



The post-Union cabinetmaking trade in Ireland, 1800-40: a time of transition

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THE APPRAISAL AND RECOGNITION OF THE DECORATIVE ARTS IN IRELAND IN THE EARLY nineteenth century has been overshadowed by two historical landmarks: the Irish Act of Union in 1801, and the catastrophic famine of the 1840s. These events have understandably drawn investigative interest and obscured the intervening years. There has consequently been a lack of inquiry into the production of luxury goods after the passing of the Act of Union, and a tendency to accept the complaints of contemporary manufacturers that the flight of the aristocracy from Dublin caused a drop in production and quality. Thus, in historical terms, the picture presented has been one of a decline in artisan manufacture in the years following the Union. In general, it has been implied that furniture was either imported or dwindled in standard from the neo-classical period.¹ Historians and collectors have considered that the peak of distinctiveness in Irish furniture was reached with the creation of exuberantly carved mahogany pieces in the mid-eighteenth century.² In fact, the Napoleonic Wars benefited Ireland, and Dublin's burgeoning middle class provided a crucial market for the craft industries. An investigation into the production of silver has also shown that a considerable volume of plate was still being manufactured in early nineteenth-century Dublin.³ This is also true of furniture production in Ireland.⁴ Cabinetmakers adapted to changes in society and continued to furnish houses in town and country. Indeed, many cabinetmaking firms, including Preston's, Morgan's, Gillington's and Mack, Williams & Gibton, passed the business from generation to generation with a continuity that supports Maurice Craig's claim that 'on a larger view the Union was in most respects an insignificant interruption'.⁵

Dublin in the eighteenth century has been depicted as a glittering city in the ascendant, a centre of style and fashion, with a glamorous aristocracy supporting a vibrant luxury goods market. In the years leading to the passing of the Act of Union, opinion was

1 – Irish mahogany dining chair, ex Mount Talbot, county Roscommon, c.1820 (private collection)

divided, and many pamphlets were published setting out positions both in favour and in opposition.⁶ In Dublin the majority of professionals, especially lawyers, as well as merchants and manufacturers, were opposed to the Act.⁷ They were concerned that Dublin would lose its established position as ‘second city’ and suffer from the subsequent economic decline. It was forecast that the loss of a parliament, with its ensuing exodus of peers from the capital, would be detrimental for the artisans who produced luxury goods.⁸ Commentators were pessimistic about building activity, envisaging a collapse of the residential property market that would result in the subsequent crumbling of the infrastructure.⁹ This uncertainty created tensions and nervousness that inhibited the continued expansion of Dublin, and the years leading up to the Union were fraught with difficulty for developers and manufacturers.¹⁰ Barbara Verschoyle, Lord Fitzwilliam’s agent, complained that rents were in arrears and tenants had not commenced building on the Fitzwilliam estate. Verschoyle linked the lack of building activity to difficulties in trade and manufacturing activity when she wrote, in 1797, that ‘the Situation of this Country at present is truly Melancholy, where it will End God Knows ... Several Manufacturers have been Obligated to Discharge more than three fourths of their People, & Crowds of Poor Creatures are hourly Begging.’¹¹

English and Irish affairs were mutually dependent, with an uneasy balance between Irish and British interests.¹² England had asserted greater control politically from an earlier period, beginning under Lord George Townshend’s viceroyalty from 1767 to 1772.¹³ The rebellion of 1798 resulted in terror and instability as the government forces reacted to early rebel victories with repression and indiscriminate slaughtering of both rebels and civilians. Charles Cornwallis, appointed Lord Lieutenant in 1798, aided by his chief secretary Viscount Robert Stewart Castlereagh, worked assiduously towards achieving a Union. Divergent political interests came together to oppose the government-backed parliamentary Union, but afterwards reverted to sectarian positions.

In the eighteenth century, at various times, campaigns to ‘Buy Irish’ were used to stimulate sales of Irish manufactured goods.¹⁴ Newspapers commented on dresses made from Irish cloth, which were worn to events at Dublin Castle. Imports had long been seen as a threat, and this exhortation to buy Irish goods intensified after the Union. The gentry were seen as important promoters of Irish goods with their ability to lead fashion. Stucco workers in 1834 claimed that, due to absenteeism, the demand for elaborate ornamentation had declined, and that by the 1830s dwelling houses were plainly plastered.¹⁵ Thus, the trades looked to the landed gentry to set the tone, to buy and flaunt the most fashionable, most intricate, and most expensive objects, which would result in a larger market for their products.

The population in Dublin increased throughout the eighteenth century, reaching 180,000 by 1800, and rising to 224,000 by 1821. Calculating the population growth after this date is problematical, but the city continued to expand, with sharply differing trends between the old districts and new suburbs, reaching 265,000 in 1831.¹⁶ Thus, Dublin remained a large city in European terms.

In 1800 there were few world cities with populations over 100,000, but this number rose rapidly from 1800 to 1850.¹⁷ The Irish and British economies were also closely connected before the Union, and the export trade had increased in importance for Ireland. As the population in England increased and the colonies in North America and the West Indies expanded, the provisions trade from Ireland grew.¹⁸ An examination of exports to England shows a predominance of agricultural produce.¹⁹ Ireland's trade improved during the war between Britain and France, which began in 1793. Although it abated briefly when the Peace of Amiens was agreed on 25th March 1802, it revived in 1803, and continued until 1815. Between 1792 and 1815, the volume of exports to England rose by forty per cent, with a corresponding sharp rise in prices, as England needed more supplies for its army and navy.²⁰

