

Chinese Wallpaper: an Elusive Element in the British Country House

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Many experts consider Chinese wallpaper to be a defining feature of the British country house interior. According to Oliver Impey, it is one of the four most prominently displayed categories of goods imported from the East that appeared in the domestic interior along with carpets, porcelain and lacquer.¹ Lining the walls Chinese wallpaper sets the most obvious keynote of a room's character, and is the dominant decorative element. It is frequently mentioned in diaries, letters and guidebooks both past and present, indicating its high visibility, and appears in widely differing and often surprising sources. The earliest reference to Chinese wallpaper in England is in the *London Gazette* of 1693 advertising the sale of 'paper hangings of Indian and Japan figures'. John Macky's, description of his visit to the Palace of Wanstead, built by Sir Richard Child in 1720, includes a reference to the parlour 'finely adorned with China paper, the figures of men, women, birds and flowers the liveliest I ever saw come from that country'.² However the earliest extant examples only survive from the 1750s, when Chinese wallpaper grew in popularity. The distinguished botanist, Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820), observed in his *Journal* in 1770: 'A man need go no further to study the Chinese ... than the China paper, the better sorts of which represent their persons and such of their customs, dresses, etc., as I have seen, most strikingly like, though a little in the *caricatura* style. Indeed, some of the plants which are common to China and Java, as bamboo, are better figured there than in the best botanical authors that I have seen'.³ When the actor entrepreneur Samuel Foote (1720-1777) was tried for buggery in 1776, his accuser mentioned the valuable Chinese wallpaper due to be put up, still in rolls by the window, in the drawing room of Foote's house in Suffolk Street, London. By referring to this distinctive commodity, he sought to prove his presence in a domestic interior which he would only have entered by invitation.⁴ The wallpaper was not a figment of his imagination, it is listed in the *Catalogue of the Genuine Neat Household Furniture* made by the

¹ Oliver Impey, 'Eastern Trade and Furnishing of the British Country House', in Gervase Jackson-Stops (ed), *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House, Studies in the History of Art*, 25, National Gallery of Art, Washington (1989), p.177.

² John Macky, *A Journey through England* (London 1724) vol.1, p.21.

³ J.D. Hooker (ed), *Journal of the Rt Hon Sir Joseph Banks* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), vol.4, p.45.

⁴ Ian Kelly, *Mr Foote's Other Leg, , Comedy, Tragedy and Murder in Georgina London* (London: Picador, 2013), p.382.

auctioneers Christie's in 1778 and had possibly been acquired in emulation of Foote's rival David Garrick who had installed his Chinese wallpaper at the Adelphi in 1772. Chinese wallpaper had seeped into the very psyche of the Nation.

Yet despite its ubiquity, there is a surprising lack of literature on the routes this exotic and expensive commodity followed from its manufacture in China, via the East India Company into the British home. Even its name presented confusion: it was commonly called 'India paper' or 'India hangings', after the East Indiamen that brought the paper from China, reflecting not only a wider British attraction to all things exotic, but also a disinterest in attribution to the precise place of manufacture, and recognition of the power and influence of the Company.⁵ While there are many and varied anecdotes about Chinese wallpaper in primary and secondary sources, it is veiled in myth and misrepresentation, perhaps enhancing its mystery and therefore desirability. Stories abound but fact is hard to pin down. Chinese wallpaper has been appropriated by many narratives, most notably in the service of imagining the 'eastern other' as irrational, weak and feminised.

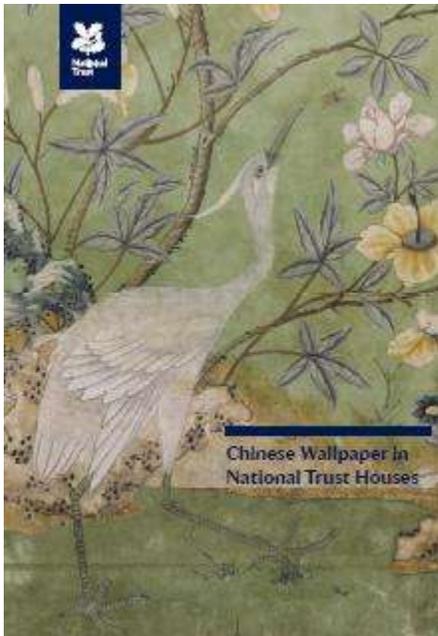


Figure 1. Front Cover of Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses, 2014. © National Trust Images/John Hammond.

In this case study the focus will be on explorations of the precise relationship between members of the East India Company and the British houses in which it was displayed. My approach benefits from a close collaboration with Emile de Bruijn and Andrew Bush from the National Trust, who have formed a Chinese wallpaper study group. Members include curators, conservators and country house owners, as well as current manufacturers, and students and scholars. The resulting catalogue, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, (2014) set the Trust's 45 holdings, the largest on public display in the UK, in the context of the wider picture of its distribution and history. For the first time it has been possible to map where the papers are (and were), attempt dating (which is difficult as Chinese wallpaper was exempt from the taxes introduced in 1712 and 1773, although it did succumb to import tax in 1792), and provide a

⁵ For example in the advertisements which appeared in *The Daily Advertiser*, e.g. 15 February 1752 'A large quantity of exceeding fine India paper for hangings'.

domestic context for interpreting this global commodity. Crossing boundaries of fine and decorative art, fixture and chattel, fact and fantasy, the reading of Chinese wallpaper requires a combined effort and multidisciplinary approach. While deployed in a variety of contexts - as part of the wider phenomenon of Chinoiserie; of gender-related constructs within the home; as part of the luxury debate and the consumer revolution; of the development of the China trade; and the wider evolution of wallpaper, and even as an influence on garden and textile design - there is only a small body of work dedicated to Chinese wallpaper itself. The foremost study is Friederike Wappenschmidt's, *Chinesische Tapeten für Europa: vom Rollbild zur Bildtapete*, published in Berlin in 1989.⁶ The study of Chinese wallpaper more generally is dominated by individual papers and houses, largely because of the scattered and anecdotal nature of the evidence.

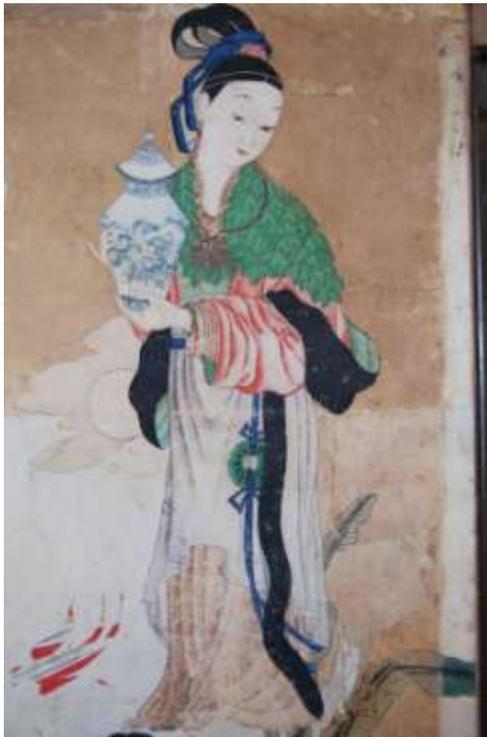
An Elusive Object

At all stages of its existence Chinese wallpaper has proved elusive. Although the Chinese pioneered the making of paper, c.105 AD they did not use the panoramic wallpaper as we know it in the West in their homes. It was designed as a European commodity. We know surprisingly little about Chinese craftsmen's use of plain, coloured and patterned paper in the design of their intricate interiors. In 1664 when John Evelyn described the Chinese goods brought back by a Jesuit on return from China, he admired 'a sort of paper ... with such lively colours, that for splendour and vividness we have nothing in Europe that approaches it ... [it is], exceeding glorious to look on'.⁷

