusually sophisticated: the doors hinge on integral square section blocks and the trays have been made in a commensurately inverted pattern in order to fit seamlessly within the rebates.

The shaped, fluted and wrythen stiles and 'button' mounts are all features invariably described as being indicative of Cork cabinet-making however this may simply be hearsay as these features appear, singularly or together, elsewhere in Irish furniture of this period.

George de La Poer Beresford commissioned designs for Curraghmore from the young James Wyatt between 1778-80, which have been described by John Martin Robinson as 'The pre-eminent Wyatt Irish interior contrived within an existing house ...'.<sup>1</sup> However, whilst it is improbable that Wyatt can have designed this cabinet at such an early date, it remains a possibility that his influence endured, as the elegant lines and distinctive paw feet are certainly elements seen in his furniture dating from the 1790's, the latter supporting the pair of stoves supplied to Castle Coole in the late 1790s.<sup>2</sup> James Wyatt supplied a suite of gem cabinets to Catherine the Great of Russia for Tsarskoye Selo in 1783, thus it would not be inconceivable for him to have undertaken this cabinet on a smaller scale for an existing client.

The Wyatt-Gillows connection is interesting, as Gillows produced a related design for a 'Rosewood Commode' in 1824.<sup>3</sup>



3. (Courtesy of Westminster City Archive)



Image courtesy of Robert O'Byrne  
(theirishaesthete.com)



## 5 A SET OF FOUR PAINTED AND OAK-GRAINED HALL CHAIRS

**PROVENANCE:** The Clan Leslie, Castle Leslie, Glaslough, Co. Monaghan, thence by descent.

Height: 40 ½" (103cm); width: 18" (46cm); depth: 18" (46cm)

This set of hall chairs came from Castle Leslie, designed in 1870 on the site of an earlier house by Lanyon, Lyn & Lanyon in the Scottish Baronial manner for John Leslie, later Sir John Leslie, 1st Baronet of Glaslough, at the insistence of his young wife Constance, daughter of Minnie Seymour (but allegedly George IV's daughter by Mrs. Fitzherbert).

The Leslie clan originated in Scotland with Bartholomew Leslie, chamberlain and protector of Margaret Queen of Scotland and originator of the family motto, 'Grip Fast'. The family was rewarded by Charles II, pardoned by George I and written about by Oliver Goldsmith, Dr. Samuel Johnson and Dean Swift, before eventually marrying into East Coast American families, including the Jeromes, Clay Ides and Bourke Cockrans.

This pattern of chair, which has its origins in the Renaissance Italian *sgabello*, became popular in England in the first half of the eighteenth-century, however the virtuoso oak-grained paintwork decorated with a Regency Gothic quatrefoil and centred by a lion mask device appears closer to a date of 1810; irrespective, each is inscribed 'George Liddell ... painted Glaslough March 15<sup>th</sup> 1865', indicating that the talented Mr Liddell may have redecorated over at least one earlier scheme in preparation for the interiors of the new house.

Dated furniture with secure provenance is exceptionally rare, providing a *terminus post quem* which places articles within an historical and evolutionary context.



## 6 PAIR OF IRISH REGENCY PAINTED AND GRAINED WATERFALL BOOKCASES

**PROVENANCE:** Private collection, Co. Wexford.

Height: 46 ¾" (119cm); width: 35 ½" (90cm); depth: 13" (33cm)

*The upper graduated tiers with gilded turned bullseye 'mounts', above a pair of marbleized columns, raised on turned toupée feet; retaining much original decoration; wear consistent with age and use.*

This pair of open bookcases of so-called 'waterfall' form is skillfully painted to imitate Indian rosewood, inset with 'ormolu' mounts and 'marble' columns, a combination of materials that would have been very costly to import into Ireland at this period. This situation changed dramatically in the second decade of the century when 'The importation of Colonial timber advanced since 1814 from 2,000 loads to 75,000 loads by 1835' chiefly, presumably, to avoid freight charges in Liverpool, underscored by all the ships being either

from the North of England or the Colonies.<sup>1</sup> Import duty was payable on all timbers except mahogany until 1793, which explains the decoration. While there is a long and well-recorded history of painted vernacular furniture in Ireland, sophisticated examples of Regency metropolitan furniture such as this pair are surprisingly rare. Interestingly the decorator has depicted the indigenous Connemara stone with its vigorous colouring rather than the usual choice of imported green marbles, collectively known as *verde antico*.<sup>2</sup>



1. *Report from the Select Committee on Timber Duties*, House of Commons Papers, 1835, p. 320, nos 4726-4742; for a greater discussion on this subject, see Glin & Peill, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-101
2. See *Cat. 10* for an example of Connemara marble.



# 7 REGENCY ORMOLU-MOUNTED ROSEWOOD LIBRARY WRITING TABLE

**PROVENANCE:** The Earls of Rosse, Birr Castle, Co. Offaly, thence by descent.

Height: 29" (74cm); width: 48 ½" (122.5cm); depth: 24" (61cm)

*The gilt-brass-mounted and inlaid rectangular top veneered and cross-banded with figured rosewood, inset with a leather writing surface, above a brass-bound ormolu-mounted frieze with a pair of inset brass rosette-handled cedar lined drawers each side, the paterna-mounted urn-form end-supports united by a turned brass-ringed stretcher on outswept feet terminating in unusual gilt-brass capped castors; the underside with black wash; leather replaced, small marks and repairs consistent with age and use.*

This sophisticated library writing-table relates to a pattern designed in the ‘Grecian’ taste promoted in the first years of the nineteenth-century by Thomas Hope, which has been associated with the Regency cabinet-maker John McLean & Son (active 1770-1815) of Little Newport Street and 55 Upper Marylebone Street, London.<sup>1</sup> A number of closely comparable versions are known, characterised by the use of rosewood veneers highlighted with gilt brass mounts, re-entrant corners to the writing surface and cedar-lined drawers, an indicator of the very best London workshops and of McLean himself.