After the war, there was a decline in foreign trade to and from Dublin port, although there was an expansion of facilities with new docks and warehouses built. Nevertheless, an increasing population meant that there was a corresponding rise in demand for supplies. As Clarkson has pointed out, due to the commonplace nature of many household requirements, the importance and level of demand for such consumer products has been overlooked.²¹ As food production supported a population of four million, this required more than 168,000 people who were devoted to feeding the upper classes alone.²² It has been suggested that national income rose from £15 million to £75 million between the 1730s and 1815. These figures, Clarkson claims, suggest that the upper class had an income of about £6 million per annum in the early eighteenth century, which rose to £30 million by the end of the century.²³ Thus, the amount spent on food would have risen from about £1.8 million to £9 million. These particulars confirm the importance of consumption in every town in Ireland, giving a livelihood to grocery shops, butchers, bakers, brewers, millers, servants, labourers, gardeners and many others, including those importing exotic foodstuffs and alcohol.²⁴

THE CABINETMAKING TRADE

THE NAMES RECORDED IN THE TRADE DIRECTORIES PUBLISHED ANNUALLY IN DUBLIN represent the masters who were employers, property owners and the managers of the workshop and retail outlets. The numbers of cabinetmakers listed in the Dublin directories rose from seventy-five in 1798 to eighty-five in 1830. However, in the intervening years, the directories listed decreasing numbers with just fifty-eight in 1803; this recovered to seventy-two by 1815. The trained employees referred to themselves as operatives or journeymen. Henry Eggleso of 12 Abbey Street, when declared bankrupt in 1818, employed forty operatives, as did Robert Morgan of Henry Street; Thomas Powel of Grafton Street, on the other hand, employed just seven.²⁵ Cabinetmakers purchased a wide range of other materials to produce furniture and upholstery work. In 1803, the workshop contents of the late Peter Eggleso, was advertised for sale. The stock included:

several hundred yards of the richest furniture calicos, elegant Paris Fringes, Lace, ornamental Brass Work and Pier Glasses executed to the newest Parisian style, many hundred stone of the best seasonal Bed Feathers, a quantity of large English Blankets, a State Four-post Bedstead and Curtains finished for a nobleman abroad, in the highest style of elegance, Mahogany Logs, Timber-Veneers, a large quantity of Iron and Brass Work for Cabinet-makers and Upholsters.²⁶

This variety of upholstery materials required an area in the workshop to be kept clean to preserve expensive fabrics and trimmings. In the period 1784 to 1800, John Mack advertised frequently in the *Dublin Evening Post* as an ‘Upholder and Auctioneer’. The term ‘upholder’, in Dublin, indicates that the cabinetmaker also produced upholstery work. In London in the eighteenth century, an upholder frequently served as an interior decorator. Many partnerships existed between a cabinetmaker and an upholsterer, allowing a wider range of services to be offered.²⁷ In 1812, Morgan’s of Henry Street styled themselves as ‘Cabinet Makers & Upholders’, but the term ‘upholder’ went out of fashion in the early nineteenth century, and by 1837 George Gillington was advertising his ‘Cabinet Manufactory and Upholstery warerooms’.²⁸ Thus, the Gillington firm covered the two main areas of production – upholstery, the ‘soft’ side of production, and cabinetmaking, which was the woodworking craft. Those styled ‘Carvers and Gilders’ produced frames for mirrors and pictures, and also gilded carcass furniture. James Del Vecchio, father and son, are recorded in the trade directories as ‘print-seller and looking glass manufacturer’ from about 1797 to 1835. A giltwood overmantel mirror from this shop is signed and dated 1813 (Plate 2). Their bill-head promoted the wide range of products and services they offered, including ‘Chimney, Pier and Toilet Glasses ... Pier Tables, Picture Frames of every denomination ... Fancy Wood Frames’, and a variety of timbers, such as ‘Rosewood, Birds Eye Maple, Mahogany, Satin-wood’.²⁹

Cabinetmakers offered a wide range of furniture products, ranging from bespoke pieces in expensive woods to everyday items in deal (pine) for kitchens or servants’ quarters, and many day-to-day activities consisted of carrying out repairs or moving furniture from house to house. This level of service entailed visiting clients’ houses, and resulted in a close relationship between cabinetmakers and their customers. Cabinetmakers had to be discreet and have skilful interpersonal skills, in particular those who were also undertakers. The term cabinetmaker was in general use in Britain by the end of the seventeenth century, when the cabinetmaking trade became separate and distinct from joiners. In London, there was a gradual increase in the numbers of cabinetmakers from the 1690s. In Dublin, evidence suggests that many cabinetmakers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century had predecessors who were joiners in the early eighteenth century.³⁰

Throughout the eighteenth century, the cabinetmaking trade expanded considerably.³¹ A cabinetmaker needed ‘a much lighter hand and a quicker eye than a joiner’ as his work required ‘more ingenuity than strength’.³² He also needed to be able to ‘write a good hand, understand arithmetic, and have some notion of drawing and designing’.³³ In



2 – James Del Vecchio, Regency carved giltwood overmantle mirror, 1813
signed and dated Del Vecchio, Dublin, 22 July 1813 (courtesy Fonsie Mealy)



Dublin, many cabinetmakers attended the Dublin Society Drawing Schools, in particular the School of Landscape and Ornament Drawing.³⁴ When Henry Mayhew reviewed the London trade in 1850, he stated that cabinetmakers were expected to make all types of furniture except chairs and bedsteads.³⁵ Specialist chair-makers were often listed in Irish street directories, but cabinetmaking firms such as Mack, Williams & Gibton, Preston's and Morgan's produced chairs of all types. In about 1815, Gillington supplied an exceptional set of fourteen chairs for Euseby Cleaver, Lord Archbishop of Dublin, for his house on St Stephen's Green (Plate 3).³⁶

As with all craft trades in Dublin, an apprenticeship system controlled entry into the cabinetmaking trade, and the apprentice, who began to train when about fourteen years old, was bound to his master for a period of seven years. In return, he was taught a skill, given a home and looked after. Once an agreement was reached over the sum to be paid by the prospective apprentice to the master, both signed an indenture setting out the terms. The cabinetmaker William Gibton in 1755 undertook to faithfully serve his master, to keep his secrets, and not to 'commit Fornication, or contract Matrimony'.³⁷ He also promised not to 'haunt or use Taverns, Ale-houses or Play-houses' or to 'play cards, dice or any other unlawful games'.³⁸

