

Nature and Mythology, two galleries and their furnishings contrasted: Temple Newsam and Hagley

Introduction

Among the many benefits which accrue to curators who lend works of art to an outside exhibition for which there is to be a catalogue is the opportunity to look again closely at the works of art which have been summoned for special display. In some cases there is a temptation to think that there is very little more to be said about a particular object, particularly if it has been researched and catalogued by a renowned scholar like the late Christopher Gilbert, author of three magisterial volumes on the furniture at Temple Newsam.¹ For *Taking Shape*, however, with its emphasis on the links between sculpture and furniture and the breaking down of art-historical hierarchies, it has led to some new thinking and conclusions about a number of the loans, in particular the furniture made for the great Picture Gallery at Temple Newsam, as well as the famous candlestand made as part of a suite for the Gallery at Hagley Hall, Worcestershire.

This paper is concerned with the way in which the furnishings of these two great mid 18th century interiors – with their examples of sculptural

¹ Christopher Gilbert, *Furniture at Temple Newsam and Lotherton Hall*, vols I and II 1977, vol III 1997

furniture par excellence – are the key integral elements of much bigger ideas which transform or ‘metamorphise’ their spaces, defying the limitations of architecture, painting, sculpture, and textiles, and create instead something unique which in each case expressed their owners’ relationship with the world. On the one hand at Temple Newsam we will see how a Palladian Saloon becomes instead an ‘indoor’ Arcadia, in which the gods of mythology are metamorphosed into sculpture or furniture and now co-exist with very identifiable contemporary and near contemporary personalities in the shape of the portraits which clad the walls. At Hagley, on the other hand, we see how the ‘outside’ parkland or Arcadia - which had already been created *before* the house was built and which lies directly outside the windows of the gallery - is now brought *into* the house. This time it is achieved by again ‘metamorphising’ the raw materials of nature (the trees of the forest, the streams and cascades, the rocky escarpments) into the classic repertory of grand furnishings (pier glasses, console tables, candlestands, girandoles, even picture frames).

Although the two galleries are barely 15 years apart (1745 and 1760) they are very different in spirit. The earlier one is perhaps looking *backwards* in time, being maybe a last gasp of the Baroque *salone* or great room of entertainment, as well as looking metaphorically *inwards* in space at the

events which are taking place here and now within the room. At Hagley this is reversed: the feeling is of looking *forward* in time towards the picturesque movement and its expressions in architecture and decoration - towards semi-circular bays with floor-length French windows, verandahs, elaborate framing curtains and valances, indoor jardinières etc etc - and *outwards* in space – to the parkland in which a tamed and benign nature is found and which is seen as a place of repose, poetic inspiration, and symbolic of the good life.

Yet in all this there is a strange irony: it has long been recognised (and now confirmed) that the Temple Newsam girandoles and Hagley candlestands are derived from the printed designs of two 18th century geniuses, Matthias Lock and Thomas Johnson. Both have the same wildly naturalistic features with strong sculptural and figurative elements. But this is where the similarities end, and not just because they were carved by different hands. The Temple Newsam girandoles are entirely gilt; matt and burnished, gleaming and shimmering as if made of gold. And this is the next degree of metamorphosis: in the hands of the genius artist or alchemist James Pascall a base material, wood, has been transformed into ‘gold’, the material of the gods even if it merely resembles ormolu or gilt bronze. Indeed much of the ornament on the whole suite of furniture is quite clearly simulating applied gilt bronze mounts on the chairs as well

as on the girandoles: Pascall's carving even includes faux screw heads so as to complete the illusion. We are indeed in a golden Arcadia – maybe even the foothills of Mount Parnassus itself.

In complete contrast, the Gallery at Hagley is far more down to earth. As if to emphasise this the candlestands have been painted dark brown and light stone colours to indicate their metamorphosis into fanciful objects of raw nature which have been, as it were, hauled out of the park to do service inside the house: the dark brown stem to suggest a living wood, while the stone coloured entwined dolphins, leaves, icicles (or stalactites and mites) indicate 'frozen' or petrified accretions.

