

THE CHIPPENDALE SOCIETY



President: the Lord St Oswald

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Chair, one of a set of sixteen supplied by Thomas Chippendale to David Garrick in 1772. Photograph courtesy of Ronald Phillips Ltd.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

There was a sense of guarded optimism in my remarks for last October's Newsletter. We did indeed manage visit to Wentworth Woodhouse on 21 October, and a short report is included in this issue. Although the weather was foul, it was a great pleasure to be out visiting a historic property once again in the company of friendly Chippendale Society members. Some had travelled an impressive distance to be free, however briefly, from the constraints of lockdown, and to show their support for the Society.

The house was well worth seeing too, and we will perhaps re-run the event on a larger scale when circumstances permit. But now, deep in lockdown #3 at the end of January 2021, October's optimism seems misplaced. We still hope to run a full schedule of events, and the year's programme will be published in the next Newsletter, but everything is contingent on the success of the nation's battle against Covid 19.

Since we have only the Wentworth Woodhouse visit to report we are able to use the rest of the Newsletter for something different. In this issue we publish an interview with Simon Phillips, of Ronald

Phillips Ltd, who is not only one of the most successful English antiques dealers of modern times but also one of the Society's staunchest supporters. Without Simon's help and encouragement the tercentenary exhibition of 2018 might never have happened, and it was only due to Simon's support that the catalogue of the exhibition was produced. His optimism about dealing in the age of Covid is refreshing to read.

The interview was conducted in a Covid safe manner (naturally) by our Newsletter Editor, May Geolot, and I take this opportunity to thank her for her good work. The same thanks are due to all members of the Chippendale Society Committee, who work hard to keep the Society running through good times and bad. These are the bad times: the good times will surely come.

Adam Bowett

DEALING IN THE AGE OF COVID: AN INTERVIEW

The following interview took place over Zoom in January 2021 with Simon Phillips of Ronald Phillips Ltd. Thank you to Simon for taking time to share his knowledge and insights on dealing antiques and Thomas Chippendale.

Can you tell us a little bit about your background in the antiques trade?

From the age of six I went around the country with my father as he ran the business. I left school in 1979 and had one or two days off before I asked my father if I could come and join him, and then the rest is history. I've always been in the same building in Bruton Street - back then we only had one floor. And our neighbours were mostly picture galleries, including Lefevre Fine Art and Roy Miles Gallery, and M. Turpin Ltd was next door!

At the beginning, it was just the two of us, and just one man in the workshop. I would manage and run the gallery while my father would be out finding new items for the business.

I can tell you that getting thrown in at the deep end is the best way to learn.

How has the furniture of Thomas Chippendale played a role in your antique dealing over the years?

In the 1970s and 80s, I always dreamed of owning those pieces - but there were other larger firms that could afford to buy them, like Hotspur, Mallett, and Partridge. About ten to twelve years before the 300 year anniversary was coming up, I started collecting with the aim of doing an exhibition and catalogue for the anniversary.

Do you have a favourite Chippendale piece - either in your collection or elsewhere?

It is hard to pick one, but a few that come to mind are ones in public collections, including the Harewood dining room suite or the library writing table, which is now at Temple Newsam. A further question would be whether you want to live with them or whether you admire them more for their craftsmanship. Lady Winn's bedchamber commode from Nostell Priory is another highlight having great shape, design, quality, mounts, and in the best possible restrained taste.

What do your collectors look for when they buy Chippendale furniture?

When it comes to Chippendale, one of the key elements is documentation - if it exists. Otherwise you are looking at the construction, originality, or history. You can make comparisons with

similar examples, or more often, identical examples, such as the Dumfries House desk and the example in our collection has the same veneers, handles, everything. These kinds of detail help us to identify works that were made by Chippendale rather than providing a general attribution to a cabinetmaker.

Besides Chippendale, what other cabinetmakers do you admire?

Some of the names that come to mind are Giles Grendey for the lacquer, John Gumley and James Moore for gesso furniture, as well as William Hallett and Ince & Mayhew. Another would be Peter Miller for his walnut and trademark construction style. At the moment, Sheraton and Hepplewhite furniture feels more old school.

How has antique dealing changed over the years since you started?

There are a few notable differences. First, the salerooms used to supply the dealers, who would in turn market those pieces to clients. Now the salerooms operate as full retailers so the traditional chain has disappeared. That change goes hand in hand with the rise of the internet as nothing is private any longer. With such detailed sales records offered online you know everyone's business. One upside to that change is that we are able to find things further afield due to the power of the internet.

What do you personally collect?

You can definitely say I practice what I preach when it comes to collecting - but we also focus on bronzes, modern British paintings, and globes.