Thomas Sheraton lists McLean as one of London’s master cabinet-makers in 1803, illustrating one of his designs for a small table, commenting that ‘... he finishes these articles in the neatest manner’.<sup>2</sup>

McLean’s designs are often identifiable due to his idiosyncratic interpretations of neoclassical Louis XVI and Empire patterns, invariably veneered in the highest quality rosewood, which was not only the most expensive timber available but provides a vigorous contrast to the gilded bronze mounts of a markedly idiosyncratic form, resulting in a highly distinguished and sophisticated French-influenced English restraint. Indeed McLean described himself on his calling card and advertisements in *The Times* as a ‘specialist in Elegant Parisian Furniture’, of which he may be considered the pre-eminent exponent.

Simon Redburn notes in his article on McLean that ‘his constant use of mounts in cast and chased brass, the design and form of which appear unique to his work (... and not ...) used by any other cabinet maker.’<sup>3</sup>

McLean’s clients included the Earl of Jersey for his mansion in Berkeley Square and his country seat Middleton Park, as well as commissions for Saltram and Shugborough.

This table was acquired directly from a descendent of the Earls of Rosse, Birr Castle, Co. Offaly, and thus may have formed part of the furnishings supplied to Laurence Parsons, 2nd Earl of Rosse, who heightened, gothicised and rebuilt part of the castle in the Regency period.



Image courtesy of Robert O’Byrne  
(theirishacsthete.com)

1. Hope, *op. cit.*; see D. Watkin and P. Hewat-Jaboor (ed.), Thomas Hope, *Regency Designer*, Bard Graduate Centre, Yale, 2008, for the pre-eminent group of essays on Hope.  
2. Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Dictionary*, 1803.  
3. S. Redburn, ‘John MacLean and Son’, *Furniture History*, 1978, XIV, p. 34.



## 8 AN IRISH REGENCY CONCAVE CABINET, PROBABLY CORK

Height: 38" (96.5cm); width: 41 ½" (105.5cm); depth: 17" (43.2cm)

*The concave front having a shaped top, above a slim 'match-striker' frieze, over a pair of astragal-moulded doors, opening to two shelves, flanked by a pair of turned, fluted and 'stacked-coin' columns, raised on bold lion paw feet; in excellent original condition, the surface unrestored.*

This unusual and beautifully proportioned concave-profile cabinet is constructed throughout from a tropical timber in the solid, which is almost certainly teak (*Tectona grandis*). Dublin was the first stop for boats bringing in timber from the West Indies, which often included unusual and unidentified specimens that would have been sold speculatively. Much of the supply of teak at this period came from India where it was traditionally valued for its durability and favoured for campaign furniture, manufactured in the Indian subcontinent, Canton, England and Ireland. It is very rare however to see a piece of this calibre in teak.

Not only is the form distinctive but the detailing is highly considered and precisely executed, from the notably slim mouldings on the concave doors and the crisply defined 'match-striker' frieze, to the use of four turned and fluted columns supported on gadrooned discs above large stylized, flattened lion paw feet. These 'stacked-coin' turnings have often been associated with furniture made in Cork.

The dry and undisturbed condition of this cabinet is exactly what one seeks but rarely finds.



## 9 A LARGE REGENCY LEATHER-UPHOLSTERED MAHOGANY STOOL

**PROVENANCE:** The Earls of Rosse, Birr Castle. Co. Offaly, Ireland, and by descent.

Height: 44" (112cm); width: 28" (71cm); depth: 28" (71cm)

*The rectangular frame later upholstered in buttoned caramel hide with a double-lined brass studded frieze, raised on ring-turned flaring mahogany legs with cast brass acanthus-capped castors; the underlining and webbing possibly original.*

This handsome and capacious stool, which was probably envisaged for a fireside, comes from Birr Castle and probably formed part of the original furnishings supplied to Laurence Parsons, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Rosse, who heightened, gothicised and rebuilt part of the castle in the Regency period.

The condition supports the reputed provenance of an unbroken history in one family, as whilst it is likely that the buttoned leather replaces a similar upholstery

scheme, what appears to be the original lining fabric and webbing remains in place on the underside, as do the original sophisticated cast brass acanthus-capped castors.

Regency period stools of this substantial scale, whether English or Irish, are extremely scarce.





# 10 A CONNEMARA MARBLE TOPPED BROWN AND BURR OAK CABINET

PROVENANCE: by repute, the Earls of Kenmare, Kenmare (Killarney) House, Co. Kerry.