⁶ For example, Rosemary Baird, *Mistress of the House, Great Ladies and Grand Houses 1670-1839* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003); Stacey Sloboda, 'Fashioning Bluestocking Conversation: Elizabeth Montagu's Chinese Room' in D. A. Baxter and M Martin (eds), *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Craig Clunas, *Chinese Export Art and Design* (London: V&A, 1987); Gill Saunders, 'The China Trade : oriental painted panels' in *The Papered Wall: History, Pattern, Technique* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994); Charles Oman and Jean Hamilton, *Wallpapers: a history and illustrated catalogues of the collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, (London: V&A, 1982); Yu Liu, *Seeds of a Different Eden: Chinese Gardening Ideas and a New English Aesthetic Ideal* (Columbia: Univeristy of South Carolina Press, 2008); Friederike Wappenschmidt, 'A friendly rivalry: Chinese wallpaper paintings and early eighteenth-century silk designs', in Anna Joly (ed), *A taste for the exotic: foreign influences on early eighteenth-century silk designs vol.14*, (Riggisberger Berichte, Abegg-Stiftung 2007).

⁷ Henry G. Bohn, *Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn, F. R. S.*, Volume 1, (London 1859), p.402.

It is likely that the Chinese wallpapers we know in the West originated from the less familiar wall decorations on paper created in China especially for export to Europe.⁸ Chinese pictures were imported in small quantities first by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, and then into France by Dutch traders, towards the end of the seventeenth century.⁹ The earliest *precise* reference to the import of graphic art from China to England is 1727.¹⁰ There is a detailed description of these pictures by Robert Fortune (1812-1880), the plant hunter who found time during his travels in China to observe in the house of a mandarin of Tsee-kee, 'a nicely furnished room according to Chinese ideas, that is, its walls were hung with pictures of flowers, birds, and scenes of Chinese life. . . . I observed a series of pictures which told a long tale as distinctly as if it had been written



in Roman characters. The actors were all on the boards, and one followed them readily from the commencement of the piece until the fall of the curtain'.¹¹ These pictures continued to be popular in Britain and were used alongside Chinese wallpaper. For example at Fawley Court, Henley-on-Thames in 1771 a dressing room was decorated with 'the most curious India paper as birds, flowers etc., put up as different pictures in frames of the same'.¹² Lady Cardigan bought 88 'Indian pictures', in 1742 which were pasted over the walls of a dining room.¹³

Figure 2. Detail of one of the 60 Chinese pictures used as wallpaper in what is now the Study at Saltram, Devon (National Trust). Picture courtesy of Andrew Bush.

⁸ I. Lambert & C. Laroque, 'An eighteenth-century Chinese wallpaper: historical context and conservation' in *Works of art on paper: books, documents and photographs: techniques and conservation: contributions to the Baltimore Congress*, 2-6 September 2002, p.122-128. See: <https://www.iiconservation.org/node/2202>

⁹ Quoted G. L. Hunter, *Decorative textiles: An illustrated book on coverings for furniture, walls and floors* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1918), p.363.

¹⁰ Craig Clunas, *Chinese Export Watercolours* (London: V&A, 1984), p.10.

¹¹ Robert Fortune, *A Residence Among the Chinese* (London: John Murray, 1865), chapter 4.

¹² Emily J. Climenson (ed.), *Diaries of Mrs Philip Lybbe Powys of Hardwick House, Oxon*, (London: Longmans, 1899), pp. 146-147, entry for October 1771, quoted in Saunders 1994, p. 49, note 15.

¹³ Quoted in Margaret Jourdain and Soame Jenyns, 'Chinese export art in the eighteenth century', *Country Life*, 1950, p.34.

Some wallpaper was in fact painted on silk not paper.¹⁴ It was ‘probably hand painted in the same workshops in Canton since the technique to stain wallpapers was very similar to the preparation of hand painted silks’.¹⁵ Like the textiles with which they were associated, including Indian-made chintz, Chinese wallpaper was admired in the West for its colour. We know that many interiors combined the two, for example at Harewood House, near Leeds the room with the ‘Chints [bed] Hanging lined with silk’, was hung with Chinese wallpaper. This was a European-wide phenomenon. In Italy the casinos were ‘neatly fitted up with India paper, and furnished with chintz’.¹⁶ Chintz patterns were even drawn from Chinese wallpaper, as the chintz valence for David Garrick’s bed demonstrates.¹⁷ Malachy Postlethwayt (?1707-1767), in his *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* (1757) ascribed the popularity of Chinese export paintings to their colours, diversity and fantasy, ‘the pictures are valued for the liveliness and briskness of the colours and variety of figures. Odd fancies commonly hit the general taste, and the Chinese do not seem to have any fancy for pieces of gravity’.¹⁸ Hargrove and Bewick described the best bedchamber at Newby Hall, near Ripon in 1789 as ‘hung with India paper, on which the flowers and foliage, birds and other figures, are represented in the most lively and beautiful colours’.¹⁹ Here the word ‘lively’ indicates vibrancy. It was the bright colour of Chinese wallpaper, that according to the wallpaper maker John Baptist Jackson (c.1701-c.1780) revolted against the notion of taste: ... ‘the gay glaring colours in broad patches of red, green yellow blue etc which are to pass for flowers and other objects which delight the eye that has not true judgment belonging to it’.²⁰ Other distinctive qualities of Chinese wallpaper were its smoothness, opacity and uniformity, akin in some ways to the European fascination with porcelain.²¹

¹⁴ Ceri Johnson, ‘Chinese Wallpapers at Saltram’, *Devon Buildings Group Newsletter*, 15 (Easter 1997), pp.6-11.

¹⁵ Vanessa Allayrac-Fielding, ‘Luscious Colors of Glossy Paint’: The Taste for China and the Consumption of Color in Eighteenth Century England’ in Andrea Feeser, Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, *The Materiality of Color: The Production, Circulation, and Application of Dyes and Pigments, 1400-1800* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 85.

¹⁶ Lady Anna Rys Miller, *Letters from Italy, describing the Manners, Customs, Antiquities, Painting*, vol.2 (London 1776), p.358.

¹⁷ Victoria and Albert Museum, W.701-1916. Painted and dyed cotton, Coromandel Coast, c.1774, replicas on display in the British Galleries room 118a, case 1.

¹⁸ Quoted in Feeser, *The Materiality of Color*, p.86.

¹⁹ E. Hargrove, *The History of the Castle, Town and Forest of Knaresborough with Harrogate* (4th edn, York 1789), p. 265

²⁰ Quoted in A.V. Sugden, *A History of English Wallpaper 1509-1914* (London: Batsford, 1914), p.56.

²¹ Pauline Webber, ‘Chinese wallpapers in the British Galleries’, *V&A Conservation Journal*, 39 (2001).



Figure 3. Detail of block printed outline, from Chinese wallpaper at Felbrigg, Norfolk, supplied by James Paine in 1751, and hung in the Chinese bedroom.

Photograph courtesy of Andrew Bush.