You have your own furniture workshop in house, while some dealers use independent workshops - what are the advantages and/or disadvantages of this? Can you share a discovery that one of your cabinetmakers made during the restoration process?

My father had the workshop since the 1950s - it allows you to keep total control, and you can drop what you're doing to focus on a new project. We are always seeking to find original colouring or paint and honour that history. We are very honest about what we do with the workshop, and it is never hidden from the public.

As for discoveries, we had one instance where a secret compartment contained £8,000 in cash (sadly returned to the owner)! But from a design perspective, it was a mirror in our latest catalogue - inside the backboard was the drawing for the mirror (see *details below*).



Details of a Chinoiserie rococo mirror, c. 1760, from an unknown workshop, showing (right) a sketch of the cresting on the backboard.
Photographs courtesy of Ronald Phillips Ltd.

DEALING IN THE AGE OF COVID *(cont.)*

You had a magnificent Chippendale exhibition & catalogue in 2018 entitled 'The Legacy of Thomas Chippendale'. How did that exhibition come about and how did it go?

I hoped that there would be celebrations for Chippendale's Tercentenary in 2018. As we got more involved in expensive pieces, it was clear that we could put together a top quality exhibition to coincide with the anniversary. The triumph of this collection was the three or four new discoveries: the Harewood House mirror, the Newby Hall plate warmer pedestal, the Garrick green and white japanned chair (*cover image*), and the Home House pedestal urns (*see right*). We had that hunch about all of them, but being able to do the research and definitively attribute them was a great experience. I should also thank my researcher Thomas Lange for all his hard work on this exhibition and catalogue. I felt that the exhibition was well received, and I thought it was important for someone to push Chippendale and put English furniture at the forefront. The exhibition in Leeds was fantastic, but overall I was disappointed that the nation did very little for the Tercentenary.

How has Covid affected your business and how do you think it has affected the trade in general?

It is difficult because people want to come look, feel, and touch in person - when it comes to a chair, you want the chance to sit in it. Our photos are very high quality and give clients a sense of what they are looking at, but it is not the same as seeing something in person. Although we cannot run our premises in the same way as we used to, business on the internet has picked up. We recently participated in the virtual 2021 edition of the Winter Show in New York. We've also noticed a trend of people moving out of cities and into country houses to have more space - these interiors are well suited for more traditional furniture unlike some of the glass and marble towers in London, so there are signs of a resurgence in the market.

Are you optimistic for the future of the antiques business?

I am still in Bruton Street, and still buying - so I must be optimistic. If you are dealing at the top end and willing to pay the top dollar, then there is still a market. Overall, I think it is important to start young, and to learn and be keen. Rather than viewing the gallery like a museum, my doors at Bruton Street are wide open - Covid permitting - for anyone who is curious and wants to walk around.



Pair of dining room pedestals and urns, attributed to Thomas Chippendale and probably supplied to Elizabeth, Countess of Home, about 1775.
Photograph courtesy of Ronald Phillips Ltd.

EVENTS REPORT

Study Tour of Wentworth Woodhouse 21st October 2020



David Allott outside the West Front, Wentworth Woodhouse

Throughout 2020, as a result of the continuing severity of the Coronavirus pandemic, our programme of events was cancelled and rebooked for 2021. However, as lockdown restrictions eased at the end of August and before they were tightened in late Autumn we were able to run a study tour of Wentworth Woodhouse near Rotherham. This visit was enabled by Chippendale Society Treasurer, historian and archivist, David Allott, who currently works at the house as head guide. As Rotherham is not far for many members to access independently and with two smaller groups on each tour, fifteen members of the Society visited the house in a perfect Covid-safe way.

Each group met in the Pillared Hall where David gave a brief history of the house and the Fitzwilliam family, the original owners. The house is now owned by the Wentworth-Woodhouse Preservation Trust whose aim is to secure its future for the nation. A government grant has enabled the Trust to repair the roof and as we walked towards the entrance, the majesty of the east front (reputedly the largest continuous façade of any house in the country) was shrouded by nearly two million pounds worth of scaffolding and plastic sheeting, illustrating the magnitude of the task ahead. The original house occupied by Thomas Wentworth, 1st Earl of Strafford, was altered and extended in the 1630s, then transformed with Baroque additions in the 1720s by Thomas Watson-Wentworth, later Marquis of Rockingham. The great east front was designed by Henry Flitcroft working for the latter in the 1730s and was based on Colen Cambell's Wanstead House, illustrated in *Vitruvius Britannicus*, 1715.

