

PATCH ROGERS – NEWSLETTER No 3

Welcome to our third Newsletter.

We will begin with the Liberty Exhibition, which many of you attended and we hope you enjoyed the wonderful display of items on view. The Exhibition was a tremendous success and our sales figures were 10% up from last year which, in this roller coaster climate, is fantastic news and a good sign that the market for Arts & Crafts is still very buoyant. Of course, the Liberty setting was ideal and all items looked very much at home in the wonderful 4th floor atrium. The general feedback was one of great enthusiasm combined with a genuine sadness that the Arts & Crafts department had virtually disappeared from the store.

To this end, we now have some very exciting news!!!!

From February 2010 we will be opening a concession at Liberty's, Regent Street, London.

This is an amazing opportunity for us and hopefully very welcome news for everyone who has missed the Arts & Crafts Department since it closed 3 years ago. We will be situated on the Fourth Floor and I will be spending at least 3 days a week there. Further details and updates with respect to our opening will follow shortly.

This month we are featuring a pair of chairs by the man known as 'Mouseman' Robert Thompson. Born in Kilburn North Yorkshire on 7th May 1876, he was the son of the village carpenter and wheelwright, John Thompson. Having been sent away and trained at an early age in mechanical engineering, Robert Thompson returned home when he was 20 to work with his father, where he learnt his trade. He inherited the family business in 1895 following the untimely death of his father, and for the next 20 years continued to develop his carpentry and stonemason skills. His early work tended to relate to more medieval furniture and was often stained dark, it was only later on into the 1920's that Thompson took on the more commercial colour of the day, light oak. His first major commission of a large figure of Christ on a crucifix came in 1919 from Father Paul Neville of Ampleforth College, with more following quickly on. His workforce continued to expand and by the time his first American commission was received for a dining table and four chairs in 1928, he was employing ten craftsmen and by 1934 this had expanded to over 30.



The signature 'mouse' appeared around 1920, the earliest mouse having front legs, which was subsequently modified in 1930 to remove these, as they had a tendency to break off. The origin of the mouse is supposed to have originated from one of the craftsmen he was working with mentioning being as 'poor as a church mouse' whilst they were carving a huge cornice for a screen. Thompson apparently then carved the mouse which remained as his trademark. Although the mouse is an important identifier of Robert Thompson pieces, it is believed that not every item produced carried this trademark.

Using only naturally seasoned oak, every piece of furniture is hand-made by one carpenter from start to finish, including the signature 'mouse'. As the oak

trees take several hundred years to mature, nature's influence during this time will create variations in colour and texture. The final colour chosen by the craftsmen is achieved through the 'fuming' process and can vary from light to dark, a technique favoured in the Arts & Crafts movement by other craftsmen such as Gustav Stickley. The fuming process causes the ammonia fumes to react with the tannic acid in the seasoned oak to produce the uniformly characteristic colour, initially grey like but over many years developing into a rich golden brown.

Thompson married and had a daughter whose own children have carried on the family business in Yorkshire using the same high quality techniques and skills. He died on 8th December 1955.

As the mice do not have their front legs these chairs will date after 1930 and are believed to be c1935. From 1950 the firm removed the front stretcher and reduced the level of adzed work.



The Mouseman chairs will form part of an exhibition 'Arts and Crafts Seating' starting Tuesday 3rd November at the Millinery Works, 87 Southgate Road, London N1 3JS www.millineryworks.co.uk

We hope you like the new updated website and would welcome any feedback you might have. We are now in a position to regularly update this site ourselves so keep a regular lookout for new stock.

On a particularly sad note to end this Newsletter we were very sorry to hear of the death of Barbara Morris. As many of you will know Barbara was not only a well known and respected local historian, she was also known nationally and internationally.

Barbara studied at the Slade School of Art and three of her life drawings of the infamous Quentin Crisp are on display at the National Portrait Gallery. After World War 2, she joined the V&A under Peter Floud in the Circulation Department and alongside Elisabeth Aslin and Shirley Bury, they became affectionately known as 'The Three Graces'. In 1952 this team at the V&A staged the Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts Exhibition, which was a resounding success with the public and thenceforward a revived interest in Victorian progressive design was under way. Barbara became a leading authority on the Arts & Crafts Movement, writing several important books, in particular on Liberty & Co. Although she retired from the V&A in 1978, she continued her extremely active life, joining Sotheby's and the BBC Antiques Road Show.

I first met Barbara in 2003 when I asked her to write the introduction to my first Arts & Crafts Exhibition I curated for Liberty's. I found her energy and enthusiasm inspiring and reassuring.

Barbara lived in Brighton and was much admired and loved locally.

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome all our new clientele to this Newsletter and we thank everyone for their continuing valued custom.