As the century progressed, operatives became increasingly well organised and unions were open to all denominations. It would appear that because the masters and



3 – Samuel Gillington, Regency cove-back mahogany dining chairs, c.1815
 stamped Gillington and B7611 (courtesy Mallet, London)

operatives in the cabinetmaking trade were a well-educated group, they were able to solve problems that arose within the trade – such as wage agreements – among themselves. Trade was badly affected by the economic slump after the wars with France ended in 1816, but cabinetmakers proved themselves resilient, offering stock at reduced prices and agreeing a wage-cut with operatives. The evidence generally points to cabinetmakers having a well-organised society in the early nineteenth century, with contact to various associations within Ireland and England. Journeymen felt they needed protection from masters in relation to their wages, but they also wished to protect their trade and its standards for the masters and for themselves.³⁹ Loyalty was established through the apprenticeship system, as master and operative worked closely together. As this system weakened, however, with the growing use of outdoor apprentices and the search for

cheaper labour, trust was undermined. Endeavouring to fix a standard piecework rate, journeymen drew up price lists, which were used to reach an agreement over pay with their employers.⁴⁰ The London Society of Cabinetmakers had published the first edition of *The Cabinet-Makers' London Book of Prices* in 1788, and many provincial centres such as Leeds (1791), Edinburgh (1805), Liverpool (1805) and Manchester (1810) followed suit. In Birmingham, the cabinetmakers published a price book in 1803, *A Supplement to the London Cabinet Makers' Price Book* of 1797.⁴¹ These price books were practical guides to enable journeymen to calculate what to charge for types of furniture in common usage. It was in effect a wage demand, which was to be used as a negotiating tool. The committee of journeymen who compiled the London book maintained that it was 'for the convenience of Cabinet-Makers in general: whereby the price of executing any piece of work may be easily found'. A price book published in Dublin in 1842 is the earliest reported, and Dublin cabinetmakers appear to have relied on the London book of prices until 1816 at least.⁴² An edition was published in Belfast in 1822, which was based on the 1805 Edinburgh *Book of Prices for Manufacturing Cabinet Work*.⁴³ The cabinet-maker Christopher Leahy claimed that in 1801 employers and journeymen had agreed to a book of prices which all employers signed, and this had continued in use until 1816.⁴⁴

DESIGN AND DISPLAY

IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY, RETAIL OUTLETS CONTRIBUTED TO an increase in demand as they kept a stock of pattern books to whet the appetite of prospective customers. The London cabinetmaker's shop, 'so richly set out it looked like a palace', became well established in the mid-eighteenth century in London, and began to appear in the provinces soon after.⁴⁵ Cabinetmakers were very aware of the competition from London, and constantly refer to receiving designs and patterns from that city. In 1809, when advertising his new business, Dubliner James Jesson asserted that he had 'formed a connection with some of the first Houses of London', and declared that he would manufacture any article in an equivalent 'style of elegance to any imported'.⁴⁶ Jesson maintained he had available the 'newest patterns' and suitable designs for curtains and draperies. In 1812, Gillington, when advertising the acquisition of new designs, assured prospective clients that they 'execute in style not inferior to any London house', and referred to the 'superior quality of their own manufacture'.⁴⁷

Pattern books published in England were clearly used as much by Dublin cabinetmakers as their counterparts in other cities, as an examination of furniture made in Dublin, London and Edinburgh makes clear.⁴⁸ However, while Dublin cabinetmakers had access to the publications of Thomas Sheraton, George Smith and Rudolph Ackermann, they also regularly advertised that they had received designs from Paris, and pieces are often described in bills as being of 'French' design. In 1815, Eggeso and Power advertised that they had just received 'Superb Parisian Furniture Designs'.⁴⁹ They elaborated



4 – Irish mahogany dining chair, ex. Mount Talbot, county Roscommon, c.1820 (private collection)

that these were available for ‘public inspection’ at their extensive warerooms, which contained a ‘choice collection of elegant and fashionable furniture’. Indeed, Ackermann noted that despite the Napoleonic wars, ‘the interchange of feelings between this country and France, as it related to matters of taste, has not been wholly suspended.’⁵⁰ The Rev John Talbot purchased a set of eighteen mahogany dining chairs for his interior at Mount Talbot, county Roscommon, in about 1820 (Plates 1, 4). The design of these is inspired by the French Directoire style. They are of tub form with curved caned backs, infilled with leather upholstery, curved arms, the oval seats with squab cushions, the front legs turned and tapering, the back legs of sabre form.

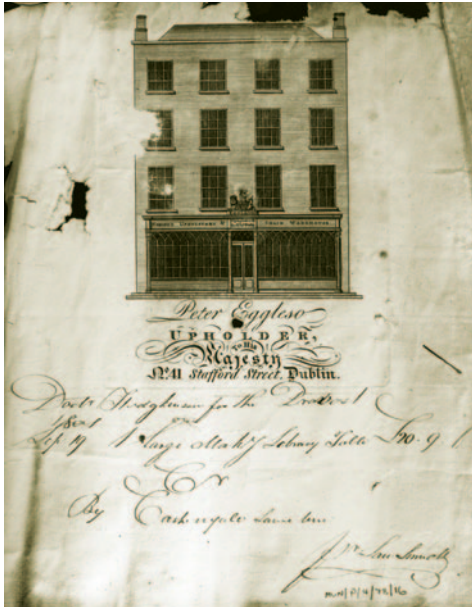
In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, discerning clients travelled widely and had access to the latest fashions. This had an impact on design and with the Irish cabinetmaking trade. The London firm of Kennet & Kidd had an enviable Irish clientele in 1793, including Viscount Dillon, William Digges la Touche and his brother Peter La Touche, Viscount Dungannon and Charles Henry Coote.⁵¹ These orders were shipped via Holyhead in Wales.⁵² In 1797, Kidd supplied the hall benches for the 1st Earl of Belmore at Castlecoole, county Fermanagh, to a design by James Wyatt.⁵³ Interestingly, this design was later produced in various interpretations by Mack, Williams & Gibton, and became a favourite with the firm (Plate 5).⁵⁴ The Preston cabinetmaking firm of Henry Street provided large orders for the 2nd Earl of Belmore from 1807 to 1825; is it possible that a cabinetmaker working for the Preston firm sketched the design in situ and later went to work