Temple Newsam

The story of the Gallery at Temple Newsam has often been told, but is always worth repeating.² It appears to have been the brain child of Henry seventh Viscount Irwin, the youngest-but-one of five brothers who inherited the great Tudor-Jacobean mansion in 1736. The family fortunes were at a very low ebb, Henry's brother having speculated wildly in the South Sea Bubble, and there was a mortgage of £25,000 over the property, as well as jointures for three widowed Viscountesses to provide from the dwindling resources of the estate. The house itself was in a poor

² Jacob Simon, 'The Long Gallery Ceiling at Temple Newsam', *Leeds Arts Calendar* no 74 (1974), pp 5 - 15

state of repair, but despite all this Henry began an ambitious campaign of rebuilding and remodelling of the north and west wings. He and his wife Ann, nee Scarburgh, clearly took an active part in the minutiae of the work, and although there is no documentation as to their role in the working out of the decorative scheme or the picture hanging arrangements, enough can be surmised from circumstantial evidence to credit them with the spectacular results. How much they were aided by Henry's brother Charles and his wife Elizabeth, who was also Ann's sister (two brothers were married to two sisters), and by the third of these Scarburgh sisters, Lady Jenkinson, who also had an apartment in the house, is not known.

Their architect was Daniel Garrett, a protégé of Lord Burlington's, who was working for a number of other clients in Yorkshire at this time. It was undoubtedly he who devised the means of transforming the earlier Jacobean panelled Long Gallery which had extended the whole length of the north wing into the three new rooms: library at the east end, picture gallery in the centre, and state bedroom at the west. The ceiling level was raised, and the fenestration altered to provide two bays on the courtyard side with four sash windows with a central Venetian window on the opposite side and looking north (this latter feature lasted until the Victorian alterations of the 1890s). The result is an approximate triple

cube: 108 x 28 x 18, and, with its two London-made chimneypieces based on designs by William Kent, is as good an example of improvised Palladianism to be found in any earlier building. Strict economy required that the estate steward John Hopkinson act as clerk of works; there was no waste – old panelling later being used as wall linings elsewhere in the house- and many of the fine craftsmen came from York rather than London: Thomas Perritt for the plasterwork, the Fishers for carving.

The principal theme or iconographic programme for the decoration and picture hanging in this room has long been recognised as that of loyalty to the Crown. In the centre of the ceiling is the portrait medallion of George I, and round the edge similar medallions of George II, Queen Caroline and other identifiable members of the royal family (supplied by Perritt at a cost of 10/6d each). This highly visible sign of loyalty to the house of Hanover (so correct in the year of the gallery's completion, 1746) is supplemented by the two central full length portraits between the windows on the north wall: the figures of William III and Mary II by Kneller, which had been given to Henry's father the 3rd Viscount Irwin by the king in 1700. As well as representing the Glorious Revolution and the triumph of the Protestant Succession they are of course Stuarts, descendants of Temple Newsam's most celebrated inhabitant Lord Darnley, husband of Mary Queen of Scots and father of James VI of

Scotland and I of England. To either side of them originally hung portraits of royalist heroes of the Civil War: Lord Kensington, Sir Henry Slingsby etc etc. Beneath these grand 'political' pictures Henry hung his smaller cabinet paintings at eye level. Elsewhere, the earlier Stuart kings were represented by smaller, less prominent portraits.

On the wall opposite Henry continued the theme of loyalty, this time to family. At the east end he hung the double portrait of his second eldest brother Rich with his wife Lady Ann Howard, daughter of the third Earl of Carlisle and distinguished poetess, by Jonathan Richardson; to match it he commissioned his own double portrait with his wife from Philippe Mercier, then residing in York, and in the centre he placed the huge over-life size portrait of his father, Arthur third Viscount Irwin, out shooting in a landscape with his guns and his dog, painted in 1700 by Leonard Knyff at a cost of £35.