Height: 51 ½" (131cm); width: 33 ¾" (85.5cm); depth: 20 ¾" (52cm)

*The rectangular slab of Connemara marble supported on a moulded frieze, over a pair of panelled cross-banded doors, opening to reveal two banks of eleven oak drawers, each with a turned rosewood knob, the sides similarly inlaid, raised on a moulded-topped flat plinth; the top previously, but not originally, rising; the marble possibly original and re-polished; lock replaced.*

The succulently-figured panels of highly desirable brown and burr oak, carefully chosen to decorate this handsome estate-made cabinet, are likely to have been selected from centuries-old parkland trees felled on the Kenmare demesne in the first half of the nineteenth-century, investing an historical and romantic element in the new furnishings. The choice of domestic cabinet timbers continued the most particular Regency fashion for using British woods, which was originally promoted to be patriotic and historicist but inevitably reflected the repeated blockades of British ports and sea-lanes by the French throughout the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>1</sup>

Brown oak does not appear to have been used much before 1800, as it invariably occurs in highly-figured or burr wood and was therefore too unstable to use in the solid. George Bullock, a primary proponent of domestic timbers, even for the most elevated of metropolitan furniture, particularly favoured brown oak for its warm, rich appearance, which was dramatically contrasted by the use of pale woods such as holly and box. The historicist connotations also chimed particularly well for Bullock's clients with stands of ancient oak trees, which accordingly led to steep increases in the value of this

timber in the first half of the nineteenth-century, fuelled further by strong demand from the United States where brown oak was particularly sought-after.<sup>2</sup>

The lustrous and deeply-coloured slab top is of solid Connemara marble, a serpentine-rich stone found only in a remote part of West Ireland, that has been valued since Neolithic times for its idiosyncratic green veins, which epitomize the colour of Ireland.

In 1861 Prince Albert and Queen Victoria visited Lord Castlerosse and together chose the site for the new Killarney House, which replaced Kenmare House (1726), seat of the Earls of Kenmare. Killarney House, designed by the architect George Devey in the Elizabethan-Revival manner in 1872, was inspired by Longleat, the family seat of Lady Kenmare (Gertrude Thynne, granddaughter of Thomas Thynne, 2nd Marquess of Bath) and was considered to be one of the finest mansions in Ireland, the interior richly panelled and hung with Spanish leather.

The house was destroyed by fire in 1913 and finally demolished in 1956.<sup>3</sup>

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1. See A. Bowett, *Woods in British Furniture-Making 1400-1900*, pp. 171-72, pl. O17, for notes on brown oak.
  2. A.L. Howard, *A Manual of Timbers of the World*, 1920.
  3. The Knight of Glin, D.J. Griffin, N.K. Robinson, *Vanishing Houses of Ireland*, 1988, p. 82.





# 11 IRISH REGENCY MAHOGANY WRITING TABLE IN NEOCLASSICAL TASTE

THE CASTORS STAMPED 'PEARSON & PASLEY, DUBLIN'

Height: 30 1/4" (77cm); width: 53 1/2" (136cm); depth: 32 1/2" (83cm)

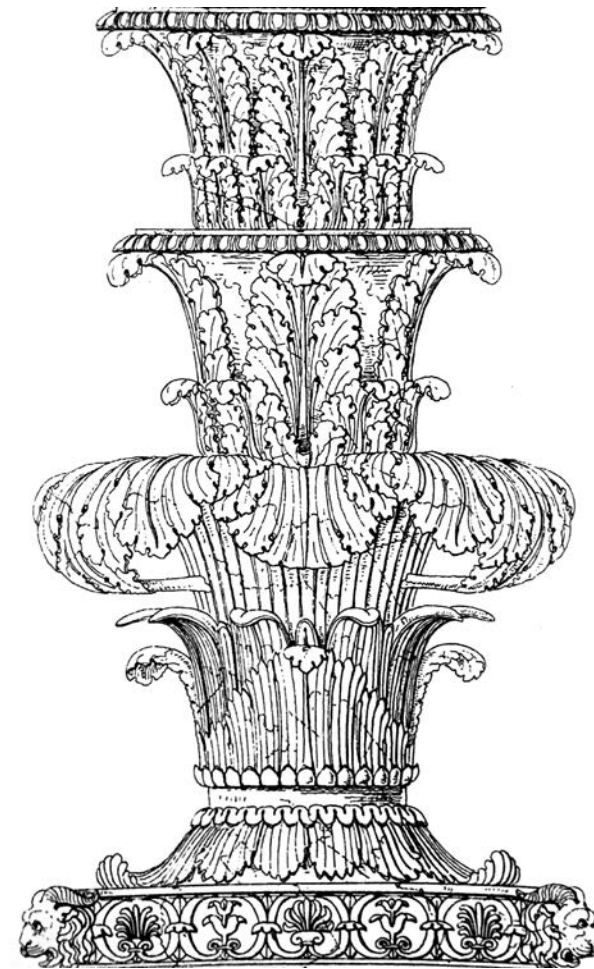
*The rectangular moulded-edged top with a mahogany cross-banded inset leather writing surface, over two full-length mahogany-lined drawers with inset mouldings divided by a central tablet and flanked by two further tablets, above turned and fluted tapering pilaster-form legs with bold leaf capitals and acanthus carving terminating in brass-capped castors stamped PEARSON & PASLEY, DUBLIN; the leather replaced.*

This elegant writing table is of distinctive architectural form, deriving inspiration directly from Charles Heathcote Tatham's sketches of classical statuary in Rome in the last years of the eighteenth-century.<sup>1</sup> The frieze is soberly decorated with inset tablets, while the legs are of a most unusual pattern, formed as tapering columns with acanthus-enriched capitals and foliate-carved terminals above the cas-

tors. The design for the legs clearly follows Tatham's engravings of the Barberini candelabrum in the Vatican Museum, dated 1798-99.<sup>2</sup>

The maker of this table is unknown however the brass-capped castors are stamped Pearson & Pasley, two families who are recorded as supplying metalware in Dublin since the eighteenth-century.<sup>3</sup>

1. Tatham, *op. cit.*
2. *Ibid.*
3. Watson's Almanack, 1783, lists a Pearson and a Peasley as ironmongers; a John Pasley was Sheriff of Dublin in 1797, and by 1850 the Dublin City Directory recorded Pasley (or Peasley) and Pearson, ironmongers and cabinet brassfounders, at 24 Capel St.