While Europeans admired what they thought was the fine art of Chinese hand-painted paper, it is clear that techniques such as block printing were used.²² Even when they

²² George H Morton, paper read before the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Liverpool, 1875 '... the Chinese and Japanese Paper Hanging are occasionally brought home at present time. They are probably partly printed and afterwards finished by hand'.

were entirely hand-painted, the production process was highly organised and subdivided, which speeded up production. As the conservator Pauline Webber has noted 'Chinese wallpapers were manufactured in production-line workshops. Working to a copied design and with labour divided according to skill, a team of painters produced sets of wallpapers to decorate entire rooms'.²³ Clare Taylor reminds us that these papers 'formed part of a growing consumer market', stimulating imitative innovation.²⁴ Yet the relationship between Chinese and European wallpapers was not a simply imitative one. Chinese wallpapers do not, like armorial porcelain, appear to have been made to commission, where western designs, such as bookplates, were sent out for copying, nor were they made to 'fit' specific rooms, as extensive modifications to Chinese wallpapers at top and base, and with cut-outs pasted on to hide joins prove. Some examples show evidence of skies painted in, or strips added at the base, like the paper at Milton Manor, Oxfordshire. There is only one example of a Chinese wallpaper being made to a European design, from engravings by the French designer of ornament Gabriel Huquier (1695-1772) after the French painter Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), made for Hampden House in Buckinghamshire, and hung around 1756.²⁵

Chinese wallpapers were rare novelties, expensive, and looked very different from the tapestries and textile hangings which preceded them. Lady Anna Rys Miller, noted in 1776 that 'India paper is more expensive in England than damask here [in Italy]'.²⁶ At Croome Court in Worcestershire the bills for the '29 fine India landscapes' of 1763 sent to Lord Coventry reveal each landscape cost £2 2s each, making a total of £60 18s, equivalent today to £4,000.²⁷ It was so expensive, offcuts were kept, as at Penryhn Castle, Gwynedd, and old papers removed and put into storage.²⁸ 'Occasionally sets of eighteenth-century Chinese wall-papers are discovered in attics and lumber rooms, which have never been fixed on to walls, but are still in the neat boxes of Chinese manufacture in which they were sent to this country. These boxes generally contain twelve lengths. The explanation seems to be that the owners, having no immediate use for

²³ Pauline Webber, 'Chinese wallpapers in the British Galleries', p.6.

²⁴ Clare Taylor, 'Chinese Papers and English Imitations in 18th Century Britain', from E. Stevenow-Hidemark (ed) *New Discoveries New Research: Papers from the International Wallpaper Conference*, Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, 2009. p.36.

²⁵ John Cornforth, *Early Georgian Interiors* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp.265-6.

²⁶ Miller, *Letters from Italy*, p.23.

²⁷ Liza Picard, *Dr Johnson's London* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), p.297

²⁸ Gill Saunders, 'The China Trade: Oriental Painted Panels' in Lesley Hopkins (ed) *The Papered Wall: History, Pattern Technique*, (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994), pp. 42-55, with thanks to Andrew Bush for this reference.

them, stored them away'.²⁹ Part of the attraction of these papers was their rarity, as Lady Mary Coke commented in 1772 'I have taken down the Indian paper, put up another upon a blue ground with white birds & flowers: 'tis very pretty & has the additional recommendation of being quite new. There are but eight sets come to England'.³⁰

The display of Chinese wallpaper signalled participation in the new consumer revolution, and became part of a popular mercantilist trope, which set honest home-made goods against deceptive foreign imports that threatened the nation's economy and morals: 'Luxury is become general. To observe the furniture of our houses with gilded ceilings, the hangings of India paper, rich silk damasks tapestry and velvet, the large French and Venetian glasses'.³¹ In an article in the popular magazine *The World* of 1753 the author bewailed the fact that 'the upper apartments of my house, which were before handsomely wainscoted' were now adorned 'with the richest Chinese and India paper, where all the powers of fancy are exhausted in a thousand fantastic figures of birds, beasts, and fishes, which never had existence'.³²

Chinese wallpapers were often, although not always, pasted to textile linings (after the 'canvas' had been lined with European paper) tacked onto wooden strainers secured to the unfinished walls with nails. The use of a textile support not only provided a flat surface but also enabled the wallpaper to be removed if the decorative scheme was changed. Given the expense of these papers, mobility was an important feature, and it also kept them dry in often damp British country houses. However it is evident that most inventory makers considered these papers as fixtures, rather than moveable chattels, so they do not always appear in these documents. Yet there is a great deal of evidence to show how these wallpapers moved about, within a house, and from house to house. The Chinese wallpaper at the Court of Noke, Herefordshire came from Lambton Castle, County Durham. The Chinese wallpaper at Harewood, Leeds hung by Thomas Chippendale in 1769 had been removed by the 1840s, and was later discovered in an outbuilding on the estate in 1988.³³ Others, like that at Croome Court, were sold at auction.³⁴

²⁹ <http://www.historic-house.org/history/part2/history-80.html>. See five wooden boxes and fifteen boards, c.1815, part of the cargo of the *Diana*, which sank off Malacca in 1817, *A Tale of Three Cities, Canton, Shanghai & Hong Kong*, Sotheby's, London, 1997, p.33.

³⁰ *The Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke*, vol.4, 1772-74 (Bath: Kingsmead Reprints, 1970), p.43.

³¹ *The London Magazine*, vol. 42, 1773, p.69

³² *The World*, September 20, no.38, vol. 1, 1753, p.245.

³³ Thanks to Mellissa Gallimore for this information.

³⁴ Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses* (National Trust, 2014), no.12, p.22 (sold in 1948).

Although imported by the East India Company, Chinese wallpaper, like hand-painted silk, was part of the private privilege trade, and never part of official Company trade, at least for the English East India Company. That is, it was part of the allowance given to employees, the captains, merchants and supercargoes, who were paid modest salaries, and were permitted to trade on their account to specified levels, which allowed the most successful to increase their income thirty-fold.³⁵ However all these private purchases had to be put through the East India House auction in London, levying an auction commission of 15 per cent (or sometimes more) on the prices realised. Thus a private trader had to buy back the goods he had financed if he wanted them. As David Howard reminds us 'These private traders were socially and financially in touch with wealthy private clients, who might often be related by blood, and it was they who elected the most fashionable products available at Canton by carrying special commissions. They gained a much wider understanding of what was available, which knowledge was in turn, at the disposal of the Company'.³⁶

Yet this private trade accounted for no more than 10 per cent of the whole trade with China (and usually much less). Unfortunately as the privilege trade was not fully documented, and most of the auction records have been lost, it is difficult to pursue more detailed research. If Chinese wallpaper remained marginal in commercial terms compared to Company trade, the latter in turn needs to be put in context. As Jan de Vries has argued, even the Company trade only equated, by the later eighteenth century to around 50,000 tons per year, (equivalent to the capacity of one modern container tanker).³⁷ What was important about these goods was not their volume, but the impact they made, which was quite disproportionate to their number.

East India Company Family Connections

There are many examples of Chinese wallpaper in the British country house. The ongoing National Trust Chinese Wallpaper Project has mapped over 149 houses, where there are either extant examples or references to it, with more coming to light as research continues. These distinctive luxury goods were undoubtedly part of wider fashion whereby 'persons of quality and distinction, who had Taste and all that', were advised to

³⁵ See further, 'The Honourable East India Company trading to China' in David S. Howard, *A Tale of Three Cities Canton, Shanghai & Hong Kong*, Sotheby's, London 1997, p.xiv.

³⁶ Howard, 1997, p.xiv.

³⁷ Jan de Vries, 'Goods from the East', p. 30, forthcoming in Maxine Berg *et al* (eds) *Trading Eurasia Europe's Asian Centuries 1600-1830* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

'have something foreign and superb'.³⁸ Although it would be impractical to research the provenance of all these papers, it is clear that a significant number of them, at current calculation 20 per cent, were connected with individuals and families that had specific links with the East India Company.³⁹ It is the aim of the rest of this case study to investigate the nature of these connections.



Figure 4. Photograph of Chinese wallpaper at Erdigg, with black Coromandel screen, Chinese silk bed hangings. (Note the red cabinet has recently been exchanged for a black one). © National Trust Images/Andreas von Einsiedel.