The rustic elements of this picture, with the hound having retrieved a bird in his mouth, the dead rabbit, and the ducks flying in formation, may well have prompted the second, or alternative iconographic programme for the room. Either side of the painting are the huge carved girandoles or wall sconces, with their central subject of a hound pursuing a stag. This is the first of our most obvious *literary* metamorphoses. According to Ovid,

Actaeon, grandson of Cadmus, who (like Arthur in the portrait) was out hunting, found himself inadvertently spying on the goddess Diana and her attendants as they bathed. For this he was punished by being transformed into a stag to be mauled to death by his own hounds.³ It is as though the two dimensional representation of the painting has become three dimensional, moving from the real world inhabited by Arthur and his dog, to the mythological world inhabited by Diana and Actaeon.

The moment of impact is shown when in Ovid's verses:

'He fled from the dogs who had served him so faithfully, longing to shout out to them,

Stop! It is I, Actaeon. Do you not know me?

But the words would not come. The air was filled with relentless braying.

Blacklock first inserted his teeth to tear at his back;

Beast-killer next; then Mountain-Boy latched onto his shoulders

.....

As they pinned their master down

The rest of the pack rushed round and buried their fangs in his body

Until it was covered with crimson wounds. Actaeon groaned

In a sound that was scarcely human but one no stag could ever

³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (trans David Raeburn, Penguin Books, 2004), Book 1, lines 131 - 250

*Have made as he filled the familiar hills with his cries of anguish....*⁴

This theme, of metamorphosis in the defence of female virtue, is taken up again most graphically close by, in the representation of the story of Pan and Syrinx, seen on the largest pair of tables and in the candlestands. Pan's mask can be seen on the aprons of the two large side tables, being driven by his hounds (who appear as the legs supporting the table's massive agate slab). He is in hot pursuit of the naiad Syrinx after whom he lusts. She, who is 'bedecked with a garland of sharp pine needles', reaches a stream that she cannot cross so she calls on the nymphs of the stream to transform her into reeds. As Ovid puts it:

So just at the moment when Pan believed his Syrinx was caught

*Instead of a fair maid's body, he found himself clutching at some marsh reeds.*⁵

Ovid goes on to describe how the sound of the wind rustling through the reeds so enchanted him that he bound some together to form his famous musical pipes declaring,

*This sylvan pipe will enable us always to talk together.*⁶

⁴ Ovid op. cit. Book 1, lines 229 - 239

⁵ Ovid, op cit Book 1, lines 704 – 705

⁶ Ibid, line 709

Syrinx is seen here in the candlestands where her upper body merges with the enveloping reeds and bulrushes which are about to completely metamorphise her. On the opposite wall, from the smaller side tables, the heads of the nymphs of the stream appear from the water responding to Syrinx's cries. From the tablets of the chimneypieces Apollo, god of light and reason and the arts, looks down impassively from a sunburst.

Although the idea of pairs of candlestands flanking pier or console tables had been commonplace in grand interiors for at least 100 years, here they become, as it were, altars with flanking candelabra, intended for sacrifices for the pagan deities: baskets of flowers to honour of Flora by day, flames of fire for Vulcan by night.⁷ The green flock wallpaper, faithfully replicated in 1996, suggests the background of the forest while the floral petit point needlework of the chairs and sofas climb up the walls as if sprouting from the soil itself. This illusion was carried even further originally by the presence of a green serge carpet around the perimeter of the room with a floral needlework border, suggesting a grassy pathway flanked by the flowers of the woods. Some lengths of this

⁷ First suggested by John Hardy in conversation with the author

needlework border came to light a few years ago, re-applied to a sofa in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.⁸

All this furniture, together with the 20 side chairs, four sofas, one large settee, two small and two large side tables, and eight candlestands were all supplied between 1745 and 1747 by James Pascall for a total cost of £376-17-9d.