David explained that the house and grounds had been left in a critical state as a result of open cast mining, use by the army during the Second World War and life from 1950 to 1977 as the Lady Mabel College of Further Education. Nationalization of the coal mines and death duties reduced the wealth of the Fitzwilliam family and there have been several auction sales of the contents over the years. In addition, after the sale of the house in 1989, the family moved to different properties. As a result, the former grandeur of the house and its collections is now only evidenced by the size of the property and its rooms and the remaining fixtures and fittings.

EVENTS REPORT (cont.)



Chinoiserie wallpaper at Wentworth Woodhouse

From the Pillared Hall, an austere Palladian space with Tuscan columns and neo-classical statues, we ascended the main staircase to the Marble Saloon. As grand and stately this neo-classical staircase designed by John Carr maybe, nothing prepares you for the overwhelming grandeur of the Marble Saloon. This marble clad room is a colossal 60 feet square and 40 feet high and is surrounded by a gallery, ideal for watching the proceedings below. Niche panels were designed by James Stewart, the overmantels by John Gibson and between the eight niches, each containing a neo-classical statue, are Ionic fluted pillars in scagliola; the shafts are Sienna and the bases, pedestals and capitals are of white marble. The geometric marble tiled floor needs some restoration but considering the room was used as a gym/sports hall, it is in remarkable condition.

Our tour progressed down a suite of rooms running from the Marble Saloon to the Whistlejacket room, part of the east front suite of rooms that Nikolaus Pevsner described as 'not easily matched anywhere in England'. The first room, the Ante Drawing

room, was where guests could retreat during parties and events. The pelmets indicate how impressive this room was when originally furnished. Similar to the ones in the ballroom at Harewood, the pelmets including swags and tails are carved in wood. Additionally, here they are covered in yellow silk taffeta.

The next room, the Van Dyke room, so called because it was hung entirely with portraits of the family by Sir Anthony Van Dyke, would have been spectacular. The grand fireplace thought to be by James Athenian Stuart and exceptional plasterwork by Joseph Rose senior and brother Jonathan remain as a reminder of those times. The last room in this suite, the Whistlejacket room, is named after the portrait of the racehorse by George Stubbs, commissioned by the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham in 1762. It hung in this room until 1972 and now hangs in the National Gallery. A replica hangs in its place. Like many rooms in the house, the use has changed over the years. It was originally a dining room with a fine marble fireplace depicting Bacchus and overdoor decoration of cereals and grapes. The decoration was heavily gilded in 1784 when the room became a drawing room and today looks spectacular.

Our tour took over two hours and involved visiting the Baroque earlier house and the Baroque West front, and also areas not normally open to the public. One of the highlights of this part of the tour was the bedroom decorated with an exquisite bird, flower and insect wallpaper. At the moment further research is required to discover whether or not this paper is British or Chinese.

At the end of the tour we agreed that a further visit should be made in the future to see the developments the trust have made in the renovation of Wentworth Woodhouse. It is hoped that in the future original furniture may be returned on loan and indeed it would be interesting to return to view a small number of rooms furnished as they had been in their heyday.

Thanks again to David Allott for such an interesting and educational tour.

Cathy Lambert

NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE FROM THE EVENTS TEAM

We wish you all a Happy New Year in these very difficult times. Let us hope that the vaccination programme gives us all our lives back and we can meet up again at our events.

You will notice that we have no new events advertised in this issue of our newsletter. The committee thought that we should wait until the end of February to advertise them on a special newsletter. By this time we hope that the position with the pandemic will be clearer.

We would be interested if participants in the study days would consider driving independently to the venue, as happened at Wentworth Woodhouse in October 2020. Obviously the fee for the day would reflect independent travel.

Provisional Events for 2021

Everingham Park day study tour - June 10th 2021, near Pocklington, East Yorkshire, 1hr from Leeds

The Welsh Borders, four days and three nights study tour - July 6th - 9th 2021

Tatton and Tabley day study tour - August 12th 2021, near Knutsford, South Manchester, 1hr 15m from Leeds

Kent, four days, three nights study tour - September 7th - 10th 2021

Our AGM is at Temple Newsam on May 17th 2021 and the Annual Dinner will be on June 1st 2021. Please note these dates are provisional due to the relevant Covid restrictions and will be confirmed in the next newsletter.

If you would consider independent travel please let me know by phone or text on 07950 206002, or leave a message on 01943 609812, or email cathylambert2@gmail.com

Cathy Lambert and Kerry Bristol

MEMBERSHIP: DUES REMINDER

Annual membership subscriptions for 2021 were due on 1st January 2021. If you have not already arranged to pay by Bankers Standing Order and would like to do so, please contact the Membership

Secretary, Peggy Pullan, membership@thechippendalesociety.co.uk, The Croft, Breary Lane, Bramhope, Leeds LS16 9AE.