

**The Afterlife of Objects:  
Anglo-Indian Ivory Furniture in Britain  
By Kate Smith**

**Please note that this case study was first published on [blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah](http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah) in July 2014. For citation advice, visit: <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/usingthewebsite>.**

The term ‘ivory’ describes the teeth or tusks of elephants and other mammals, including the Asiatic and African boar, the Artic walrus, hippopotamus, warthog and whale. Ivory is a dense material that can be carved, engraved, turned, pierced and painted, and it has the strength and elasticity required for use both as a solid material and a veneer. In the Indian context, hunters removed ivory from the upper front tusks of the elephants found across the subcontinent, from the foothills of the Himalayas to the southern tip of Ceylon.<sup>1</sup> This case study explores the objects made from these tusks. It particularly focuses on the furniture pieces, made by skilled craftsmen in the subcontinent during the eighteenth century. Although Europe had a long tradition of ivory goods, often made from African and Asian elephant ivory (which was imported to Europe in greater quantities from the 1500s onwards), the skills Indian craftsmen used to make ivory furniture presented European consumers with new and desirable aesthetic options.<sup>2</sup> Ivory furniture can thus act as a lens through which to examine how individuals in the modern period related to objects from the subcontinent. More particularly, ivory furniture is useful in considering a question central to *The East India Company at Home* project: were objects purchased by East India Company (EIC) families understood as distinct from those traded more generally by the EIC? If so, how? This analysis seeks to show that although these objects were increasingly made to European forms, contemporaries in Britain understood that ivory furniture represented a family’s link to the subcontinent and more particularly signalled the gains of an EIC career. Furthermore, it demonstrates that ivory furniture continued to act as a prompt for retelling EIC family narratives long after the family members with links to the Company had died. Like Company families, Company objects played important roles in British cultural and social life. Like the families who bought, collected and retained them, Company objects experienced complicated and global biographies, which shaped British material cultures long after the initial point of exchange.

The range of Indian ivory furniture found in the collections of British museums, such as the V&A, as well as private collections, reflects eighteenth- and

---

<sup>1</sup> Amin Jaffer, *Luxury Goods from India: The Art of the Indian Cabinet-Maker* (London: V&A Publications, 2002), p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> Kirsten A. Seaver, ‘Desirable teeth: the medieval trade in Artic and African ivory’, *Journal of Global History*, 4:2 (2009), p. 276.

nineteenth-century Britons' widespread desire to possess these exotic luxury goods. As Anne Gerritsen and Stephen McDowall warn in the case of porcelain, however, the survival of many items in museum collections should be treated with caution and should not be understood as unproblematic evidence of historical popularity.<sup>3</sup> Yet compared to better-known large-scale imports such as porcelain and textiles, ivory furniture's seeming ubiquity is noteworthy precisely because the Company did not trade in it. In contrast to widely traded commodities like textiles and porcelain, ivory furniture generally came to Britain through individual purchases made by EIC servants while in India. Whereas men and women in Britain could commission armorial porcelains, items of ivory furniture tended to be purchased by families or individuals while in India or when trading on the Indian coast. Given these modes of purchase, did British men and women understand ivory furniture as distinctly different from widely traded commodities?

Such questions can be answered through exploring the ivory furniture purchased by a variety of families. From the Harrisons in the early eighteenth century, to the Monros and Hastings in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and from the Morrisons in the nineteenth century to the Kleinworts of the twentieth century and the Peakes of the twenty-first. Inventories, auction catalogues, correspondence, newspaper articles and sales reveal that all these families have purchased or retained ivory furniture pieces. Through analysing these sources it is possible to understand how and why ivory furniture came to represent East India Company connections and histories in the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### **Methodological questions**

In trying to understand the meanings applied to and possessed by these objects, this study takes a different approach to that used in the [Englefield House case study](#), which used private correspondence to demonstrate how family members used specific objects in their collections to express affection. It also examined wills to show how family members bequeathed objects with EIC connections, singling them out as important pieces and thus perhaps underlining links to the subcontinent as significant. In contrast, this case study uses a range of sources such as newspapers, sale catalogues, inventories, wills and correspondence to show that while some EIC families used their ivory furniture to enact affective practices, other processes of meaning making were also at work. More particularly, this case study examines the extent to which individuals in wider British culture used ivory furniture as a means of demonstrating and then

---

<sup>3</sup> Anne Gerritsen and Stephen McDowall, 'Global China: material culture and connections in world history', *Journal of World History*, 23:1 (2012), p. 5.

exploring a family's EIC connections. This analysis moves away from a single family to ask, how was ivory furniture understood in British culture more broadly? What did it mean in this domestic context?