*'No pen, no ink, no table, no room,  
no time, no quiet, no inclination.'*

(James Joyce 1882-1941)



## MACK, WILLIAMS & GIBTON

This famed dynasty of cabinet-makers was started in Abbey Street, Dublin in 1784 by John Mack who was joined by William Gibton in around 1801. Their partnership, registered in 1805, quickly gained an appointment in 1807 as ‘Upholsterers and Cabinet Makers to his Majesty, His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant and His Majesty’s Board of works’; from 1801-6 Mack and Gibton are listed at 188 Abbey Street and 39 Stafford Street, Dublin.

By 1810 the firm was advertised as Mack, Gibton & Co., after the death of Robert Gibton, who was succeeded by his son William Gibton (1789-1842) and son-in-law, the former apprentice Zachariah Williams. The new partnership of Mack, Williams & Gibton, formalised at 39 Stafford Street in 1812, was undoubtedly the leading cabinet-making concern in Regency Dublin, justly famed for the distinction of their designs, timbers and workmanship, which has often been compared to Gillows of Lancaster and London. After John Mack’s death in 1829, the firm traded as Williams & Gibton until 1842.

Dublin was a major strategic port for the furniture business at this period, as boats shipping mahogany and other timbers from the West Indies and elsewhere would stop off first, coming right into the Liffey Quays, before continuing on to England. The firm’s ability to source the very best timber, combined with the scale of their operation and their connections, brought commissions to supply furniture to some of the most important public buildings in Ireland, including the Chapel Royal, Dublin Castle, the War Office, Four Courts and the Treasury as well as major country houses, notably Ballynegal, Co. Westmeath; Oakley Park, Co. Meath; Storkestown, Co. Roscommon; Lissadell, Co. Sligo and Newbridge, Co. Dublin.

In addition to following engraved sources by Thomas Sheraton, Charles Heathcote Tatham, Thomas Hope and George Smith, the firm worked closely with architects including Francis Johnston, notably on the Chapel Royal, and with Francis Goodwin at Lissadell, where there are notable similarities between the Hopeian architecture and the furniture in Grecian taste, suggesting a close working relationship. Indeed Lissadell was the last house in Ireland to retain the original Williams & Gibton furniture until the majority of the contents was sold at auction.<sup>1</sup>

The designs of Gillows of Lancaster and London clearly influenced the partnership, which are known to have produced items such as an X-frame ‘Grecian’ stool that closely relates to a pattern illustrated in Gillow’s *Estimate Sketch Book*, dated 1827.<sup>1</sup> This connection is drawn far closer by our recent discovery of an inscription referring to Gillows on the sideboard stamped by Williams & Gibton, *Cat.* 17, confirming that this is a subject worthy of further research.

Dr Alexander raises the interesting question of the authorship of Williams & Gibton’s designs, suggesting that the Dublin Society Schools may have tutored cabinet-makers as well as artists, enabling designs to be interpreted in-house, which may explain the repetition of visual *leitmotifs* that appear to permeate much of their work. In the absence of the firms’ label, name or four/five digit stamps, it is these various elements of reoccurring detail, seen on signed or provenanced articles which Dr Alexander describes as ‘instantly recognisable’, that can assist in making a justifiable attribution.<sup>3</sup>



1. *Lissadell*, Christie’s & HOK, 25 November 2003.  
2. *Lissadell*, *op. cit.*, lot 123; Gillows, *op. cit.*, p. 3568.  
3. Alexander, *op. cit.* pp. 145-46.





# 12 THE BANTRY HOUSE BENCH

## IN THE MANNER OF MACK, WILLIAMS & GIBTON

**PROVENANCE:** by repute, Richard White, Viscount Berehaven, (1800-1868),  
Bantry House, Co. Cork, thence by descent.

Height: 24 ¾" (63cm); length: 68 ½" (174cm); depth: 27 ½" (70cm)

*The carved and gilded frame having a scrolling acanthus and bud-carved frieze supported on four leaf-wrapped volute legs, raised on paw feet; the frame re-railed and extensively adapted; losses to gilding with areas of gold overpaint; the seat re-upholstered.*

This spectacularly powerful carved and gilded bench, supported upon four gargantuan, muscular volute legs, is likely to have been commissioned by the connoisseur Richard White, Viscount Bearhaven, later 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Bantry (1800-1868). White travelled extensively from around 1817 on his Grand Tour to Russia, Poland, Scandinavia, Spain, Italy and France, bringing back a profusion of French royal tapestries, chimneypieces and furniture, paintings by Guardi and others, leather wall hangings and the Pompeian mosaic panels inset into the floor of the Outer Hall at Bantry House.<sup>1</sup>

