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A 'Royal' Sideboard for Chetham's Library: Spolia, Design, and Historical Associations

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George Shaw (1810–76), architect, antiquary, furniture maker, and forger of ancestral 'relics', has received sustained attention recently in the pages of this society's journal and newsletter, as well as in *Furniture History*, the *Furniture History Society Newsletter*, and *The Coat of Arms*. An until now unnoticed associational subtlety to his ancient-style work can be seen on a 'royal' sideboard supplied by Shaw to Chetham's Library, Manchester, towards the end of the 1840s. *The Guardian* for late 1847 recorded that the Library 'has recently been undergoing partial repairs, by order of the feoffees [governors], under the direction of Mr. George Shaw, architect, of St. Chad's, Upper Mills [*sic*], Saddleworth', and this sideboard was part of internal enhancements and modifications, including 'a rare-dos and dogs, or andirons, with the arms of Henry VII. and with a moveable grate for the burning of coal'.¹ This fireback, still present in the Library's Audit Room, displays the arms of Henry VII, quarterly 1,4, *France Modern*, 2,3 *England*, with the supporters typical for the King throughout most of his reign: dragon (dexter), and collared greyhound (sinister) (**Fig.1**). The choice to include these arms on the fireback is curious given that Chetham's Library, originally a college, was founded under Henry VI, and Henry VII is not connected to it in an obvious manner.

Shaw's 'royal' sideboard (**Fig.2**) originally included two royal achievements between the pairs of pinnacles on the backboard (now removed for safety (**Fig.3**)) that separate out Henry VII's quarters into *France modern* and *England*; like the fireback, these achievements' shields are of a specifically Tudor form (barbed hour-glass), and their carving, colour, surface treatment, patina, and signs of age are quite unlike the rest of the sideboard, in particular their hand-planed backs jar with the otherwise mechanically sanded work by Shaw. The royal arms are clear spolia which makes this sideboard a piece of 'Frankenstein furniture' in marked contrast to Shaw's typically all-new faked ancestral furniture sold to aristocrats in 1840s Britain.² Methodologically, the sideboard is akin to the pieces available on Wardour Street and 'the Abbot of Kirkstall's bed' examined in the last issue of this newsletter;³ Shaw, however, was partial to the reuse of ancient material in other contexts, such as the creation of the Radcliffe bed, his house's interior, St Chad's, Uppermill, and some church interiors, including St Chad's, Rochdale.

The sideboard's royal achievements were repeated in an incredibly crude manner by Shaw's workshop on the concave and recessed drawer face as an impaled rather than quartered shield—itsself a curious deviation from heraldic formality (**Fig.4**). Complicating the sideboard's presentation of royal heraldry and identity, Shaw did not repeat the unusual supporters incorporated within the achievements found primarily at the start of Henry VII's reign (lion and dragon, revived curiously for the front armorial to the Henry VII Chapel's High altar at Westminster Abbey designed by Pietro Torrigiano (1472–1528)), but, instead, the King's more recognisable supporters as found on the Audit Room's fireback (dragon and collared greyhound). This ancient and Victorian material therefore offer quite different

¹ *The Guardian*, 13 November (1847), p. 9.

² See Adam Bowett, "George Shaw, Rogue Antiquary: Fake Furniture for the Earl of Derby and the Duke of Northumberland," *Furniture History* 57 (2021), pp. 109–47.

³ Peter Brears, 'The Abbot of Kirkstall's Bed', *Regional Furniture Society Newsletter*, 76, Spring (2022), pp. 8–9.

heraldic visualisations of Henry VII, but the sideboard's royal credentials are left beyond doubt.

Confusing the sideboard's manufactured royal identity are, within the spandrels, floral Gothic letters that have just come to the author's attention whilst conducting detailed laser scanning of the sideboard and the royal armorials to determine if any idiosyncratic toolmarks remain on these Victorian and ancient works that help illustrate their removed production from one another. These letters are J and D conjoined (dexter), and C (sinister) (**Fig.5**), and D and C are also found within the stacked quatrefoils on the backboard's outer fretwork panels (replacing the mouchette wheels on the inner two fretwork panels (**Fig.6**) so typical of Shaw's Gothic design). Unlike the heraldic decoration strewn across Shaw's faked ancestral furniture, such as for Algernon Percy (1792–1865), fourth Duke of Northumberland, used to ascribe antiquity to his modern productions, Shaw here used letters to memorialise important figures in the history of Chetham's. J D must surely refer James Stanley (1607–51), Seventh Earl of Derby—the Stanley family having acquired the college once dissolved in 1547 and the Seventh Earl, prior to his execution in 1651, had received a petition (March 1648/9) for the site's re-use as a hospital. It was Humphrey Chetham (1580–1653) who wrote to the Earl's agent about the site, and the sideboard's letter C must surely refer to Chetham; this is confirmed by a suite of chairs supplied by Shaw to the library that features Chetham's armorial prominently. In the end, the site was acquired, initially on a seven-year lease, from the dowager Countess in 1653, and its use had already been outlined in Chetham's 1651 will where it should be 'for the use of schollars and others well affected'.⁴

As the product of a regional workshop under Shaw, the sideboard also revived the vocabulary of early-Tudor domestic woodwork found in a series of tester beds made for Lancashire families around the turn of the sixteenth century (which are the subject of a forthcoming essay by the author). Perhaps the most significant of these beds was made for Thomas Stanley (1435–1504), first Earl of Derby, and another for the Hulton family, now converted into a bookcase and given to Chetham's library in 1827 (**Fig.7**). Shaw was certainly aware of these beds, the Derby bed being in the collection of his antiquarian acquaintance James Dearden (1798–1862) of Rochdale Manor, and he had also seen the Hulton bed at Chetham's years before.⁵ Recreating the range of diapers applied to the posts and muntings found on these beds, as well as Gothic fretwork and brattishing, Shaw gave this regional style of Tudor furniture an imaginative afterlife by applying these decorative forms in a different and modern context.

Fig1: George Shaw, *Fireback for the Audit Room, Chetham's Library*, 1847. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.2: George Shaw, *The Royal Sideboard at Chetham's Library, with the Royal Arms removed*, 1847 and earlier spolia. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.3: *The Royal Arms of Henry VII now at Chetham's Library, and incorporated within Shaw's 1847 Royal Sideboard*, c.1485. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.4: *The Royal Arms of Henry VII Impaled on the Drawer of the Royal Sideboard at Chetham's Library*, 1847. © Peter N. Lindfield.

⁴ See Clare Hartwell, *The History and Architecture of Chetham's School and Library* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 49–62.

⁵ Peter N. Lindfield, "George Shaw Revisited: Ancient Oak, and Beds," *Furniture History Society Newsletter* 225 (2022), pp. 1–12.

Fig.5: *Detail of D and C carved within the sideboard's central drawer spandrels, 1847.* © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.6: *Detail of the sideboard's backboard panels including D, C, and mouchette wheels, 1847.* © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.7: *The 'Adam Hulton Bed', converted to a bookcase before 1827, c.1490s.* © Peter N. Lindfield.