Some owners of Chinese wallpaper, like Edward Howard, 9th Duke of Norfolk (1686-1777) were investors in the Company, although it has not been possible to link the wallpaper which decorated the principal bedrooms of Norfolk House, St James's Square, and at Worksop Manor, with specific ships. Henry Lascelles Senior (1690-1753), Collector of Customs in Bridgetown, Barbados, became a Director of the East India Company between 1742-1746. Henry's youngest son, also called Henry, became a Captain for the East India Company and by 1741 was in command of a ship called the *York*. In the next

³⁸ *The World*, September 20, no.38, vol.1, 1753, p.242

³⁹ Based on an ongoing database, part of the National Trust Chinese wallpaper project, which at March 2014 included 149 houses, 30 of which have East India Company connections. The number is set to rise substantially as research progresses.

seven years Henry made three trips to the port of Canton. However it has not been possible to make a direct link with between these trips and the Chinese wallpaper that hung in the East Bedroom at Harewood House in 1769, which belonged to Henry's brother Edwin. The Chinese wallpaper at Broughton Castle, c.1850 which bears similarities to those at Belton, Burton Constable, Ickworth, Penrhyn, Woburn, may have been introduced by Frederick Twistleton, 16th Lord Saye and Sele (1799–1887), as he refurbished the Castle in the 1860s.⁴⁰ The family had close connections with the East India Company via the 13th Lord Saye and Sele (c.1735-1788). His wife, Elizabeth Turner was the heiress of Sir Edward Turner whose East India Company wealth funded the restoration of Broughton. Edward Turner's mother, Mary was the daughter of Sir Gregory Page (c.1669-1720) a London merchant whose wealth partly stemmed from the East India Company, of which he was a Director. At Erdigg in Wrexham the Chinese wallpaper in the State bedroom, may have been installed during the modernisation of the house in the 1770s by Philip Yorke (1743-1804) and his wife Elizabeth (1750-1779), daughter of Sir John Cust of Belton. It is possible, that the Chinese wallpaper was supplied by Elizabeth's uncle, Peregrine Cust (1723-1785) who was deeply involved in East India Company affairs, becoming a Director in 1767. When Agneta York wrote in 1772 that the bedrooms and dressing rooms at Osterley were furnished 'with the finest chintzes, painted taffetys, india paper and decker work and such a profusion of rich China and Japan that I could almost fancy myself in Pekin', she was acknowledging the fruits of three generations of owners who had close connections with the Company (see Case Study on Osterley House and Park).

James Drummond, 8th Viscount Strathallan (1767-1851) brought his Chinese wallpaper back with him from Canton. Drummond, was a nephew of the London banker Robert Drummond of Cadland, Hampshire, and prospered in the service of the East India Company in China. He began his East India Company career as a supercargo, and became assistant to the Head of the Committee at Canton in 1792, and by 1800 he was a member of the Select Committee there and the following year became President, a post he held until 1807 when he returned to Scotland. The 18 rolls of 12 foot by 4 foot mulberry bark and bamboo paper are hand-painted with a scene of the 'hongs', or foreign factories of Canton (Guangzhou), which enable its dating to c.1780. It is decorated the walls of the Ladies' Salon at Strathallen Castle for almost 200 years, before it was acquired by the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts.⁴¹ It is the only known example of an

⁴⁰ With many thanks to Emile de Bruijn for his very helpful comments on this wallpaper.

⁴¹ He also acquired amongst other things a porcelain 'Palaceware' dessert service, c.1795 which also travelled back with him to Scotland. See *A Tale of Three Cities*, Sotheby's, London 1997, cat.no.41, p.47.

historic Chinese wallpaper showing the hongts at Canton, a motif that was shown more often on Chinese export porcelain.⁴²

Despite this wealth of connections it is difficult to trace any specific routes of acquisition from these examples. To do this we need to turn to the Russells, Dukes of Bedford. (The Bedford Russells are not related to the Russells of Swallowfield Park featured elsewhere on our project website, the two families shared surnames and East India Company connections notwithstanding).

The Russells and their Chinese Wallpaper

The associations of the Russells and the East India Company cover six generations from the 1st to the 6th Dukes of Bedford, and are revealed in successive waves of Asian influence on their patterns of collecting and decorating.⁴³ The wealth of Chinese wallpapers relating to Bedford property has recently been investigated by Lucy Johnson, for an exhibition curated by her at Woburn, *Peeling Back the Years Chinoiserie at Woburn Abbey* (2014).

The marriage of the 1st Duke of Bedford's grandson Wriothesley Russell, Lord Tavistock (1680-1711) to Elizabeth Howland (1682-1724) in 1695 brought a spectacularly large dowry of near £100,000 (roughly equivalent to £9,000,000 today) into the family whose estates included Thames-side property at Rotherhithe. The marriage also connected the Russells with the Childs, as Elizabeth was the grand daughter of Sir Josiah Child (1630-1699) whose advocacy of the East India Company's monopoly led directly to his appointment as a Director in 1677, rising to Deputy-Governor and Governor of the East India Company in 1681. (See further the [Case Study of Wanstead](#)) At Rotherhithe the 1st Duke of Bedford (1613-1700) built the first docks, whose rental brought in a useful income, first from the Greenland, and then the South Sea Companies. At these docks he built the *Streatham* which was presented by his grandson to the East India Company. The *Bedford*, *Tavistock*, *Russell* and *Howland* followed, all commissioned before 1700, to which were added the *Tonqueen*, and later the *Houghton* and *Denham*.⁴⁴ The Bedfords invested between one-sixteenth to one-eighth part in the voyages these vessels took, and thereby had considerable holdings in the East India Company.

⁴² With thanks to Emile de Bruijn for this observation. See forthcoming paper on the Drummond wallpaper by William Sargent in *Orientalism*.

⁴³ The following taken from Gladys Scott Thomson, *The Russells in Bloomsbury 1669-1771* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), pp.312-338.

⁴⁴ Thomson, *The Russells*, p.316

When John Russell, 4th Duke of Bedford (1710-71) began remodelling and redecorating Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire and Bedford House in London in 1748, he combined Chinese wallpaper and china with new Louis XV-style furniture and portraits by British artists.⁴⁵ Tracking their purchase reveals the ways these exotic commodities, including wallpaper, entered the British home. The most direct route was via the privilege trade, where the Dukes used their positions as owners of East Indiamen hired to the Company, and their positions as investors to gain privileged access to these Asian goods. Having sold their outward cargo and made purchases in India on their eight month journey out, the Company servants on the East Indiamen sailed on to Canton buying goods via the Hong merchants, including Chinese wallpaper. Sailing was geared to the monsoons in the Eastern Seas, homebound ships returning with the north-east monsoon between November and March. The ships steered a course via the Straits of Sunda, the Cape of Good Hope and on to St Helena and Ascencion passing the west of the Cape Verdes and Azores, and then up the English Channel, continuing up to Blackwall or Deptford. The cargo was transferred to the Company's lighters under the eyes of the revenue officers, and up to the Company warehouses. Once inspected, and after duties had been paid, the goods were sold at auctions held in the Company's sale room in Leadenhall Street, London 'by inch of candle'. The Green Drawing Room at Woburn, now known as the Ballroom, is hung with a hand-painted Chinese wallpaper of c.1800-20. When this wallpaper was conserved in 1998 two separate inked inscriptions were found on the back of the wallpaper. 'Royal George' refers to the ship that transported the wallpaper from China to England, and 'No 48' may refer to the package and '46 sheets' to its contents. 'Lot 25' is written in a different hand and confirms it was consigned to auction at East India Company House, and comprised '24 sheets'. This shows that the original consignment was divided which suggests that another set was made from the remaining 22 sheets.⁴⁶ There were five ships named the *Royal George* which made voyages between 1737 and 1822; the one conveying the wallpaper, was a 1333 ton ship that made seven voyages between 1802 and 1817.⁴⁷ This wallpaper relates to the 6th Duke's (1766-1839) campaign of re-decoration.