The pattern, which follows Roman marble seats, was already popular by the seventeenth-century evidenced by a related example illustrated in the woodcut dating from 1633-36 by Christoffel Jegher (1596-1652) after ‘The Garden of Love’ by Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640).<sup>2</sup> Late eighteenth-century examples of Irish furniture drawn from antiquity include a black Galway marble-topped centre table of similar profile, inscribed ‘Made by S. O’Connor / Dublin / 1775’, after the ‘Tomb of Agrippa’, the marble sarcophagus which once sat under the portico of the Pantheon.<sup>3</sup>

There can be no doubt that the design for the offered bench was inspired by antique sculpture in the Vatican Museum, sketched and later published by Tatham in the last years of the eighteenth-century. The ends follow ‘the grand antique bathing vase in red porphyry now in the Corsini Chapel of St. Giovanni of Laterano at Rome’, the acanthus-voluted paw feet resemble those on the ‘Grand antique Tripod of verd-antique marble from the Collection in the

*Museum of the Vatican*’, and the frieze is after an ‘antique fragment in the Otto Farnese, at Rome’.<sup>4</sup> Tatham’s designs were hugely influential over the next two decades, witnessed by two closely related ‘Hall seats for recesses’, dated 1804, published by George Smith in 1808 which were themselves,<sup>5</sup> inspired by the furniture and interior decoration of the Duchess Street House of Thomas Hope, who owned a copy of *Etchings*.<sup>6</sup>

Other examples of this type of muscular Regency giltwood furniture found in Ireland include the large group at Castle Coole, Co. Fermanagh, commissioned by Somerset Lowry-Corry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Belmore, from the Dublin cabinetmakers and dealers John and Nathaniel Preston between 1802-21.<sup>7</sup> It is still uncertain how much of that furniture was actually made in Ireland as the Drawing Room suite was apparently bought in London,<sup>8</sup> however the carved mahogany state bed, supplied in 1821 for a planned visit from George IV, has a similar strength which, as James Peill points out, owes more to the French Empire style of Percier and Fontaine.<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Alexander compares the detailing of the ends to the set of mahogany pew benches<sup>10</sup>, that were probably designed by the architect Francis Johnston and supplied by Mack Williams & Gibton to the Board of Works to the Chapel Royal, Dublin Castle around 1812, derived from a Roman marble seat published by Tatham.<sup>10</sup> The construction of this seat appears to be composed of various elements of differing ages, as with other pieces at Bantry House, rendering the original form enigmatic and leaving us with a whimsical confection rather than a piece of pure Regency furniture.



1. H. Montgomery-Massingberd & C. Sykes, *Great Houses of Ireland*, p. 182.  
2. Christoffel Jegher, *The Garden of Love* (left block), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (acc. no. 30.53.17a).  
3. Glin & Peill, *op. cit.*, no. 157, p. 241.  
4. Tatham, *op. cit.*  
5. George Smith, *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and Interior Decoration*, 1808, pl. 34, dated 1804.  
6. Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture & Interior Decoration*, London, 1807.  
7. D. Guinness and W. Ryan, *Irish Houses and Castles*, 1971, pp.162, 174-75; J. O'Brien & D. Guinness, *Great Irish Houses & Castles*, pp.130-35.  
8. Brien & Guinness, *ibid.*, p. 134.  
9. Glin & Peill, *op. cit.*, pl. 254, pp.188-190.  
10. A. Alexander, 'A Firm of Dublin Cabinet-Makers Mack, Williams and Gibton', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, vol 11, 1995, p. 145, pl. 9; A. Alexander, *The Chapel Royal Dublin Castle An Architectural History*, pp. 71-82, figs. 4.3, 4.4.



# 13 IRISH LATE REGENCY MAHOGANY DOUBLE MAGNUM WINE COOLER

ATTRIBUTED TO MACK, WILLIAMS & GIBTON, DUBLIN, CIRCA 1827-29

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Gorey, Co. Wexford.

Height: 21 1/2" (55cm); width: 31 1/2" (80cm); depth: 22" (56cm)

*The octagonal casket with canted flame-figured mahogany panels, having a fitted lead-lined interior with four inset bottle carriers and drain plug, raised on lion paw feet and brass castors signed DOBBINS PATENT BRISTOL; detachable mahogany cover; carriers replaced; retaining a rich old surface.*

Bacchic ornament was particularly appropriate for dining-room furniture or rooms associated with eating and drinking. Glin and Peill, referring to earlier decanter stands, note that ‘many survive which give a hint of the Bacchic pastimes of the Irish aristocracy and gentry. According to the official Bordeaux records, between 1739 and 1740, Ireland imported 4,000 tuns of fine wine as opposed to 1,000 tuns to England and 2,500 tuns to Scotland’.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, when referring to the mid-eighteenth-century, the authors emphasise that ‘the Bacchic theme is ever present in the huge quantity of lion paw feet that exist on chairs, tables and stands’.<sup>2</sup>

This handsome and generously over-scaled wine cooler, veneered with tablets of the finest flame-figured mahogany and raised on lion paw feet, is perhaps the epitome of Regency neoclassicism: austere, powerful and unadorned, save for the lion or panther feet, the design following a Roman sarcophagus.

Somewhat surprisingly, no other example of a double-magnum cooler appears to be recorded and while the internal carriers have been replaced, presumably by heavy use, the absence of a rising lid confirms that this cellaret was made for extra tall bottles, as does the scale of the original brass castors - as opposed to carrying handles - an essential requirement to support the substantial weight of a loaded cooler wheeled from beneath a sideboard to the dining table.