In addition to the hanging of the ‘political’ and ‘family’ portraits which were such an important element in Henry’s programme for this room, there were the other pictures to take their part. In total there were 83 pictures in this room in 1750 and they included some of the consignment of ‘over 40’ stormy landscapes, seascapes and battle scenes by Antonio Marini which had come to Temple Newsam in the wake of the Grand Tour of Henry’s eldest brother Edward as early as 1709.⁹ Some 20 of these were now hung – reframed in lugged Palladian style frames - on the south, east and west walls. With their dramatic and violent scenes, either showing uncontrolled nature or man’s cruelty and barbarism, they act as a foil to the harmonious and peaceful scenes being enacted in the Arcadian setting of the Gallery. They are however safely *outside* the world in

⁸ First identified by Lucy Wood of the Victoria and Albert Museum. See *Maids and Mistresses*, exhibition catalogue, Temple Newsam 2004 (17)

⁹ David Connell, ‘Temple Newsam Paintings – Discoveries and Reattributions’, *Leeds Arts Calendar*, no 110 (1992), passim

which we are now, conversing with the gods of mythology or the heroes of the past.

Henry himself acquired two rare Arcadian paintings which were clearly intended for a precise location in the Gallery and which were, in contrast to the other pictures, intended to make the spectator look *outwards* from the adjacent windows and into the parkland beyond. These are the two landscapes by Etienne Allegrain, bought by Henry in 1740 for 16 and 17 guineas each, at exactly the time in which he was planning the room.

They were clearly intended for the central piers of the north wall, to hang either side of the great Venetian window, immediately below the portraits of William and Mary, and above the smaller side tables. Note how they are exactly the same width as these side tables, which they were intended to complement, but the moulding of their frames was copied freely for the new frames which were now provided for the portraits of William and Mary above them. These pictures came to light in a private collection in Brussels last year and were triumphantly returned to their historic location six months ago.

If it is not too fanciful to suggest it, I would also maintain that the subject matter of these pictures, is also highly appropriate to the room and may well have directed Henry's attention to the arcadian theme. They show

romantic sub-Claudian pastoral scenes, framed by curving pine trees, with sheets of foreground water leading the eye towards distant ruins and sunsets. Among the features in each picture there is a distinct and unusual tower, or campanile, surmounted by a tall spire. This is much taller than the usual spires to be found in northern Italy and may suggest the spire of Whitkirk church, which can be clearly seen from the adjoining windows. The intention may therefore have been for these two paintings to provide a link from the make-believe world which Henry so successfully created in his Gallery into the real world beyond the park.

Hagley

In contrast to Temple Newsam, the Gallery at Hagley was built as an integral part of George Lyttelton's new house, erected between 1754 and 1759 within the existing landscape setting he had been famously embellishing since the late 1740s.¹⁰ His architects were – in addition to himself - his friends, led by Sanderson Miller, in addition to Thomas Prowse and John Sanderson. The Gallery forms the whole length of the east side of the house, measuring 79ft x 19ft, being a virtual four times cube. Most remarkably – and according to John Cornforth perhaps for the first time in England - it is divided into three sections by two screens of columns – looking ahead to the 'scenic' divisions of internal spaces so

¹⁰ Michael McCarthy, 'The Building of Hagley Hall, Worcestershire', *Burlington Magazine* vol cxviii, no 877 (April 1976), pp 214 - 224

beloved by Robert Adam and the architects of neo-Classicism. Cornforth also suggested that the room was never intended to be a Picture Gallery as such – unlike the Irwins of Temple Newsam the Lytteltons did not own a collection of Old Master paintings. Instead it was more a gathering place for family and friends to enjoy views of the park from its five large windows, perhaps also doubling up as a large entertaining room for assemblies and gatherings. This essentially informal function of the room and its theme of naturalism which we will see dominates the room is emphasised by the lack of gilding anywhere in the decoration or furnishings of the room.

