

**LITTLE BOOKS ABOUT OLD
FURNITURE; ENGLISH
FURNITURE VOLUME III;
CHIPPENDALE AND HIS SCHOOL**

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J. P. BLAKE

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MAHOGANY BEDSTEAD
(EIGHTEENTH CENTURY).

LITTLE BOOKS ABOUT OLD FURNITURE
ENGLISH FURNITURE VOLUME III

CHIPPENDALE AND HIS SCHOOL

BY J. P. BLAKE

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INTRODUCTION

THE name of Chippendale is so generally applied to mahogany furniture that it might seem, on a first inquiry, that he invented this rich and interesting wood, and also every style pertaining to it. Mahogany furniture, antique and otherwise, is so often airily described as Chippendale that the term has lost much of its personal significance and become simply generic.

The present volume deals with the period in the commencement of which mahogany was first employed in England in the manufacture of furniture—approximately in the first quarter of the eighteenth century (after the death of Queen Anne). For approaching two hundred years, therefore, it has sustained its popularity, and its position is still unchallenged. Certainly in the nineteenth century metal was very generally used in the making of bedsteads, but in these later days mahogany is again frequently employed for this purpose.

A very large quantity of genuine old mahogany furniture has survived to this day, and it is often described in general terms as Chippendale. The number of chairs alone seriously and deliberately described as Chippendale is almost innumerable.

It is needless to remark that this great man did not construct all these chairs. Chippendale was even more an influence rather than an actual producer, and the number of pieces of furniture which, with any approach to authenticity, can be ascribed to his hand could almost be counted on the fingers. The genius of Chippendale lay in the fact that he gathered ideas from many styles—the Dutch, French, Chinese, and Gothic—and gave them practical expression and commercial practicability. No doubt he was a great craftsman, a superb carver, and an accomplished cabinet-maker; but he was more than all this: he was a supreme influence, a virile spirit, an inspiration which is with us in our household surroundings to this day. It is sometimes objected that his ideas are not original; but the answer is that Chippendale was in business as a furniture-maker, and in his application of varied ideas to his work he collected his forms from every available source. He took the Dutch designs which he found to his hand and grafted on to them every style he could come upon—from France he took the ribband-back chair; from China he took the whole of the forms of a complete phase of his work: for another he took the forms of Gothic architecture. Nothing came amiss to him.

In the present volume many simple pieces are

illustrated and described which, although certainly not the work of Chippendale, are none the less, for their form and being, assuredly attributable to his influence. Such pieces are neither expensive nor very difficult to acquire, and should certainly find a place in any collection, however modest. They are for the most part beautifully made from old wood in a condition as regards figuring and marking which at this day it is almost impossible to duplicate. Whenever possible it has been considered useful to add a rough and approximate price at which they might be purchasable.

For permission to reproduce various pieces I am again indebted to the authorities at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is, however, to be greatly regretted that the National Collection of the furniture of the period under review is so inadequate both as regards the examples and their arrangement; and it is to be hoped that (before it is too late) some active means may be taken to augment it by a State grant or by the encouragement of private contributions. Also I have to thank Mr. C. J. Charles, of Brook Street, W., and Mr. Edward, of King Street, St. James's, for permission to reproduce several of their fine pieces; and to Mr. J. H. Springett, High Street, Rochester, and Mr. F. W. Phillips, of The

Manor House, Hitchin, I am indebted for photographs of various simple and genuine pieces of this period. Mr. Phillips in particular I have to thank for his courtesy in arranging at his interesting Galleries for photographic reproduction of the mahogany bedstead which forms the frontispiece of this volume.

There is no chapter in this book on "Fakes and How to Detect Them," because it is not thought that such things will be learnt in books except in the sense of obtaining general knowledge, which is what may be called a contributory protection. The best method of guarding against deception is to be thoroughly familiar with genuine examples, a familiarity which can generally be obtained by frequenting museums. There are, however, some people who have the antique sense which other people will never acquire, however great their knowledge. There are dealers in London whose knowledge of the historical detail of the furniture periods is of the vaguest, but who will infallibly tell you at a glance whether a piece of furniture is genuine or not. There are certain tests laid down in books about examining the feet of Chippendale chairs to see whether, in view of their being drawn to and fro from the table for a long period of years, they are worn away in the right direction, and there is the well-known formula