

From the Fernery...

John Taylor & Son, Manufacturers, Edinburgh

Fern ware is the only Mauchline ware finish in which items of furniture, usually small, were made. Although relatively rare compared to the smaller, souvenir, fern pieces, once one starts to keep records, it soon becomes obvious – at least to someone with a recently acquired interest in Mauchline ware – that such furniture is more common than at first imagined, with occasional tables seeming to be the most popular. In just three years, without looking particularly hard, I have found eight occasional tables and know of a ninth. In design, not one of these tables is identical to any of the



others, but similar fern designs are seen on more than one table. One of the tables carries a manufacturer's mark, the impressed mark of *John Taylor & Son, (Manufacturers), Edinburgh*, with what is presumably a pattern or catalogue number, *E2024*.

John Taylor started in business in Edinburgh about 1832 offering framed prints, picture frames and cabinet furniture, and also advertised the sale of 'Prepared canvass, panels, drawing-boards, easels, and palettes, &c., for Artists' (*The Scotsman* 7 February 1838). From 1838–1850, he had an account with Roberson*, a well-known manufacturer and supplier of paints and other art materials. In 1841 Taylor took out an auctioneer's licence and opened a sale room under the Assembly Hall at 54 George St., opposite his then premises at no. 55, and advertising as 'picture framemakers, printsellers, auctioneers'. About 1850 his son joined the company, which became 'John Taylor & Son', and moved a year later into larger premises at 109 Princes St and later 110 Princes St. They eventually gave up selling artist's materials, already having begun to advertise as 'furniture makers and upholsterers', and at one stage as 'upholsterer to Her Majesty, and supplying furniture'. The firm continued to trade at 110 Princes St., Edinburgh, in one form or another until October 1945 when it went into liquidation (*Edinburgh Gazette* 30 October 1945).

Surfing the Internet for auctioneers and antique furniture retailers, quickly reveals that, today, furniture by John Taylor's company today demands a very respectable price, and images suggest it to be of high quality in design and manufacture.

The firm's furniture carried varying marks over the years, with the one on the table, *John Taylor & Son (Manufacturers) Edinburgh*, best fitting that recorded for the period 1902–1940: *John Taylor & Son (Edinburgh)*



Ltd. An identical mark to that on the table is also known from the stretcher of an undated painting by Samuel Edmonston.

The owner of the table believes it to be made of North American walnut, which was imported in large amounts in the 19th Century. This, together with a maker's mark, might suggest that the table was made by John Taylor and Son and then sent to one of the Mauchline ware manufacturers for decoration. (This may well have been the case for other Fern ware furniture.) But was this done by Taylor's before the item was sold, or after purchase by



a one-time owner? Alternatively, one or more of the Mauchline Ware manufacturers may have made the tabletops, possibly as souvenirs (easy to carry), and purchasers would then have had legs made for them when they got home. A manufacturer of 19th Century inlaid furniture that I research made occasional table tops as 'pot boilers', selling them mainly as souvenirs and gifts to make some money whilst making larger commissioned pieces. Both of these scenarios would account for the variety of 'legs' seen on the tables.

(* Roberson began his business in 1810 and his company continues until the present day. Famous clients of Roberson included Turner, Whistler and Sargent, designers such as William Morris, William de Morgan and Walter Crane and the royal and famous including Queen Victoria, Lady Randolph Churchill and Winston Churchill.)

I would like to thank Martin Rickard for allowing me to feature his table and acknowledge the National Portrait Gallery Internet site: British artists' suppliers, 1650-1950, for the information about John Taylor and Son, and C. Roberson and Co.'s own site for information about their company.

Jennifer M. Ide

Philip Giles of St. Austell

A number of St. Austell, Cornwall, pieces bear the name of their retailer, **PUBLISHED BY PHILIP GILES**, and indeed if one looks closely at the transfer of **Fore Street**, his shop appears in the foreground on the left hand side. In the mid 19th Century, St.

Austell was the centre of the thriving china clay industry. There was a population of about 10,000. The main railway line from London to Penzance



came to St. Austell in 1859. Fore Street is the main shopping street of the town (this being a common name for the main street in most West Country towns).

The Voters List for St. Austell in 1864/65 shows Philip Giles as the owner of property in Fore Street. The 1873 Kelly's *Directory* provides more information. There he is listed as a Printer, Stationer, Bookseller, Stamp Distributor and Publisher of the *St. Austell Weekly News & Country Advertiser*, with an address at No. 24 Fore Street. In the 1881 Census he is listed at No. 32 Fore Street, where he is described as a Stamp Distributor, Bookseller and Printer. He was then aged 50, with a wife and three daughters (the youngest 7 months old) who together with a niece, a servant and a nursemaid lived above the shop. The elder daughter is listed as a stationers' assistant and he also employed a man and three boys. This was boom time in St. Austell. Mr. Giles' shop was probably the only bookshop in town.

Although the population of St. Austell has grown to about 20,000 today, its importance as a commercial centre has declined with major changes in the china clay industry and the virtual elimination of other mining industries. Now, its main claim to fame is the close proximity of the Eden Project, a major tourist attraction.

The St. Austell entry on *Wikipedia* has a photograph taken in 2005 which shows a view of Fore Street looking towards Holy Trinity Church as in the Mauchline Ware view. The Clinton shop is No. 18 and it seems that Mr.



Giles' shops were on the same side of the street a bit further back from the church.

David Davey