Another route via which Chinese wallpaper entered the home, was purchase from the range of specialist shopkeepers, like John Tombes who sold 'all kinds of India goods' including silk, muslins, china, tea and spices. The Chinese wallpaper in 'His Grace's Bed-chamber' at Woburn came via this route. It was bought from the London wallpaper sup-

⁴⁵ With thanks to Lucy Johnson for this information.

⁴⁶ Latest information from Lucy Johnson, kindly supplied 29 June 2014.

⁴⁷ Jean Sutton, *Lords of the East*, see: <http://www.mariners-l.co.uk/EICsuttonO-Z.htm>

pliers Crompton and Spinnage in 1751-2, at a cost of £60 13s 10d (a similar price to that purchased for Croome Court), part of a larger bill for hanging Chinese wallpapers at Woburn of £253 13s 10¹/₂ d. It is one of the earliest known Chinese wallpapers to survive, contemporary and identical with those at Felbrigg Hall in Norfolk, Ightam Mote in Kent and Uppark in West Sussex. It was still there in 1771 when it was described in an inventory of that year as 'Hung with India Paper'.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The Chinese paper in this room at Woburn was protected by another layer of paper added 28 years later when the room was redecorated, and was re-discovered in 2014.



Figure 5. Detail of Chinese wallpaper in 'His Grace's Bedchamber', Woburn Abbey. Reproduced with kind permission of Woburn Abbey

Architects were also involved with the supply of Chinese wallpaper, as at Felbrigg, in Norfolk where James Paine (1717-1789) supplied paper to the owner William Windham

II (1717-1761), installed by a specialist paper-hanger from London.⁴⁹ At Nostell Priory, in West Yorkshire Thomas Chippendale supplied the Chinese wallpaper in 1771.

The Russells clearly liked their Chinese wallpaper, as it was also used at Oakley House, in Bedfordshire, not far from Woburn and at Endsleigh Cottage in Devon. After the purchase of Oakley House (built between 1748 and 1750) by the 4th Duke in 1757, the old house was demolished and a new one was built on the site, serving as a hunting box for successive Dukes. The 1935 sale catalogue lists three rooms clad with Chinese wallpaper, on the ground floor smoking room, the staircase hall and in the first floor bedroom. One of c.1790, survives. They were probably related to the 5th Duke's influence, who employed Henry Holland to modify Oakley for him. The paper for Endsleigh Cottage, which was hung in the main guest bedroom, may have been bought at the same time as the pale for the Green Drawing Room at Woburn. This was one of a number of Chinese wallpapers at Endsleigh. The house was built between 1810 and 1816 by John Russell, 6th Duke of Bedford as a private family residence, to the designs of Sir Jeffry Wyattville, as a grand form of the cottage orné, where house and landscape were designed as one. It was usefully positioned to serve as a residence whilst the Duke, normally residing at Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire, was inspecting his extensive Bedford estates in Devon and Cornwall. It was the Duke and Duchess's favourite residence and was used for entertaining intimate friends.

The Chinese wallpaper in the Russell residences was a part of a wider strategy of furnishing which included Chinese porcelain and silk, and Indian furniture (all either acquired before the 4th Duke's time, or made in the style of this period) which was a constant reminder of the family's links with the East India Company which dated back to the 1st Duke, and through it, to the wider world. They appeared in their grand country house at Woburn, as well as in their smaller retreats. These furnishings demonstrated the family's power to access these goods over several generations. As Lucy Johnson has noted, this engagement with Asian goods, via their East India Company connections was underpinned by a deeper fascination with the culture of China, evidenced by the the 4th Duke's purchase 'from 1735 onwards [of books] which covered virtually every aspect of Chinese history, life and culture'.⁵⁰ The 5th Duke went on to build a Chinese Dairy at Woburn, designed by Henry Holland in 1787, decorated by John Crace, and completed in 1794. Humphrey Repton supplied designs for a Chinese garden at Woburn in 1804-5.

⁴⁹ *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, 2014, Paine at Felbrigg (cat. 17, pp.25-6) and Chippendale at Nostell and Harewood (cats. 24-6, pp.31-2).

⁵⁰ Lucy Johnson, *Peeling Back the years Chinoiserie at Woburn Abbey* (2014).

The 6th Duke employed Sir Joseph Banks to advise and acquire Chinese plants for his gardens, and bought as many Chinese wallpapers as the 4th Duke.

The Importance of Gifts

There was another route which Chinese wallpaper took from the workshops of Canton to the country houses of Britain. The gifting of Chinese wallpaper dominates their history, although it is difficult to verify any of the stories connected with these presents. (See Case Study of William Rattray of Downie Park) It has been suggested, although not substantiated with evidence, that 'sets of painted wallpaper were specially created by Chinese merchants to give as gifts to finalize deals with their European trading partners'.⁵¹ Within a culture that placed great emphasis on ritualised gift-giving, this strategy appears possible. Through gifting, these expensive commodities slipped their economic context, and gained a separate and higher level of existence. The reciprocity of a business transaction, for example the purchase of Chinese wallpaper from a London shop, was both immediate and specific, a self-enclosed episode, while acquisition by gift was more complex.

a) Kings, Queens and Royal Mistresses

Although it has been impossible to verify any of these gifting 'stories', whatever their truth, the activity indicates that they were given a high status, especially when the gifting was frequently connected with royal favour. It is from the 1780s that the narratives of 'imperial' and 'royal' gifts of Chinese wallpaper begin to appear, perhaps as a reaction to the increasing prevalence of wallpaper from the 1750s, in an attempt to make some more distinct than others? Charlotte Abrams reporting in a current fashion bulletin makes a note that must have been as appropriate in the eighteenth century as now, 'that the trend [of hanging expensive wallpapers] is so ubiquitous it is becoming increasingly tricky to keep ahead of one's paper-buying friends.'⁵²

The earliest story of the gift of Chinese wallpaper found so far, is connected with the royal physician Dr John Turton (1735-1806). Appointed in 1772 as George III's doctor, Turton had duties which involved delivery of the numerous royal babies. His role made him a great favourite of Queen Charlotte. On his retirement in 1786, Turton left Adam Street, in the Adelphi, where he had been a neighbour of the actor David Garrick, and bought Brasted Place in Kent, which he immediately demolished and began rebuilding

⁵¹ Rooms with a View: *Wallpaper and Landscape*, Cooper Hewitt Museum, New York 2001.