The use of patent Bristol-made brassware underscores the valuable trade between that city and Dublin at this period. Fortuitously these signed castors are dateable

between 1827-1831, as the firm of Dobins (*sic*) and Gresley were in existence in 1827,<sup>3</sup> appearing in Pigot’s *Dictionary of Gloucestershire* in 1830, before the College Street premises were closed to make rollers and castors,<sup>4</sup> announcing that Dobbins name would continue to appear on the ‘patent articles of his manufacture’.<sup>5</sup>

This date further supports Dr Alexander’s suggestion that this cooler is probably by Williams & Gibton, based on their characteristic detailing and the exceptionally choice mahogany veneers.

It is unfortunately not known from which of the several fine houses in Gorey this originally came from.



1. Ted Murphy, *A Kingdom of Wine*, Currahaha, Co. Cork, 2005, pp. 35-6, (*q.v.* Glin and Peill, *op. cit.*, p. 114).
2. Glin and Peill, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
3. *London Gazette*, 31 May 1827; *Morning Post*, 9 June 1827.
4. *Birmingham Gazette*, 17 May 1830.
5. *Bristol Mercury*, 5 April 1831.



# 14 PAIR OF IRISH GEORGE IV CARVED ROSEWOOD LIBRARY ARMCHAIRS

ATTRIBUTED TO WILLIAMS & GIBTON, DUBLIN, CIRCA 1827-29

PROVENANCE: Palmerstown House, Johnstown, Co. Kildare, seat of the Earls of Mayo.

Height: 41 1/2" (105cm); width: 23 5/8" (60cm); depth: 32 3/4" (83cm)

*Each over-scrrolled high-back above a deeply swept seat, with down-scrolling leaf-carved arms, raised on acanthus-carved and fluted front legs with brass-capped castors; one leg with a small replaced section in grained walnut; newly reupholstered in French silk with bespoke passementerie.*

The vivacious design of this pair of neoclassical library armchairs with their dramatically raked backs seems to be uniquely Irish; another, of related form and later date attributed to Arthur Jones & Co. of Dublin is at Malahide Castle.<sup>1</sup> While the over-scrrolled, raked back broadly follows other Regency chair designs, such as Gillows 'Spanish' chair of 1823<sup>2</sup>, published variants only appear at a much later date, including the example popularised by John Claudius Loudon, who stated that this style of chair '... is very easy to sit upon'.<sup>3</sup>

This pair of supremely comfortable library armchairs came from Palmerstown House, Johnstown, Co.

Kildare, seat of the Earls of Mayo, and may conceivably have formed part of the furnishings commissioned by John Bourke, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl from 1807, whose descendent the 7th Earl rebuilt the house in 1875.

Dr. Alexander has attributed these chairs to Williams & Gibton, comparing them to a set by the firm that were previously part of the original furnishings of Lissadell, Co. Sligo, but were not included in the house sale.<sup>4</sup> Other unstamped pieces with the same attribution have also come from this source which, prior to the sale, was the last house in Ireland to retain the original Williams & Gibton furniture.

1. G Kenyon, *The Irish Furniture at Malahide Castle*, 1994, p. 10.

2. Stuart, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pl. 224, pp. 230, 232; Gillows *Estimate Sketch Book*, dated 25 October 1823 (Westminster City Archive).

3. J.C. Loudon, *Encyclopaedia of Cottage Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture*, 1839, fig. 1911.

4. Lissadell, *op. cit.*





# 15 IRISH REGENCY CARVED MAHOGANY TRIPLE DUMB WAITER

PROVENANCE: The Earls of Rosse, Birr Castle. Co. Offaly, Ireland, and by descent.

Height: 44" (112cm); width: 28" (71cm); depth: 28" (71cm)

*The three graduated, curved and reeded-edged rectangular drop-leaf trays, each supported on a central inverted reeded column, raised on four swept feet with brass box castors; small repairs; in good original condition.*

The fashion for placing these multiple-tray-tables by the dining table, assisting diners to help themselves to cheese, wine, dishes, cutlery and glasses when the servants had withdrawn, maintained popularity throughout the second-half of the eighteenth-century, as Miss Mary Hamilton noted in her diary in 1784, 'We had dumb waiters so our conversation was not under any restraint by ye Servants being in ye room'.<sup>1</sup> Sheraton describes a Dumb-Waiter as 'a useful piece of furniture, to serve in some respects the place of a waiter, whence it is so named'.<sup>2</sup>

The pattern, although not the configuration, of inverted, tapering, reeded stems supporting rounded-edged rectangular trays is unusual.

Despite the lack of a stamp or number, the cluster detailing on the tall vase-shaped columns is reminiscent of Gillows and thus, considering the provenance as well as the curiously reversed form, plausibly supports a Dublin maker - perhaps either Williams & Gibton or Gillingtons, who made furniture in this taste. The brothers George and Samuel Gillington are recorded at various addresses and in various partnerships from 1815 to 1838. Their warehouses were mostly in Abbey Street, which inevitably led to confusion with Mack, Williams and Gibton, who also traded from there. George Gillington's trade card begged it 'to be observed that his house is in the NARROW PART of Abbey Str.'<sup>3</sup>



# 16 A LATE IRISH REGENCY CARVED MAHOGANY AND LEATHER SOFA

ATTRIBUTED TO MACK, WILLIAMS & GIBTON, DUBLIN, CIRCA 1825-30

Height: 33" (55cm); width: 83" (211cm); depth: 25 1/4" (64cm)

There is unfortunately no known provenance for this spirited sofa, which is purposefully included in this exhibition not only because of its crisply carved mahogany frame and exuberant form but also, perhaps

more poignantly, for its ruined state: a reminder of Ireland at that period in history and of its architecture, still sleeping, even today, waiting to be reawakened.