Lord Lyttelton appears to have taken as his starting point a set of inherited 17th century portraits with their original frames carved in limewood with foliate decoration in the style of Grinling Gibbons, and at least one of these he had freely copied – in a lighter and more obviously naturalistic way - for a portrait of his sister Hester. The same carver was probably responsible for the wooden chimneypiece in the room, although whether he was the same craftsman responsible for all or just some of the rest of the furniture remains to be seen.

The rest of the furnishings were now incorporated into this setting.

Between the two central windows were hung two immense pier glasses

and their tables beneath them. Flanking these, on either side, were the two pairs of candlestands, which are the purpose of today's paper. On the fireplace wall opposite were hung two spectacular girandoles; and around the walls of the room was placed the seat furniture.

Linking all these pieces is the theme of naturalism, or the imagery of the parkland over which this room affords splendid views. To begin with the candlestands: these are painted in strongly contrasting reddish brown and stone colours, the former (for the stem) to imitate mahogany and the latter to suggest *either* petrification *or* 'frozen' woods, leaves and water in which the entwined dolphins have been caught up. Indeed it is difficult to distinguish whether the 'stalactites' and 'stalagmites' are not in fact icicles, and whether the entwined dolphins have either been petrified into their strange locked embrace or have been frozen solid.

The four stands would have been placed beside the pier tables close to the windows, in the time honoured way. Above them are the magnificent pier glasses, which are divided into several compartments each, the joints being camouflaged by trailing vine and flower stems. The side platforms have echoing vases, while enormously overflowing scrolling leaves descend from the upper reaches and the whole ensemble is crowned by a basket of flowers. There are stalacmites (or are they icicles?) and

scrolling rocaille ornament which, together with their two tone effect, links them to the candlestands.

Opposite them, and to either side of the fireplace, are the two great girandoles. They take the form of rustic thatched windmills, with wildly protruding candle branches, above an arch under which a donkey is drinking from the stream. They rest of brackets of asymmetrical scrolls, raffle leaves and rocaille ornament. Linking them to the pier glasses are the use of rusticated arches, which reappear in the pier glasses as a seven arched viaduct in the lower level. Their two tone effect links them again with the glasses, the candlestands, the pier tables and the seat furniture.

The seat furniture and pier tables might be considered somewhat tame in comparison with the tour de force of rococo design and carving of the other pieces. Here the applied naturalistic ornament is found on chair legs with their applied limewood leaves and berries and on the rails with similar leafy scrolls and quatrefoils. On the tables are corresponding motifs on the legs while the rails have trailing vines and fruits which clearly relate to the chimneypiece and 'Grinling Gibbons' style picture frame with the portrait of Lyttelton's sister Hester. I would suggest that the tables' fine marquetry tops incorporating heraldry must be slightly later replacements. Clearly their unity suggests that this group of furniture

has come from the same workshop, and although different skills are required for the making of tables and chairs, the applied ornament at least is likely to be from the same hand.¹¹ Whoever this workshop or craftsman was, he is probably *not* the same workshop or person who made the more virtuoso girandoles, stands and pier glasses which are of quite a different order.

This vocabulary of naturalistic ornament, found here and throughout the house, is most likely to have been devised by Lyttelton himself and his wife (although she departed before the house was complete), in collaboration with his architect friend Sanderson Miller and the other virtuosi who advised on the creation of the house. Cornforth has suggested however that the craftsmen, plasterers and carvers may have been given a relatively free hand in the detailed work. But the crucial fact remains that Hagley was above all a haven for poets and writers whose owner had a passion for landscape gardening. Lyttelton had no great success as a politician, but much more as a man of letters. He was a friend of Pope and Shenstone, *Tom Jones* was dedicated to him by Fielding, and James Thomson allowed him to correct *The Seasons* in