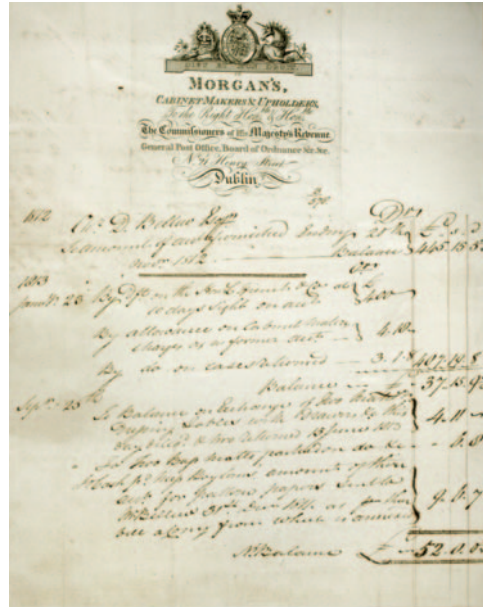
5 – Mack, Williams & Gibton, Regency carved mahogany hall bench, c.1815
stamped 8531 (private collection)

6 – Mack, Williams & Gibton, William IV carved mahogany hall seat
stamped Williams & Gibton, numbered 18067 (Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design)





7 – Billhead of Peter Egglese, ‘Upholder to his Majesty’, 41 Stafford Street, Dublin, to the Provost of Trinity College Dublin, for supplying a library table (1801) (courtesy Manuscripts, Trinity College Dublin)



8 – Billhead of Morgan’s Cabinetmakers and Upholders, 21 Henry Street, Dublin, to Christopher Dillon Bellew, Mount Bellew, county Galway (1812-13) (courtesy National Library)

for Mack, Williams & Gibton? Cabinetmakers certainly travelled and emigrated for work.⁵⁵ In 1795, Kennet & Kidd sent a cabinetmaker to Dublin to carry out work for the Earl of Ormond.⁵⁶ He spent nine weeks ‘fixing furniture’. Mack, Williams & Gibton later produced a related pattern of the hall bench design for Portaferry House, county Down (dating from about 1815).⁵⁷ As with other designs, they continued to adapt to current fashions, and in 1830 produced a bench with a pair of matching hall chairs (Plate 6). The carving on these pieces is more modulated and they are more elaborately decorated. The crest is filled with a gilded cockerel, and the Prince of Wales feathers are carved on the seats – a popular motif in the early nineteenth century.

Advertising new or improved showrooms was an important aspect of promotion, and considerable thought and planning went into the display of goods. Samuel Lindsey, a carver and gilder producing mirror frames, advertised his new shop display in 1814 and announced ‘an entirely new and most superb Assortment’ of stock.⁵⁸ A Regency-style mirror with entwined mythological creatures bears his trade label on the back. Trade cards with elaborate illustrations of the products for sale and attractive shop-fronts confirm the importance of display and promotion. Robert Shields showed an elegant neo-classical interior on his trade card before 1810, when the unfortunate Shields was declared bankrupt.⁵⁹ The card promoted Shields as ‘Auctioneers, Fancy Upholstery and Cabinet

Ware House, 43 Stafford Street, Dublin, Fringe lines and Tassels, Funerals Supplied'.⁶⁰ Gillington for many years displayed their shopfront on a trade label, but in 1830 they included a display of furniture available for sale in the shop window. George Murray's trade card showed his elegant shopfront on Dawson Street, with a selection of gilt mirrors on display.⁶¹ Quality and variety were key selling points in advertising rhetoric. In 1842, Gillington & Sons announced that they had 'considerably enlarged their Ware-rooms' and referred to their 'Elegant and Extensive Variety of Useful and Ornamental furniture ... not surpassed for design, materials or execution by any in the empire'.⁶² Longevity in business was also regularly stressed: in 1832, Anthony Morgan declared that he had been in business for 'upwards of half a Century'.⁶³

Official patronage was also of great importance at this time. An appointment to the Lord Lieutenant allowed the Royal Arms and tablets to be placed over the shop door, and to be used on billheads and trade cards. These can clearly be seen in billheads of 1801 and 1813 (Plates 7, 8).⁶⁴ Advertising in 1804, Henry Eggleso announced that he was upholsterer to her Excellency the Countess of Hardwicke.⁶⁵ John Mack also campaigned for this privilege, and received a satisfactory result in 1807, the appointments secretary finding that the furnishings Mack had supplied to Dublin Castle gave him 'every ground for claiming the desire you mention'.⁶⁶ In fact, Mack had been supplying considerable quantities of furniture to the Board of Works for some time, and from 1804 was their principal supplier.⁶⁷ Others sought professional distinction through other achievements. In 1836, Thomas Kane, a camp-furniture manufacturer at 150 Francis Street, reminded prospective customers that he had received 'Silver Medals from the Royal Dublin Society' at their two annual exhibitions.⁶⁸

Advertising and self-promotion served a number of purposes, not least when we consider that firms often had to compete with one another for large orders, providing both estimates and designs. At Castlegar, county Galway, the Morgan firm of Henry Street lost out to the English firm of Gillows of Lancaster for the order to furnish the main reception rooms in 1808.⁶⁹ The estimates for furniture from the Morgan firm were in fact higher than those of Gillows.⁷⁰ In turn, several Dublin cabinetmakers provided estimates to furnish the bedrooms at Castlegar, including John Mack, Robert Fannin, James Wood and Henry Eggleso.⁷¹ In the event, Eggleso received the commission, and his quote came in just under John Mack's, but higher than the other two cabinetmakers, suggesting that his designs had played a part in the decision.⁷²