⁵² <http://howtospendit.ft.com/interior-design/25123-wall-important>

and decorating with the assistance of Robert Adam. Several royal favours included ‘a wall-paper which had originally been sent by the Emperor of China as a present to King George III and was bestowed on Dr Turton by the Queen’.⁵³ Some accounts say the paper was put up in the billiard room, others in the drawing room, the latter was more likely. The paper was recorded *in situ* at Brasted by English Heritage, where it is described as ‘2 panels of Chinese wallpaper depicting scenes of everyday life’, some removed to Kent Museum.⁵⁴ Papers depicting this type of scene, and those illustrating Chinese manufactures, were more expensive than other types of Chinese wallpaper, such as those with trees and birds, and the largely forgotten plain and patterned ones. Using data from *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, it is clear that papers with these patterns were also unusual accounting for only 20, that is 15 per cent of the total of known patterns. ‘Papers decorated with flowering trees and plants, birds, insects and rocks, representing idealised gardens’ were more popular (and more affordable), accounting for 95, that is 60 per cent of all examples collated so far.⁵⁵

The greatest number of Chinese wallpapers seems to survive from the period 1751-1775, although, as discussed earlier, the whole process of dating is complicated. The second wave of popularity was 1826-1850, coinciding with the impact of Brighton Pavilion. Its creation, between 1787 and 1826, is said to have been inspired by the gift of some Chinese wallpaper to the Prince Regent.⁵⁶ Other decorative goods like Chinese porcelain, furniture and other decorative objects, were acquired via John and Frederick Crace who were responsible for negotiating the Custom House for their importation. Gordon Lang reminds us that Frederick Crace took an ‘almost slavish adherence to original Chinese sources, using motifs from eighteenth century ‘famille-rose’ export ware porcelain, Canton enamel and even Mandarin robes’; and asks whether he was following the wishes of the Prince of Wales?⁵⁷ There are three different Chinese wallpapers at the Pavilion, one c.1790, acquired in 1815, and hung in 1820 in the Adelaide corridor; one c.1815 part of Frederick Crace’s scheme for the Saloon, and one hung in the in Queen Victoria’s bedroom when she resided there between 1835 and 1845 (the wallpaper currently in this bedroom is a recent facsimile). Perhaps it was from the earliest cache of Chinese wallpaper that the Prince Regent made his gift in 1806 to the feisty

⁵³ J.B Nias, *Dr John Radcliffe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), p.55.

⁵⁴ E. Jordan, ‘Chinese Wallpapers in England’, *The Star*, Issue 9680, 23 October 1909, p.1; Listed 1954, English Heritage Building ID 356912.

⁵⁵ See Emile de Bruijn, Andrew Bush and Helen Clifford, *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, National Trust 2014, p.5

⁵⁶ Christina Baird, *Liverpool China Traders*, Peter Lang, Bern 2007, p.136.

⁵⁷ See Gordon Lang, ‘The Royal Pavilion, Brighton: the Chinoiserie Designs by Frederick Crace’, in Megan Aldrich (ed) *The Craces Royal Decorators 1768-1899*, The Royal Pavilion, Brighton 1990, p.43

Frances Ingram, Lady Irwin (?1734-1807) of Temple Newsam in Leeds, as an indication of his affection for her eldest daughter Isabella, Marchioness of Hertford (1759-1834), who became his mistress the following year? It was she who had the paper hung, twenty years later, in 1827, creating the Blue Drawing Room (also known as the Chinese Drawing Room) out of what had been the best dining room at Temple Newsam. She embellished its design with prints of exotic birds cut from John James Audubon's famous publication *The Birds of America* to which she had subscribed to the first issue. After visiting the Pavilion in the late 1820s, Marianne, Lady Clifford Constable and her sister Eliza were inspired to create their own Chinese Room at Burton Constable, in East Yorkshire. The walls were hung with new Chinese wallpaper, (originally a powdered pink colour) stencilled designs were added to doors and walls, and silvered bells hung from the cornice and doorway.⁵⁸

During the removal of the wallpaper in 1992 as part of a conservation project, an earlier Chinese wallpaper of the 1780s was discovered underneath, which relates to bills paid to Thomas Chippendale's foreman, William Reid in 1783. This reveals a predisposition for Chinese wallpaper that perhaps laid the foundation for the later decoration.



Figure 6. Detail of the Chinese wallpaper in the Chinese Room at Burton Constable, East Yorkshire. With kind permission of the Burton Constable Foundation.

⁵⁸ Avray Tipping, 'In English Homes: The Internal Character, Furniture & Adornments of Some of the Most Notable Houses of England', *Country Life*, 2, 1908. p.150.

The Importance of Gifts

b) Ambassadors, Bankers & Useful Knowledge

The Chinese wallpaper that can be seen in the Board Room at Coutts Bank on the Strand, in London today is said to have been a gift to Thomas Coutts (1735-1822) from George Macartney (1737-1806).⁵⁹ It originally hung in Coutts's private rooms 'above the shop', at 59 the Strand.⁶⁰ Coutts was an 'old friend'⁶¹ of Macartney's, who organised remittances for Macartney from India, when he was appointed Governor of Madras in 1781. Macartney had been appointed the first Ambassador to China, responsible for the trade mission to the Qianlong Emperor in 1793, the total costs (calculated at £95,000) of which were defrayed by the East India Company. This was not simply a commercial mission. Facilitating and extending trade were key priorities of both the East India Company and the government, which instructed Macartney to cultivate the friendship of China in order to increase 'the sale of our manufactured articles and of the products of our territories in India'.⁶² Yet as one of the advisors to the mission, the Birmingham manufacturer Matthew Boulton explained 'Our knowledge of China is so imperfect that it will be difficult to point out the most necessary articles to send thither. The women are kept so confined that we know nothing of them but from pictures'.⁶³ As a result they were not sure what to send from Britain to attract Chinese interest.

On arrival in Peking, Macartney and his entourage were given accommodation in the only building large enough to accommodate the whole embassy, the Palace of Eleven Courtyards. This was the home of a Collector of Customs who was in jail awaiting execution for misappropriating the profits of European trade'.⁶⁴ The historian Paul Gillingham states that it was here that Macartney saw the paper that he was to take home to Coutts. From the published journals and diaries of those who were part of the embassy, it is possible to gain some idea of their impressions of the decoration. The pavilions where they were lodged were described by the official recorder of the embassy George Staunton. He noted that they were decorated with paintings, and while some from the

⁵⁹ Helen Fetherstonhaugh, *Three Hundred Years of Private Banking* (London: Coutts, n.d.), p.21.

⁶⁰ He acquired the lease of number 59 and designed a premises specifically for banking.

⁶¹ Helen Henrietta Macartney Robbins, *Our First Ambassador to China: An Account of the Life of George, Earl of Macartney, with Extracts from His Letters, and the Narrative of His Experiences in China, as Told by Himself, 1737-1806* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.442.

⁶² Maxine Berg, 'Britain, industry and perceptions of China: Matthew Boulton, 'useful knowledge' and the Macartney Embassy to China 1792-94', *Journal of Global History*, 1 (2006), p. 268.

⁶³ Berg, 'Britain, industry and perceptions of China', p.280.

⁶⁴ Paul Gillingham, 'The Macartney Embassy to China, 1792-94', *History Today*, 43 (1993), p.5.

mission appreciated them, the general attitude was critical: 'If a lake is surrounded by houses and trees, the painted does not show the reflection on the water', and the 'Distant landscapes seem larger than a house in the foreground and they do not touch the ground'.⁶⁵ They were not to stay here long however, as the imperial audience was to take place in the emperor's summer residence 120 miles to the north, at Jehol in Manchuria. In Peking they left behind a team to set up the display of the 'presents' and make arrangements for transforming the Palace of Eleven Courtyards into the British embassy.