¹¹ When two pairs of the Hagley chairs appeared at Christie's London 14 June 2001 lot 52 it was pointed out that their design was very close to a set of chairs designed by William Kent for Rousham Park, Oxfordshire c1738, and that this appears to be the model for the remarkably similar set made by William Linnell for the Gallery at Osterley. Another name was also suggested when the tables appeared for sale at Sotheby's London 4 June 2008 lot 100; this time for James Lovell, a carver associated with the famous hall chimneypiece at Hagley and who is also referred to in Mrs Montagu's and Lyttelton's correspondence. He is also recorded as working in plaster, wood and papier mache.

which there is a long passage in praise of Hagley. The park at Hagley appears to be entirely his brain child, although perhaps inspired by his Temple relations' activities at Stowe. Within he populated it with a whole repertory of ornamental buildings and monuments strategically placed: the ruined castle (for whom Sanderson Miller supplied designs for the furniture: 'they are not to be common chairs, but of a Gothick form'), an Ionic rotunda, the Prince of Wales's column, a Palladian Bridge, a statue of Venus, urns commemorating Pope and Shenstone, seats to Thomson and Milton, and of course the famous Greek Doric Temple designed for him by James Athenian Stuart.

The park was of course famous, and much described, not least by Horace Walpole who wrote to Bentley in September 1753:

'You might draw, but I can't describe, the enchanting scenes of the park: it is a hill of three miles, but broke into all manner of beauty; such lawns, such woods, rills, cascades, and a thickness of verdure quite to the summit of the hill, and commanding such a vale of towns, and meadows, and woods extending quite to the Black Mountains of Wales...Then there is a scene of a small lake, with cascades falling down such a Parnassus ! with a circular temple on the distant eminence ! and there is such a fairy dale, with more cascades gushing out of rocks ! and there is a hermitage,

*so exactly like those of Sadeler's prints, on the brow of a shady mountain, stealing peeps into the glorious world below ! and there is such a pretty well under a wood, like the Samaritan woman's in a picture of Nicolo Poussin ! and there is such a wood without the park, enjoying such a prospect ! and there is such a mountain on t'other side of the park commanding all prospects, that I wore out my eyes with gazing, my feet with climbing, and my tongue and my vocabulary with commending !'*¹²

It is just these 'watery' natural/artificial features of lake, cascade, hermitage, and well – not to mention the grotto, which seems to have eluded Walpole that give us our clue as to the genesis of the Gallery furniture.

A more personal, less histrionic description of the park appears in the correspondence of Lyttelton's protégé the poet James Thomson which he clearly worked up later and incorporated into verses for *Spring* in *The Seasons*:

The park where we pass a great part of our Time, is thoroughly delightful, quite enchanting. It consists of several little Hills, finely tufted with Wood and rising softly one above the other; from which are seen a

¹² Quoted by Gordon Nares, 'Hagley Hall, Worcestershire 1', *Country Life*, 19 September 1957, p 549

great Variety of at once beautiful and grand extensive Prospects: but I am most charmed with its sweet embowered Retirements, and particularly with a winding Dale that runs thro' the Middle of it. This Dale is overhung with deep Woods, and enlivened by a Stream, that, now gushing from mossy Rocks, now falling in Cascades, and now spreading into a calm length of water, forms the most natural and pleasing Scene imaginable. At the Source of this Water, composed of some pretty Rills, that purl from beneath the Roots of oaks, there is as fine a retired Seat as a Lover's Heart could wish'.¹³

In Thomson's verse this becomes:

*[O Lyttelton].....There along the Dale
With Woods o'er – hung and shagg'd with mossy Rocks, Whence on each
Hand the gushing waters play,
And down the rough Cascade white – dashing fall,
Or gleam in lengthen'd Vista thro' the Trees,
You silent steal; or sit beneath the Shade
Of solemn Oaks, that tuft the swelling mounts
Thrown graceful round by Nature's careless Hand,
And pensive listen to the various Voice*

¹³ James Sambrook, *James Thomson 1700 – 1748 A Life*, (1991) p. 223. Sambrook points out the similarities of the imagery re-used in the description of Hagley in the 1744 edition of *Spring* 905 - 920

*Of rural Peace: the Herds, the Flocks, the Birds,
The hollow-whispering Breeze, the plaint of Rills,
That, purling down amid the twisted Roots
Which creep around, their dewy Murmurs shake
On the sooth'd ear. From these abstracted oft,
You wander thro' the Philosophic World....*¹⁴

Surely the 'shagg'd and mossy rocks', the 'white dashing cascade
cascade', the 'voices of rural peace' are what we find translated into the
Gallery furniture at Hagley.