OFFICIAL PATRONAGE: THE BOARD OF WORKS

THE BOARD OF WORKS REMAINED AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF COMMISSIONS FOR CABINETMAKERS and allied trades in the early nineteenth century. Furniture, upholstery work, carved and gilded mirrors and picture frames were ordered for the state apartments at Dublin Castle, the Four Courts, the Treasury, the War and Barracks Office

and the Vice Regal Lodge. Institutions such as hospitals, banks, state offices and libraries procured furniture for offices and waiting rooms. The Morgan firm supplied furniture to the Board of Education and had an appointment from the Commissioners of Revenue, the General Post Office and the Board of Ordnance.⁷³ The firm also supplied furniture to Trinity College Dublin, as did several other cabinetmakers, including Henry Eggleso, Williams & Gibton, and Arthur Jones. This ranged from the very grand – for instance, the elaborate upholstery from the Morgan firm for the visit of George IV – to the utilitarian, such as the reading stands, library bookcases and chairs supplied to Trinity College by the cabinetmakers Williams & Gibton in 1843.

Succeeding lord lieutenants continued to entertain and spend lavishly, and the Board of Works engaged in several refurbishments of the state apartments.⁷⁴ For example, in 1803, large amounts were spent on furnishing and altering the Castle apartments and covering the walls of a suite of rooms in crimson silk for Philip Yorke, 3rd Earl of Hardwicke; in the 1820s, Richard Wellesley, 1st Marquess, coming to Dublin from the magnificence of India, also demanded new furnishings.⁷⁵ Commentators derided the replacement of a glamorous and ostentatious nobility by a style-less and monotonous middle class. However, as William Drennan, United Irishman, pamphleteer, poet and doctor wrote, ‘Dublin is said to be thriving notwithstanding its loss by the rich absentees, and evidence points to many merchants and lawyers prospering and furnishing town and suburban country houses in style.’⁷⁶

PRIVATE PATRONAGE: DINING IN STYLE

COUNTRY-HOUSE BUILDING GATHERED IMPETUS IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE NINETEENTH century, and the house continued to act as both a family home and a centre for social activity. Visitors to Ireland in the early nineteenth century continuously refer to the level of munificence in country houses. As Prince von Puckler-Muskau noted in 1828, ‘the stranger in Ireland soon notices the hospitality’.⁷⁷ The Marquess and Marchioness Donegal enjoyed a period, in the early 1800s, of great extravagance in Belfast, having fled from their creditors in London.⁷⁸ In 1802 they entertained on a grand scale, hosting a supper for seventy guests to open their ‘new drawing room’, and in 1803 a hundred guests arrived to enjoy and admire a new dining room.⁷⁹ When the Donegal’s possessions were advertised for sale in 1803, it included everything from furniture to horses. The ‘parlour’ had been furnished with a view to entertaining large numbers as it contained thirty-one chairs, eight tables, a ‘library sopha table’; the drawing room contained two dozen chairs, nine tables and four sofas.⁸⁰

The dining room served an important role in a family’s social life. Furnishing schemes varied from the very grand, as at Ballyfin, county Laois, or Castlecoole, county Fermangh, to more modest schemes such as at Ballindoolin, county Offaly, or Kilsharven, county Meath. At Ballyfin, Sir Charles Coote ordered a set of ‘imperial telescope tables,

5ft 3 wide with 8 loose leaves, 2ft 6 each on strong massive legs and castors, 25ft 6 long', along with '24 St. Domingo mahogany chairs with stuffed backs in rich morocco leather'. In town houses in Dublin, sets of dining chairs supplied by the Morgan firm varied in size in the 1830s from twelve to twenty-four. Thus, the set of eighteen supplied to Mount Talbot, county Roscommon, suggest elaborate entertainments held by the family. The house was originally an eighteenth-century Palladian house extended in about 1820. The chairs, Regency pedestal table and plain cellaret, along with the Gothic side table in the alcove, were purchased to complement the new Gothic interior of 1820.⁸¹

A description of an early nineteenth-century dining room provides a rare glimpse of how furniture and soft furnishings acted in concert to create a sumptuous effect. In 1809, Margaret Harvey, visiting from Philadelphia, attended a dinner party at her relation Tom Harvey's house in Cork. She described the dining room as having

one large table in the middle and two side tables laid. The furniture in the room and the superb manner the tables were decorated exceeds anything I ever saw. The room is about forty feet by twenty, with three large windows front, over which a pole is the length of the room, by way of cornice, beautifully gilt. The curtains were crimson, with wings to them; but the drapery was thrown over the pole and hung in festoons from one end of the room to the other and of course, over the pier. It is a most fanciful way of putting up curtains. I never saw any put up so handsome with us. The floor is covered all over with a rich Turkey carpet; mahogany chairs. The room, elegant light papered. Over the chimney, a portrait of the eldest boy, as large as life, playing Shuttlecock. Under the table was green cloth spread, fine enough for coats. But how shall I give thee an idea of the grandeur of the tables? – I do not know.⁸²

Harvey was later impressed by a sumptuous dinner at the villa of another of her husband's relations, Reuban Harvey, where 'I was again astonished to see such style, such order and elegance in one family.'⁸³