Although the embassy was a failure, Maxine Berg argues that it was a success in terms of the gathering of 'useful knowledge' about China.⁶⁶ The Chinese wallpaper that Macartney brought home depicts different Chinese manufactures. Their source was Song Yingxing's (1597-1666) *Tiangongkaiwu* published in 1637, an encyclopaedic work which examines numerous aspects of technology and manufacture practised in China at the time including porcelain production accompanied by detailed woodblock illustrations.⁶⁷ These illustrations were themselves 'useful knowledge'. An example of how Chinese wallpaper could convey such useful information is given by William Marshall, in his *The Rural Economy of Yorkshire* (1788), in which he discusses the origins of the winnowing machine. He notes that 'We are probably indebted to the Chinese or other Eastern nation, for the invention of this machine. I have seen it upon an India paper drawn with sufficient accuracy, to shew that the draughtsman was intimately acquainted with the uses of it. The Dutch, to whom the invention has been ascribed, imported it, in all probability, from the East Indies'.⁶⁸ The connection between the scenes of Chinese labour and that of a nation undergoing an agricultural and industrial revolution was drawn upon by Viscount Torrington when he visited Cromford in 1789, the site of Arkwright's new textile 'factory', where 'There is so much water, so much rock, so much population and so much wood that it looks like a Chinese town'.⁶⁹ As Clive Aslet has commented 'it was a whimsical picture' evoking the contrast made between the busy cotton spinners and the wild Derbyshire scenery amid which their industry took place'.⁷⁰ Yet as Craig Clunas

⁶⁵ G. L. Staunton, *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China* (London, 1797), p.155

⁶⁶ Berg, 'Britain, industry and perceptions of China', p. 268.

⁶⁷ Thanks to Anna Wu for this information.

⁶⁸ William Marshall, *The Rural Economy of Yorkshire: Comprizing the Management of Landed Estates, and the Present Practice of Husbandry in the Agricultural Districts of that County*, Volume 1 (London: Cadell, 1788), p.282

⁶⁹ C. Bruyn Andrews (ed.), *The Torrington Diaries containing the tours through England and Wales of the Hon. John Byng (later Fifth Viscount Torrington) between the years 1781 and 1794*, volume 2, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1935), p.40.

⁷⁰ Clive Aslet, *The English House. The Story of a Nation at Home* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p.131.

has reminded us, in relation to Chinese export watercolours, the reading of such information is not so simple. 'Whatever the customer may have thought, he was not buying a piece of reportage, an accurate picture Nor was he buying a product of Chinese imagination. Rather he was receiving his own preconceptions of the mysterious inland provinces as a land of grotesque and fantastic landscapes, inhabited by ingenious and curious people living an idyllic life of harmony with nature, reflected back at him by an artist whose sole concern as to please'.⁷¹

Macartney's wallpaper depicted an idyllic picture of manufacture at a time when Britain was launching into its own system of factory production. Perhaps there was some irony too in the fact that this paper showed Chinese goods such as porcelain, tea and silk which Europeans were desperately keen to imitate, acquired by an ambassador who had failed to entice the Chinese into buying European goods. The Emperor dismissed the embassy, and its gifts explaining that 'we have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your Country's manufactures'.⁷²

When Thomas Coutts sat in this room above the 'shop', the wallpaper that Macartney had given him, must have reinforced the global image and ambition of his business. Coutts kept closely in touch with public affairs at home and throughout the world, through leading politicians and by maintaining a close network of Scottish friends and relatives abroad. As Macartney brought him wallpaper from China, so Lord Minto (1751-1814) who was Governor General of India between 1807-1813, brought him news from India.⁷³ Coutts had interests in a number of East India Company vessels, two of which were named after him.⁷⁴

A second failed mission to the Emperor of China, led by William Pitt Amherst (1773-1857) while Ambassador Extraordinary to China in 1816-17, led to the gift of another Chinese wallpaper, which was sent by Amherst to the artist Henry Chamberlain (1796-1844).⁷⁵ (See Case Study of Montreal Park). Chamberlain accompanied his father, the Consul General of England, to Brazil in 1819, and he is best known for his *Views and Costumes of the City and Neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro*, published in London in 1821.

⁷¹ Craig Clunas, *Chinese Export Watercolours* (London: V&A, 1984), p.14.

⁷² Quoted in Catherine Pagani, *Eastern Magnificence & European Ingenuity": Clocks of Late Imperial China*, (University of Michigan Press, 2001), p.74.

⁷³ Philip Beresford, William D. Rubinstein, *The Richest of the Rich: The Wealthiest 250 People in Britain since 1066* (London: Harriman House, 2011), p.302.

⁷⁴ National Maritime Museum: BHC3664

⁷⁵ British Library, Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, ref.no.Mss Eur. B376. Letter dated 23 May 1817.

Some of the book's illustrations, such as 'Itinerant Traders Carrying their Wares on their heads', are not unlike details which appears on figurative Chinese wallpaper. The Embassy, which was financed by the East India Company was sent to redress interference with their trade by the Viceroy of Canton.⁷⁶ Amherst however never did see the Emperor as the mission was immediately dismissed.⁷⁷

The Chinese wallpapers that lie at the heart of these missions, as material evidence of superior manufacturing, were witness to both the failure of gift giving from West to East, and of successful gifting and commerce from East to West.

The Importance of Gifts

c) Writers and Relatives

The vivid green Chinese wallpaper that hangs in the Drawing Room at Abbotsford in the Scottish Borders might strike the modern visitor as incongruous in a baronial antiquarian interior, created by the famous author Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) between 1812 and his death. However its presence not only illustrates the power of the gift, but also how intimately Asian goods and Scottish history could be intertwined. We know that Scott 'direct[ed] everything personally, connected with the building and decorating of his mansions'⁷⁸ advised by a close group of male friends: James Skene of Rubislaw (1775-1864), Daniel Terry (1780?-1829), Edward Blore (1787-1879), William Atkinson (1773-1839), William Stark 1770-1813) and George Bullock (1782/3-1818).⁷⁹ Scott's wife, Margaret Charlotte Charpentier (d.1826) seems to have had little say in the transformation from farmhouse to castle. This finding confirms Deborah Cohen's argument that 'the Victorian interior was neither chiefly the responsibility, nor even the prerogative of women ... men did not merely follow, more often than not, they seem to have led'.⁸⁰ We know a great deal about the furnishing of Abbotsford through Scott's correspondence,

⁷⁶ Henry Ellis, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Late Embassy to China* (London: John Murray, 1817).

⁷⁷ Despite being dismissed by the Emperor, Amherst like Macartney, travelled extensively throughout China and did not depart until January of 1817. On the voyage back to England HMS *Alceste*, struck a rock near the Straits of Gaspar in the Java sea and sank. There was no loss of life and Lord Amherst was taken to Batavia aboard the H.M. Brig *Lyra*.

⁷⁸ Henry Carey Baird, *The Interior Decorator, being the laws of harmonious colourings apply dot interior decorations with observation on the practice of house painting* (Philadelphia, 1867).

⁷⁹ Clive Wainwright, *The Romantic Interior, The British Collector at Home 1750-1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p.154.

⁸⁰ Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods The British and their Possessions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p.89.

and because of Scott's fame, we also have the published comments of his workmen and visitors. It is in a letter dated 10 November 1822 to Daniel Terry, one of his group of advisors, that the origin of Abbotsford's Chinese wallpaper is revealed: 'Hawl the second is twenty-four pieces of the most splendid Chinese paper ... a present from my cousin Hugh Scott, enough to finish the drawing room and two bedrooms'.⁸¹ These were the private and sociable spaces most often connected with the use of Chinese wallpaper.



Figure 7. Portrait miniature of Hugh Scott (1777-1835), watercolour on ivory, by Andrew Roberston, 1815. Picture courtesy of Lane Fine Art.

Captain Hugh Scott (1777-1852) was the second son of Walter Scott, Laird of Raeburn (1744-c.1830), Sir Walter Scott's uncle, who at the time was in the Naval Service of the East India Company. He had been made Captain of the East Indiaman, *Ceres*, which made several voyages to China, until it was relegated to hulk in 1816. The painting of

⁸¹ John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, Volume 3, (Paris: A. and W. Galignani and Company, 1838), p.142.

the ship, in its original frame, remained in the possession of Hugh Scott's family at Draycott until recently.