1. R. Edwards, *The Dictionary of English Furniture*, 1954, Vol. II, p. 227.
2. Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Dictionary*, 1803.
3. D.Fitz-Gerald, 'Dublin Directories and Trade Labels', *Furniture History*, XXI, (1985), p. 266.



# 17 A MONUMENTAL IRISH GEORGE IV MAHOGANY ‘SIDEBOARD TABLE’

STAMPED: ‘WILLIAMS & GIBTON’, DUBLIN, *CIRCA* 1830

PROVENANCE: An historic Irish family collection, probably since originally supplied.

Height: 36 ¼" (92cm); (to upstand: 49 ¾" / 126.5cm); width: 108" (274.5cm); depth: 35 ½" (90cm)

*The cross-grained-edged top mounted with a triple tablet-backed superstructure with gadrooned reveals and a foliate carved cresting, above a slim-paneled frieze over a pair of cupboards with paneled doors, flanked by deeply undercut acanthus-carved canted-corner volutes on massive hairy paw feet, raised on a shaped plinth; stamped WILLIAMS & GIBTON; the left-hand door with a copperplate ink inscription 'Gillows/ No 379-43/ G...'; in original condition throughout.*

This ‘Broddingnagian’ dining-room sideboard or serving table is particularly Irish in its gargantuan scale and neoclassical muscularity; the monstrous acanthus-enriched volutes with hairy paw feet flank a pair of cupboards: the left having a single shelf, the right a lead-lined cellaret; the whole carved from richly figured mahogany to the exceptional standard seen on the very best pieces produced by this partnership, which still retains the original untouched surface.<sup>1</sup>

The pattern conforms to ‘sideboard tables’ supplied by Gillows of London and Lancaster from the first decade of the nineteenth-century, such as that supplied in 1810 to R.O. Gascoigne at Parlington Hall and another, in 1813, to Stephen Tempest at Broughton Hall, both of which have relatively well-mannered, front-facing small acanthus-wrapped volutes compared to the present brute.<sup>2</sup> Within a decade, the volutes had changed direction, moving onto canted corners and increasing in scale, implying a greater power and movement as well as reflecting the ‘French antique’ style increasingly favoured by the Prince Regent, now King George IV.

A notable example in this zoomorphic taste was ordered from Redmayne and Ferguson in 1825 by Richard Gillow of Leighton Hall, previously the manager of Gillow’s London shop, which has bronze-painted *chimeras* to the front corners<sup>3</sup> that follow designs for those mythical beasts published by George Smith in 1804;<sup>4</sup> another, supplied two years later to George Wilson of Dallam Tower near Carnforth, shares the heroic scale of the offered table but has simplified carving.<sup>5</sup>

An exciting discovery further linking Williams & Gibton to Gillows was made just as this catalogue was being finalised. Found on the inside of the left-hand door, a copperplate ink inscription reads ‘Gillows/ No 379-43/ G...’ The relevance of this number, whether that of Williams & Gibton or Gillows, has yet to be established.

In 1828 Sir Walter Scott wrote, ‘Our national taste, indeed has been changed, in almost every particular, from that which was meager, formal and poor, and has attained, comparatively speaking, a character of richness, variety and solidarity. An ordinary chair ... has now something of an antique cast - something of Grecian massiveness, at once, and elegance in its forms.’<sup>6</sup> Christopher Gilbert quoted Scott *verbatim* in his introduction to the 1973 reprinted edition of Peter and Michael Angelo Nicholson’s *The Practical Cabinet Maker*, a pattern book which influenced many cabinet-makers, notably Nicholas Morel who worked for the Prince Regent, later King George IV, at Carlton House and Windsor Castle.<sup>7</sup>

A celebrated example of similar scale and inspiration, raised on massive corner eagle supports, is at Westport House, Co. Mayo, seat of the Marquesses of Sligo, and may have been supplied by Benjamin Dean Wyatt in around 1819 for the dining room, which his father James Wyatt designed several decades earlier in 1781.<sup>8</sup>



1. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, 1726.
2. Stuart, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pl. 224, pls. 366, 367, pp. 322-33.
3. *Ibid.*, pl. 368, p. 264.
4. George Smith, *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and Interior Decoration*, London, 1808.
5. Stuart, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pls. 370, 371, pp. 324-25.
6. *Quarterly Review*, March 1828.
7. Peter and Michael Angelo Nicholson, *The Practical Cabinet Maker, Upholsterer and Complete Decorator*, 1826-27, reprinted 1973, with an introduction by C. Gilbert.
8. D. Guinness and William Ryan, *Irish Houses and Castles*, 1971, p. 253.



# 18 AN IRISH LATE REGENCY CARVED MAHOGANY HALL BENCH

ATTRIBUTED TO MACK, WILLIAMS & GIBTON, DUBLIN, *CIRCA* 1825-30

PROVENANCE: Patrick and Louise Guinness, Furness, Naas, Co. Kildare.