The 'petrification' or 'frozen' quality of the furniture is further suggested
by Thomson's description of the cascade in *Winter*

*What art thou, Frost?.....
An icy Gale, oft shifting, o'er the Pool
Breathes a blue Film, and in its mid Career
Arrests the bickering Steam. The loosen'd Ice,
Let down the Flood, and half dissolv'd by Day,
Rustles no more; but to the sedgy Bank
Fast grows, or gathers round the pointed Stone,*

¹⁴(James Sambrook ed) *James Thomson, The Seasons* (1981), 'Spring', lines 906 - 923

A crystal pavement, by the Breath of Heaven
Cemented firm.....
.....It freezes on;
Till Morn, late – rising o'er the drooping World,
Lifts her pale Eye unjoyous. The appears
The various Labour of the silent Night:
Prone from the dripping Eave, and dumb Cascade,
Whose idle Torrents only seem to roar,
The pendant Icicle; the Frost-Work fair,
Where transient Hues, and fancy'd Figures rise;
Wide spouted o'er the Hill, the frozen Brook,
*A livid Tract, cold-gleaming on the Morn....*¹⁵

This inspiration of the soggy cascade, petrified or frozen, is surely also reminiscent of the vogue for grottoes which had a remarkable revival from the mid 18th century including an example at Hagley. Although these had been devised for country houses and gardens since the Renaissance the idea of furnishing them with artificial stalactites and stalagmites (always known as 'icicles') appears to have originated with Pope's own grotto at Twickenham. They were further enhanced with chips of spar and sparkly geological specimens to create astonishing

¹⁵ Sambrook, *The Seasons* ibid, 'Winter', lines 714; 720 – 729; 744 - 753

effects, like the example from the 1790s still surviving at Ascot Place, Berkshire.¹⁶ Several interiors, of irregular shape and deliberately Gothick inspiration might be made within these grottos as places for refreshment and entertainment. Lighting them with subtlety was all-important as their ‘sublime’ effect depended on strong contrasts of light and dark of the interiors, and capturing the sparkling effects of the spar and geological features. Thus the Hagley candlestands could surely so easily be taken into the grotto where they would have blended entirely. Instead it is as though the grotto has been brought into the house.

Who is the genius responsible for the design of these unique objects and the virtuoso craftsman to whom they should be attributed ? The stands have long been identified with the published designs of Thomas Johnson, whose career as a carver has only recently been revealed and who was previously known only as a designer. They are particularly close to a design in his *New Book of Ornaments* (1758), re-published in *One Hundred and Fifty New Designs* (1761). The dolphin motif is of course by no means new to the repertory of ornament: they had been popular motifs for Baroque fountains and had been adapted in the 1740s for a more rococo taste by Francois de Cuvillies and Jacques de Lajoue.

Chippendale was to use them somewhat incongruously ‘out of the water’

¹⁶ See Eileen Harris, ‘Last of the Icicles’, *Country Life* 13 April 1989, pp 100 – 103 for a discussion of these features.

on the branches for 'Chandeliers for Halls etc', and Johnson used them again as supports for tables, a tea kettle stand and a wall sconce.

The windmill motif however, used on the girandoles, *was* something entirely new, although it looks back to the rustic paintings of Teniers etc.