Wine cellarets were another important element of dining room furnishings. One design was produced many times by the cabinetmakers Mack, Williams & Gibton (Plate 9), and supplied to the Board of Works.⁸⁴ The furniture they supplied to Dublin Castle in the early 1800s contained Greek Revival architectural elements, which echo the designs and taste of the architect Francis Johnston.⁸⁵ Johnston, in fact, probably supplied designs to the cabinetmakers, including one for a wine-cooler in about 1810. This he based on a plate from Sheraton's *Cabinet Dictionary* (1803) (Plate 10).⁸⁶ Another wine-cooler by Mack, Williams & Gibton, bearing the emblems of the Illustrious Order of Saint Patrick (established in 1783), is executed in a more vigorous and robust spirit than Johnston's rather stiff design.⁸⁷ Johnston himself had a wine-cooler of this design in his own house, Kilmore, county Armagh.⁸⁸ A cellaret of the same pattern by Mack, Williams & Gibton was supplied to Major Bryan Bellew of Jenkinstown Castle, county Kilkenny, along with a monumental sideboard, with very specific classical references.⁸⁹ Sideboards were often



9 – Mack, Williams & Gibton (attrib.), Regency mahogany wine cellaret (private collection)

10 – Francis Johnston, design for a 'Sarcophagus', based on an illustration in Thomas Sheraton, *THE CABINET DICTIONARY* (1803), pl. 68

opposite

11 – Samuel and George Gillington, Regency mahogany serving table stamped Gillingtons (courtesy Adam's, Dublin)



ordered along with side tables, and served a utilitarian purpose as well as being for display. The cupboards were fitted to hold bottles of wine, or shelves for glasses, and drawers were fitted for cutlery or napkins. Side tables were primarily for display and to add to the ceremony of dining; a serving table stamped by Gillingtons has grooves on the top for displaying plates (Plate 11).

CONCLUSION

AS IN ANY SOCIETY, INDIVIDUALS IN IRELAND HAD VARYING MOTIVATIONS AND INSPIRATIONS. There were those among the elite who were well educated and travelled widely, had studied classical architecture and civilization, and were stimulated and inspired by what they saw. In 1791, Blayney Balfour, on his Grand Tour, described how Genoa ‘abounds in magnificent Palaces some of which contain valuable collections of Pictures ... others are remarkable for the richness and elegance of the furniture.’⁹⁰ Travel provided an impulse to connect Irish taste to that of the elites in England and Europe. Other contributing factors were the individual’s stage of life, marriage and inheritance.⁹¹ Inheritance provided income and an opportunity to build, as did a judicious marriage. Thus, building and planning, developing the garden, and other projects, continued to engage many skilled artisans and gave employment to many journeymen and labourers. Moreover, as the profitability from land increased during the nineteenth century, it allowed the elites of Great Britain and Ireland to operate on a level playing field. Even those who did not have the opportunity to travel were exposed to new ideas through correspondence, books and prints, in tandem with an increased availability of pattern-books and designs.

The new buildings of the nineteenth century in Ireland, including churches, courthouses, schools, hospitals, gaols and bridges, provided direct motivation and stimulus. Cabinetmakers supplied furnishings for many of these interiors, offering a wide range of



services to clients, from acting as an interior designer to conducting elaborate funerals, and they were increasingly prepared to carry out these services in any part of Ireland, aided in no small way by improved transport and road networks. Cabinetmakers also benefited from the growth of the professional, urban and middle class. The combination of evidence from primary sources, together with the furniture of the period identified, confirms that there was a thriving cabinetmaking trade throughout Ireland in the early nineteenth century. Furnishing country houses, town houses and institutions supported the excellent craft culture that had long existed in Ireland, and continued to play an important part in the Irish economy of the early nineteenth century.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Donald McClelland, 'Introduction', in John Teahan (ed.), *Irish Decorative Arts from the Collections of the National Museum of Ireland* (Dublin, 1990) 12.
- ² John Teahan, *Irish Furniture and Woodcraft* (Dublin, 1994) 33.
- ³ Alison FitzGerald and Conor O'Brien, 'The production of silver in late-Georgian Dublin', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, IV, 2001, 8-47.
- ⁴ Angela Alexander, 'Dublin cabinetmakers and their clientele in the period 1800-1841', unpublished PhD thesis, UCD, 2006. The Knight of Glin and James Peill's recent study, though concluding at 1800, briefly summarises the work of the 'leading players in the next century'. Knight of Glin and James Peill, *Irish Furniture* (New Haven and London, 2007) 190-95.
- ⁵ Maurice Craig, 'Unknown Dublin', *The Antique Collector*, August 1974, 53-61.
- ⁶ David Dickson, 'Second City Syndrome: reflections on three Irish cases', in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *Kingdoms United? Great Britain and Ireland since 1500* (Dublin, 1999) 98. Dickson states that over 340 pamphlets were published arguing for and against the Union.
- ⁷ David Dickson, 'Death of a Capital? Dublin and the consequences of Union', in Peter Clark and Raymond Gillespie (eds), *Two Capitals: London and Dublin, 1500-1840* (Oxford, 2001) 113-14. Michael Brown, Patrick M. Geoghegan, James Kelly (eds), *The Irish Act of Union* (Dublin, 2001) 112.
- ⁸ Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), Foster Papers, MS D207/10/30.
- ⁹ Dickson, 'Death of a Capital?', 114.
- ¹⁰ R.M. Martin, *Ireland before and after the Union with Great Britain* (3rd ed., London, 1848) 37-38. Martin claimed that major public building projects only happened before 1782 and after 1800. However, Carlisle Bridge was opened in 1796 and the Four Courts in 1797.
- ¹¹ Quoted by Eve McAulay in 'Some problems in building on the Fitzwilliam estate during the agency of Barbara Verschoyle', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, II, 1999, 109.
- ¹² T.C. Barnard, 'Historiographical Review: Farewell to old Ireland', *The Historical Journal*, XXXVI, 1993, 919.
- ¹³ Thomas Bartlett, 'The Townshend Viceroyalty 1767-72', in Thomas Bartlett and D.W. Hayton (eds), *Penal Era and Golden Age: essays in Irish history 1690-1800* (Dublin, 1979) 88-112.
- ¹⁴ Sarah Foster, 'Buying Irish', *History Today*, June 1997, 44-51.
- ¹⁵ Royal Irish Academy (RIA), MS 1765, Letters for Repeal of the Union (1834) 30.
- ¹⁶ W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish Historical Statistics: Population 1821-1971* (Dublin,