Figure 8. Painting of the East Indiaman *Ceres*, by William Huggins (1791-1845), oil painting 30 x 48 inches (75 x 120 cm) in original gilt frame. Provenance: by descent from the captain of the ship, Hugh Scott of Draycott. Picture courtesy of Lane Fine Art.

This was not the only Chinese wallpaper to hang on the walls at Abbotsford however. Scott's painter and decorator, Mr Hay refers in the 6th edition of his *The Laws of Harmonious Colouring adapted to Interior Decoration*, (published in 1847) to 'an Indian paper of a crimson colour with a small gilded pattern upon it' to complete the decoration of the Dining Room walls at Abbotsford, for which the final plans had been made in 1818.⁸² This paper may also have come from Scott's cousin Hugh. Hay notes of this wallpaper that Scott 'said he did not altogether approve of for a dining room, but as he had it in a present expressly for that purpose, and as he believed it to be rare, he would have it put upon the room, thither than hurt the feelings of the donor'.⁸³ This Chinese wallpaper reveals two important points. First, it reveals the presence of a type of wallpaper that is rarely commented upon. It is the floral and figural papers that caught contemporary attention, and we know little about these plainer papers. Scott himself remarks that it is 'rare'. Secondly the presence of the wallpaper demonstrates that the power of the gift giver over-rode convention in the hanging of the paper in an 'inappropriate space'. The National Trust Chinese Wallpaper Project has revealed the dominance of private spaces such as bedrooms, dressing rooms and drawing rooms (often, but not only, feminine) for such paper, with only one example of a paper hung in a dining room, as at Abbotsford. This exception is a twentieth century reproduction made for Avebury Manor. There is also one example in a Library at Sudbury Hall, hung by 1751.⁸⁴

Hay 'observed to Sir Walter that there would scarcely be enough to cover the whole remainder of the wall after the pictures were fixed up, to which he replied, that if that was the case I might paint the recess of the sideboard in imitation oak'. He noted that Scott

⁸²D.R. Hay, *The Laws of Harmonious Colouring adapted to Interior Decoration*, 6th ed. (Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1847), p.181.

⁸³ Hay, *The Laws of Harmonious Colouring*, p.182.

⁸⁴ See *Chinese Wallpaper in National Trust Houses*, cat.no.42, p.44.

abominated the common-place daubing of walls, panels, doors and window-boards, with coats of white, blue, or grey ... He desired to have about him, wherever he could manage it, rich, though not gaudy hangings, or substantial old-fashioned wainscot work, with no ornament but that of carving, and where the wood was to be painted at all, it was done in strict imitation of oak or cedar ... He ordered me to paint the dining -room ceiling, cornice, niches &c in imitation of oak to match the doors, window shutters and wainscoting which were made of that wood'.⁸⁵ These instructions suggest that Scott was making the most of his limited supply of this wallpaper, and that he felt that it needed to be used, not put in store, in recognition of the value of the gift, and the status of the donor in the recipient's eyes.

The Abbotsford Chinese wallpapers may seem an odd addition to Scott's antiquarian interior to modern eyes. However it is clear that Asian connections and influences percolated throughout the house, and indeed through Scott's own family and friends, as well as through his work, most notably in *The Surgeon's Daughter* (1827). Sir Walter resided for many years at Ashestiel, near Selkirk, the home of his cousin General Sir James Russell who was then in India. It was not only Scott's cousin Hugh who had ties with the East India Company. His brother Robert died young while serving with the Company in India. Sir Walters's nephew, Walter Scott (1807-1876), the only son of Thomas Scott, spent a considerable portion of his youth under the immediate care of his uncle. At the age of seventeen he entered the service of the East India Company as a lieutenant in the engineers. He attained distinction in the Mooltan campaign (1848-9), and was, in 1861, promoted as Major-General, and in 1875 as General.⁸⁶ His brother-in-law Charles Charpentier (later Carpenter) was also a Company servant, finally taking-up residence in the Madras estates in Salem, where he died in 1818. Scott's eldest son Walter (b.1801) became a Lieutenant General in the 15th Dragoons, and served in Bangalore until his death in 1847.⁸⁷ While Scott's younger son Charles (b.1805) died in Tehran, in 1841, while part of a Foreign Office mission to the Court of Persia. Abbotsford boasted an armoury, adjoining the dining room, which was described in 1818 as including 'the armour of true celebrated Jalabad Sing Son of Nador Shah (1688-1747) as well as 'pretty complete suits of armour - one Indian ... and the clubs and creases of Indian tribes', alongside those of Highlanders' accoutrements.⁸⁸ The 'curious antique ebony chairs' in the Drawing Room, were Indo-Portuguese, c.1800 and were combined with furniture from the Palace of Fal-

⁸⁵ Hay, *The Laws of Harmonious Colouring*, p.183.

⁸⁶ Charles Rogers, *Genealogical Memoirs of the Family of Sir Walter Scott, Bart. of Abbotsford* (London: Grampian Club, 1877), p.102.

⁸⁷ See further on Scott and India: <http://www.tigerandthistle.net/scots432.htm>

⁸⁸ Herbert J.C. Grierson (ed) *The Letters of Walter Scott*, vol.7, Constable, London 1932-1937, pp. 278-80.

kirk. Sir Walter Scott also had a connection, if remote with Thomas Coutts. In his *Life of Scott*, Lockhart (Scott's son-in-law and biographer) remarks that the poet had 'Sir Walter's grandmother, Barbara Haliburton, wife of Robert Scott of Sandyknowe, was the banker's first cousin'.⁸⁹

Concluding Remarks: Afterlife



Figure 9. Oval Chinese picture, with paper border, on a chimney board, in the Yellow Taffeta Bedroom, Osterley Park and House (National Trust).

© Stuart Howat Photography.

Chinese wallpaper illustrates the myriad ways in which East India Company trade, employment and politics pervaded British social and cultural life, shaping the domestic interior in fundamental ways. Although the papers themselves were (and are) conspicuous in their colouring, patterns and design, their pivotal roles in globalising the British

⁸⁹ David Veddar, *Memoir of Sir Walter Scott, Bart: with critical notices of his writings compiled from various authentic sources* (Dundee: Archibald Allardice, 1832), p.5.

home have received little systematic attention to date. The impact of Chinese wallpaper was not restricted to those who had houses decorated with it, or had access to these houses as visitors and servants. Despite the success of British-made wallpapers, the allure of Chinese wallpaper continued into and beyond the nineteenth century. Its high value ensured that this exotic and fashionable luxury item lived on beyond the walls on which it was initially placed in British homes. Offcuts and scraps were framed as pictures, used to decorate chimney boards (at Osterley a Chinese print was used with an applied border), or deployed to back embroidered pole screens and craft work like that on the reverse of a cut-paper picture of c.1800. Chinese wallpaper was used to cover boxes, and larger sections were turned into screens.⁹⁰ The fascination with Chinese wallpaper continues in the twenty-first century, as a recent advertisement in the *Financial Times* reveals. Even today, in a globalized world of commerce, tourism and manufacture, Chinese wallpaper is ‘a picture that transports you somewhere. It isn’t cheap, but if you’d happily spend thousands of pounds on a piece of art to fill that wall, you will spend £300 on a wallpaper mural where the effect is the same. In many cases you’re the only person who is going to have it.’⁹¹

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⁹⁰ Pair of framed Chinese wallpaper fragments, 56 x 49 cms, Christie’s 10-11/1/202, sale 2530 Lot 295; Box covered with Chinese wallpaper, 19th c., 28 x 65.5 x 42 cms, sold Christie’s 21 October 2003, lot 229; For example 6-fold screen, c.1790s, sold Sotheby’s 24 October 2008, lot 174.

⁹¹ *Financial Times*, ‘How to Spend It’, 3 August 2013. p.6.