Its author was once again Thomas Johnson. He relates in his autobiography how, in 1755, after his return to London from Dublin, he had produced a girandole 'in a taste never before thought on; the principle of it was a ruined building with cattle etc...[which] being so well received I immediately published a small book of designs for girandoles, the price 1s 6d of which I soon sold upwards of 500.'¹⁷ He reproduced the 'ruined building with cattle' in his autobiography, where it can clearly be seen as the forerunner of many variations incorporating precarious buildings, including a thatched windmill with its donkey, as girandoles and sconces.

This was the style which Johnson described as 'Rural' and which he grouped together with Gothick and Chinese as being in the 'present taste', which collectively he called 'contrast'. He never of course referred to 'rococo', a modern term, nor 'French' nor 'modern' which other

¹⁷ For Johnson's Autobiography see Jacob Simon, 'Thomas Johnson's *The Life of the Author*', *Furniture History*, vol XXXIX (2003), pp 1 – 64 passim

contemporaries used to describe their work in the English version of the *genre pittoresque*.

Despite these connections with known designs by Johnson, the identity of the maker of this remarkable group remains unresolved, not least because of the lack of documentation. Although some attributions have been given for furniture made elsewhere in the house, the Gallery furniture is quite different in style and intention. There is the possibility that it might have been carved in the workshop of Thomas Johnson himself, as his recently published autobiography has revealed him to have been a sought after and celebrated carver. However, Johnson's incompetence in running his own business affairs led him to work either as a master craftsman in an established firm, or as a sub-contractor; hence his name never appears in surviving invoices. Instead, one needs to look at furniture provided by the firms for whom Johnson is known to have worked. From 1755 – 6, just before the time when Hagley was being furnished he was working for the picture-frame maker Thomas Vials, 'for more [than] twenty one years', in making drawings and executing 'the principal part of his work'. For an interlude between c1757 and c1760 he also worked as a foreman for the successful firm of James Whittle and Samuel Norman, but fell out with them over financial arrangements. Neither of these firms is recorded as working for Lord Lyttelton, nor can any of the surviving furniture at

Hagley be attributed to them by comparison with their documented work elsewhere.

One may therefore look elsewhere for a craftsman, especially Johnson himself admitted that his designs were not intended to be primarily advertisements of his *own* skills but rather, models or ‘Assistants to young artists...And when Honoured by the hand of the skilful Workman...I flatter myself will give entire satisfaction’.

The name of a ‘Mr Griffith’ appears in Mrs Elizabeth Montagu’s correspondence with Lyttelton’s in connection with the delivery of the girandoles to Hagley ¹⁸and John Cornforth speculated that this might refer to Edward Griffiths, an upholsterer and cabinet maker of Dean Street and former assistant to Benjamin Goodison, royal furniture supplier to George I and II. If this is the case then it has been suggested that the candlestands and pier glasses as well as the girandoles were also supplied by him.

Yet this is not the end of the story for yet another, still anonymous, author has been suggested for the Gallery furniture. During his tour of the Midlands in 1778 Sir Richard Sullivan gave a vivid description of Hagley and its treasures (‘exquisitely fitted up. Nothing tawdry, nothing

¹⁸ Emily J. Climinson, *Elizabeth Montagu, Queen of the Blue Stockings: her Correspondence 1720 – 1761*, pp 192 - 3

expensive, but all conceived with the happiest taste, and most admirably executed').¹⁹ When he reached the 'Long Gallery' [sic] he went into raptures: 'of all the rooms I have seen in England [it] is most to my fancy. It is completely furnished with chairs, tables, and brackets of carved work, by an artist in the neighbourhood of Hagley: it is really elegant, exhibiting nothing but unassuming taste, simplicity, and ornament'. Such a tantalising clue – no doubt supplied by the housekeeper ('our old conductress') who showed them the house – awaits further investigation, but the name of one Thomas Gaddick, a cabinet maker of Stourbridge, Worcestershire, has already been suggested.

¹⁹ Kindly drawn to the author's attention by Lucy Wood of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Sir Richard Sullivan, *A Tour through Parts of England, Scotland and Wales in 1778*, 2nd edition corrected and enlarged, 1785, vol 2, pp 13 – 20.