- 1978) 28. Dickson, 'Death of a Capital?', 117-21.
- ¹⁷ Richard Lawton (ed.), *The Rise and Fall of Great Cities* (London, 1989) 1-19.
- ¹⁸ Louis Cullen, *Population Growth and Diet 1600-1830* (Dublin, 1987) 105. Cullen claims that Ireland was a major exporter in Europe of beef and butter in the eighteenth century, and in the early nineteenth century it became a major exporter of grain and flour to Britain. This trade peaked in the 1830s.
- ¹⁹ Public Records Office, Kew (PRO, Kew), Customs 15, 'Ledgers of Imports and Exports (Ireland)'. Exports consisted of animal skins, horses, hogs, pork, tanned and untanned hides, tallow, soap and large quantities of linen cloth.
- ²⁰ Louis Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland* (London, 1987) 100-103.
- ²¹ L.A. Clarkson, 'Hospitality, housekeeping and high living in eighteenth century Ireland', in Jacqueline R. Hill and Colm Lennon (eds), *Luxury and Austerity*, *Historical Studies* 21 (Dublin, 1999), 84-105.
- ²² *ibid.*
- ²³ *ibid.*, 90.
- ²⁴ PRO, Kew, 'Ledgers of Exports and Imports (Ireland)'.
- ²⁵ RIA, MS 1765, Letters for Repeal of the Union (1834).
- ²⁶ *Dublin Evening Post*, 17th November 1803.
- ²⁷ Pat Kirkham, *The London Furniture Trade 1700-1870* (London, 1988) 57-60.
- ²⁸ See plates 3 and 7.
- ²⁹ Label described in Glin and Peill, *Irish Furniture*, 193, and a pier glass and table illustrated, 194. Bill-head illustrated in Angela Alexander, 'The Dublin Cabinet-Makers in the Early Nineteenth Century: furnishing with style', in Brian Austen (ed.), *Irish Furniture* (London, 2000) 4.
- ³⁰ John Rogers, Appendix 1, in Glin and Peill, *Irish Furniture*, 272-95.
- ³¹ The Knight of Glin, introduction to *An Exhibition of Irish Georgian Furniture* (Dublin, 1998) 1.
- ³² R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman* (London, 1747) 171.
- ³³ Joseph Collyer, *The parents and guardian's directory and the youth's guide in the choice of profession or trade* (London, 1761) 86.
- ³⁴ Gitta Willemson, *The Dublin Society Drawing Schools: students and award winners, 1746-1876* (Dublin, 2000).
- ³⁵ *Morning Chronicle*, 1st August 1850.
- ³⁶ These are stamped B7611 and were sold by Mallett, London, in 1996. The bishops's house is now the Kildare Street Club, 17 St Stephen's Green, Dublin. A pair in the same taste from St Iberius Church, Wexford, were sold at Adams, Dublin, in 2013, with an identical pair to these sold at Bonham's, London, in 2013.
- ³⁷ Illustration of William Gibton's 1755 indenture in Angela Cowhey [Alexander], 'A Case Study of an Early Nineteenth Century Dublin Cabinet-Making Firm', unpublished MA thesis, NCAD, 1992, 75. William Gibton was the father of Robert Gibton, founder of the firm Mack & Gibton, with John Mack in 1803.
- ³⁸ *ibid.*
- ³⁹ Alexander, 'Dublin cabinetmakers and their clientele in the period 1800-1841', 57-104.
- ⁴⁰ Christopher Gilbert, 'The Cabinet-Makers' London Book of Prices', *Furniture History*, XVIII, 1982, 11.
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*, 18. This was agreed in Birmingham on 1st January 1803. It contains a list of known provincial book of prices.
- ⁴² Copy in the collection of the Knight of Glin.
- ⁴³ David Jones, 'An Early Cabinet Makers' Club in Belfast and their Book of Prices, 1822', *Regional*