Height: 38 1/4" (97cm); width: 49 3/4" (126.5cm); depth: 21 3/4" (55.2cm)

*The deeply carved foliate cresting over a shaped back, the horizontal double-leaf-enriched arms with anthemion carved tablets, supported by a rosette-mounted seat, raised on square-section leaf-carved tapering front legs and turned back legs; two birch rails restored; central cross-brace replaced; bespoke striped olive silk squab cushion.*

The richly expressive carving of the arms, legs and motifs of this muscular little bench are quintessentially Irish, however the exuberantly- baroque form of the foliate cresting derives from Louis XIV hall seats by Daniel Marot (Paris 1661-1772 Hague) and his circle. Marot, who had left France in 1685 at the time of the Edict of Nantes, moved to Holland where he worked at Het Loo, following the Prince of Orange, by then King William III, to England in 1694.<sup>1</sup>

The source of this bench is particularly interesting as the previous owner is the grandson of Diana Mitford, and son of the Hon. Desmond Guinness and his first wife Mariga (the Princess Marie Gabrielle von Urach), co-founders of the Irish Georgian Group, who not only inherited articles from various Guinness houses but were buying wonderful pieces from the major Irish country house dispersals throughout the 1950s and 1960s. This provides almost limitless possibilities for an earlier provenance, including Carton, Castletown, Gormanston Castle and St Anne's Clontarf, amongst numerous other houses.

1. Variants with related elements include several illustrated in de Jonge & Vogelsang, *Holländische Möbel und Raumkunst von 1650-1780*, Stuttgart, 1922, pls. 375, 376; another sold, *Style*, Sotheby's, London, 3 May 2000, lot 12.



Image courtesy of  
Robert O'Byrne  
(theirishaesthete.com)



# 19 A PAIR OF SHERATON CHINA CABINETS

ATTRIBUTED TO MACK, WILLIAMS & GIBTON, DUBLIN, CIRCA 1810

PROVENANCE: By repute, the Vane-Tempest-Stewart family, Marquesses of Londonderry, Mount Stewart, Strangford Lough, Co. Down.

Height: 98" (249cm); width: 81" (226cm); depth: 27" (69cm)

*Each D-profile dentil cornice over brass-edged astragal-glazed doors, enclosing display shelves, with pull-out slides beneath, above a pair of curved wings flanking a central breakfront of four graduated drawers with red-stained and white ivory-inlaid knob handles, raised on shaped and stepped bracket feet; repairs; several doors fitted with earlier S-bitted locks; the knobs and some keys with Portuguese labelled tags presumably nineteenth-century; now completely relined in grey velvet.*

This magnificent pair of Regency curved-sided, glazed mahogany display cabinets, or china cases as they would originally have been described, comes with a reputed provenance of Mount Stewart, seat of the Stewarts since 1744.

In 1804 Alexander Stewart, who was made first Marquess of Londonderry in 1816, employed George Dance the Younger to remodel the west wing of the house. On his death in 1821, his son Viscount Castlereigh inherited the house. He was succeeded only a year later by his Dublin-born half brother, Charles, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess of Londonderry (1778-1854), *aide-de-camp* to King George III and Under Secretary of State for War and the Colonies. This perhaps explains the most unusual set of handles, inlaid in Vizagapatam taste.

It was the marriage of Charles, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess of Londonderry, to his second wife Lady Frances Anne Vane-Tempest, the greatest heiress of her time, which increased the family's finances exponentially. This huge influx of new wealth prompted the refurbishment and enlargement of the newly renamed Mount Stewart at the vast cost of £150,000, increasing the house to eleven bays. The marriage also brought in much of the Vane-Tempest property, including Wynyard Park in County Durham which had also been redesigned in the neoclassical style, Seaham Hall, County Durham, and Holderness House on London's Park Lane, later renamed Londonderry House, complete with forty-four staff.

The last owner of Mount Stewart, now in the custody of the National Trust, was Lady Mairi Bury (*née* Vane-Tempest-Stewart) who was born into this family of

fabulous wealth and famous social connections. Lady Mairi's mother Edith was the most celebrated society and political hostess of her day, hosting parties with up to 2,500 guests including royalty, prime ministers and a glittering array of artists and literary figures.

According to the Irish writer Oliver St John Gogarty, it was a 'house so hospitable that after a few days you wouldn't know which of you owned the place'; unsurprising when one realizes that Mount Stewart had an indoor staff of thirty-five, comprising four footmen, a groom of the chambers, a butler and numerous housemaids and kitchen maids, as well as a kilted piper who played in the early morning round the outside of the house and later at dinner. In 1940 Mairi Vane-Tempest-Stewart married Derek Keppel, Viscount Bury, son of the 9th Earl of Albemarle. The famous gardens were given to the National Trust in 1957 followed by the house and most of its contents in 1976, however Lady Mairi continued to live in her private apartment accompanied by her cockatoo until her death in 2010.<sup>1</sup>

The attribution to Mack, Williams & Gibton, kindly supported by Dr Alexander, is further strengthened by comparison to a remarkably similar bookcase, which has subsequently been attributed to the same maker.<sup>2</sup>



1. Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd & Christopher Sykes, *Great Houses of Ireland*, pp.198-207.

2. Sotheby's, *Important English Furniture*, 13.11.87, lot 320.









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PATRICK JEFFERSON

69 PIMLICO ROAD LONDON SW1W 8NE

PATRICKJEFFERSON.COM

+44 (0)7768 510 022

PATRICK@PATRICKJEFFERSON.COM