- Furniture*, IV, 1990, 100-12.
- ⁴⁴ This must have been the London price book published as a revised edition in 1793.
- ⁴⁵ Quoted in Lorna H. Mui and Hoh-Cheung Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1989) 50-51.
- ⁴⁶ *Dublin Evening Post*, 26th October 1809.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 4th April 1812.
- ⁴⁸ Cowhey, 'Case Study of an Early Nineteenth Century Dublin Cabinet-Making Firm', 54-56. Thomas Sheraton, *Cabinet-maker, upholsterer and general artist's encyclopaedia* (London, 1804) and *Designs for household furniture* (London, 1812); George Smith, *Collection of designs for household furniture* (London, 1808); Rudolf Ackermann, *The Repository of Arts*, a magazine published from January 1809 to 1828. See Pauline Agius (ed.), *Ackermann's Regency Furniture and Interiors* (Ramsbury, Wiltshire, 1984).
- ⁴⁹ *Dublin Evening Post*, 21st March 1815. For information on the Eggleso and Power partnership, see Cowhey, 'Case Study of an Early Nineteenth Century Dublin Cabinet-Making Firm', 78.
- ⁵⁰ Quoted in Frances Collard, *Regency Furniture* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1987) 132.
- ⁵¹ PRO, Kew, MS C 114/181, Ledger of Kennet & Kidd, 1 July 1794 – 21 September 1795. See Glin and Peill, *Irish Furniture*, 177-78.
- ⁵² *ibid.*
- ⁵³ Attributed to Wyatt by Glin and Peill, *Irish Furniture*, 185.
- ⁵⁴ Mahogany hall bench (128cm wide x 40cm deep), stamped 8531, sold Hamilton Osborne King, Royal Dublin Society, 31st May 1999, lot 429. A smaller bench of the same design was sold in Hamilton Osborne King, Darver Castle, Dundalk, county Louth, lot 237, signed in pen 'M.W.G.' and stamped B6533. A pair from Bellamont Forest, county Cavan, sold at Sotheby's, New York, in 2005, and a pair with Bowes-Daly crest sold at Christie's, London, in 1992.
- ⁵⁵ William Moore trained in London with Ince & Mayhew, returning to Dublin in 1793.
- ⁵⁶ PRO, Kew, MS C 114/181, Ledger of Kennet & Kidd, 5th November 1795, 550. Glin and Peill attribute the design of the hall seats at Castlecoole to Wyatt. They do not attribute the seats to a cabinetmaker. See Glin & Peill, *Irish Furniture*, 185-87.
- ⁵⁷ Portaferry House, county Down, originally had a set of six of these hall seats.
- ⁵⁸ *Dublin Evening Post*, 22nd February 1814.
- ⁵⁹ Registry of Deeds, 639/232/441149, Woodward to Kirchoffer, 10th August 1810.
- ⁶⁰ Collection Peter Bateman. Illustrated in Knight of Glin, 'Dublin Directories and Trade Labels', *Furniture History*, 1985, 259-82.
- ⁶¹ Illustrated in Glin and Peill, *Irish Furniture*, 193.
- ⁶² Cowhey, 'Case Study of an Early Nineteenth Century Dublin Cabinet-Making Firm', 30-33.
- ⁶³ *Saunders' Newsletter*, 22nd September 1832.
- ⁶⁴ Trinity College Dublin, Manuscripts, Mun/P/4/78/16. The bill is dated 19th September 1801.
- ⁶⁵ Philip Yorke, 3rd Earl of Hardwicke, served as Lord Lieutenant from March 1801 to November 1805. The Hardwicks refurbished the apartments at Dublin Castle and employed Eggleso, enabling him to use this appointment on promotional material.
- ⁶⁶ National Archives of Ireland (NAI), MS 2D-57-34, Board of Works, Letter Book, 1806-1810.
- ⁶⁷ Cowhey, 'A Case Study of an Early Nineteenth Century Dublin Cabinet-Making Firm', 54-56.
- ⁶⁸ *Dublin Evening Post*, 21st May 1836. Thomas Kane had attended the Dublin Society's School of Figure Drawing and Landscape in 1786 and the School of Ornament in 1789. See Willemson, *Dublin Society Drawing Schools*, 53.
- ⁶⁹ Cowhey, 'A Case Study of an Early Nineteenth Century Dublin Cabinet-Making Firm', 93-94.

- ⁷⁰ *ibid.*
- ⁷¹ Irish Architectural Archive (IAA), RW.C.247, Castlegar, county Galway. Cowhey, 'A Case Study of an Early Nineteenth Century Dublin Cabinet-Making Firm', 109.
- ⁷² *ibid.* Henry Eggleso sent a bill for £171 12s 5d for bedroom furniture dated 14th March 1810.
- ⁷³ National Library of Ireland (NLI), Mount Bellew Papers, MS 27,477 (5).
- ⁷⁴ NAI, Board of Works, MS 2D-56-25, abstract of accounts for 1802-06. Cowhey, 'A Case Study of an Early Nineteenth Century Dublin Cabinet-Making Firm', 69-71.
- ⁷⁵ Joseph Robins, *Champagne and Silver Buckles* (Dublin, 2001) 97-99, 108-09.
- ⁷⁶ Jean Agnew and Maria Luddy (eds), *The Drennan-McTier Letters*, 3 vols (Dublin, 1999) III, 96.
- ⁷⁷ Prince H. Puckler-Muskau, *A tour in England, Wales and Ireland and France in a series of letters* (London, 1832).
- ⁷⁸ W.A. Maguire, *Living Like a Lord: the second Marquis of Donegal, 1769-1844* (Belfast, 2002) 15.
- ⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 18.
- ⁸⁰ PRONI, Donegal Papers, MS D 509/1517.
- ⁸¹ The chairs which retain their original red leather upholstery bear the crests of Talbot and Crosbie. The Rev John Talbot assumed the name Crosbie in 1816.
- ⁸² Margaret Boyle Harvey, *A journal of a voyage from Philadelphia to Cork in the year of our Lord, 1809: together with a description of a sojourn in Ireland* (Philadelphia, 1915).
- ⁸³ *ibid.*
- ⁸⁴ An example is at Áras an Uachtaráin, formerly the Vice Regal Lodge. A second is from the National Museum of Ireland and is of unknown provenance. A late nineteenth-century copy by Hicks is in Dublin Castle.
- ⁸⁵ Angela Alexander, 'A Firm of Dublin Cabinet-Makers, Mack, Williams & Gibton', *Irish Arts Review*, XI, 1995, 142-48.
- ⁸⁶ Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet Dictionary* (London, 1803; reprint, New York, 1970) pl. 68. This drawing, in the collection of Anthony Malcolmson, was attributed to Francis Johnston by The Knight of Glin.
- ⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 144.
- ⁸⁸ In photographs of Kilmore, county Armagh, family seat of Francis Johnston, a wine-cooler can be seen in the drawing-room window. These photographs were published in Robert M. Young's *Belfast and the Province of Ulster in the Twentieth Century* (Brighton, 1909). Young mentions that the sarcophagus was a replica of one in Dublin Castle, and that there was another in the room, smaller and bearing the arms of the Johnston family. Young also claims that much of the furniture in the room was designed by Francis Johnston. An identical wine cooler was illustrated in *Country Life*, 21st October, 1993, having been sold at auction in England.
- ⁸⁹ Alexander, 'Dublin cabinetmakers and their clientele in the period 1800-1841', 131-32.
- ⁹⁰ NLI, Townley Hall Papers, MS 9593.
- ⁹¹ Thomas Smout, *The Search for Wealth and Stability* (London, 1979) 91-113.