In recent years historians of material culture have increasingly interrogated the meanings that objects possessed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>4</sup> Through this work objects have come to be seen as potent signifiers of identities. For imperial and global historians, new questions have been asked as to whether objects represented distant geographical locations and cultures. In the case of comestibles brought to Britain, for example, historian Troy Bickham has argued that by the second half of the eighteenth century foodstuffs imported from empire became ubiquitous in British households of all social groups. Highly visual advertising forms such as trade cards along with text-based recipe books affirmed a clear link between tobacco, tea, curry and empire.<sup>5</sup> For those consuming it, tea was understood to have come from China. Despite greater scholarly interest in commodities traded between Europe and Asia by state monopolies such as the EIC, less is known about what objects that were imported through other, more exclusive, routes came to mean in Britain. Tillman Nechtman has argued that these objects were understood as deeply imperial: 'a means of narrating an imperial identity, of spanning the distance between empire and nation'.<sup>6</sup> While it is possible to make this argument for remarkable objects such as diamonds and dress, which were worn, gifted and scrutinised in public spaces such as the court, it becomes more difficult to track reactions to objects in domestic spaces.<sup>7</sup> Yet, as the *East India Company at Home* project has sought to show, domestic objects and domestic spaces were and are important in understanding how contemporaries confronted empire. To understand the history and significance of these imperial objects, we need to study what they went on to mean after their initial purchase, as they moved on into other families, houses and institutions.

What can ivory objects brought back to Britain by East India Company families tell us? To capture the meanings that such objects held in wider British culture, I examine ivory furniture both in residence in particular houses and at moments in which these goods moved and circulated. It is often in moments of movement that objects emerge onto the historical record with their greatest force. In the

---

<sup>4</sup> For more on these debates see Frank Trentmann, 'Materiality in the future of history: things, practices, and politics', *Journal of British Studies*, 48:2 (2009), p. 288.

<sup>5</sup> Troy Bickham, 'Eating the empire: intersections of food, cookery and imperialism in eighteenth-century Britain', *Past and Present*, 198 (2008), p. 106.

<sup>6</sup> Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.170.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the importance of being seen to wear Indian goods in public see Tillman W. Nechtman, 'Nabobinas: luxury, gender, and the sexual politics of British imperialism in India in the late eighteenth century', *Journal of Women's History*, 18:4 (2006), pp. 8-30.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when people advertised objects for sale, singled them out for inheritance, or valued them, they tended to describe and arrange them, privileging certain components for inclusion or note. The texts created to record exchange and circulation offer historians important evidence through which to understand the meanings affixed to objects. Of course, these texts are often steeped in particular conventions (the inventory, the sales catalogue), which need to be fully understood and accounted for as shaping forces, altering how descriptions and notes are shaped and written. Nevertheless, these texts provide important sources for the question at hand.

My approach here is to examine three different types of movement chronologically. First, I examine the purchase of ivory furniture by members of the EIC elite, such as Edward Harrison, in the early eighteenth century. I investigate why EIC officials bought ivory furniture by asking what the visual and material qualities of such pieces might represent. I also explore the ways in which families embedded these objects into their domestic spaces upon return 'home' to Britain. Where were they placed in houses? What were they surrounded with? The second section of the case study explores how collections purchased in the eighteenth century came to be dismantled and recirculated in the nineteenth century, focusing on Warren Hastings and the sale of parts of his ivory furniture collection in the mid-nineteenth century. I examine the ways in which these goods were presented to interested parties and question how and why newspaper writers used the marketing of Hastings's house contents at Daylesford's to embark on further retellings of the Hastings myth. I end by looking at non-EIC families who purchased Indian ivory furniture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, asking what these objects might have meant when circulated outside EIC networks. In following these avenues this case study explores British public understandings of empire through ivory objects across the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

## 1. Purchase



Figure 1. Balls Park, Hertfordshire.

Edward Harrison (1674-1732) inherited Balls Park in Hertfordshire after the death of his father Richard Harrison in 1726.<sup>8</sup> Prior to establishing himself at the estate during the 1720s, Edward had worked in different capacities in the service of the EIC. It is possible that he began his EIC career as purser upon the *London* in the early 1690s. He certainly went on to captain EIC ships including the *Powderham Castle*, which sailed to Borneo in the late 1690s and the *Kent*, which he commanded on voyages to China in 1704-5 and 1706-10.<sup>9</sup> Towards the end of 1710, after completing his final voyage on the *Kent*, Harrison was appointed Governor of Fort St George, Madras.<sup>10</sup> After completing his tenure as Governor in 1717 Harrison returned to England, where he continued to be involved with the EIC and simultaneously established a career in Parliament. Between 1717 and 1722 he acted as MP for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis before going on to represent Hertford between 1722 and 1726. After moving to Balls Park in 1726, Harrison re-established himself once again within the Company by becoming Deputy Chairman of the Court of Directors in 1728, Chairman in 1729 and Deputy Chairman for a second time in 1731.<sup>11</sup> By the time of his death in 1732 Edward Harrison was deeply embedded in EIC life – he had travelled to places as diverse as Macao and Batavia on Company business, he had led Company operations in Madras and he had worked to govern the Company in London.

Edward Harrison's EIC career is not visible only through Company records that list orders from the Directors for copper, tea, green ginger, rhubarb, wrought silks, raw silk and china.<sup>12</sup> For Harrison's experiences of Asia and Eurasian trade were (and are) also made materially manifest through the objects he returned with and the wealth he acquired. Of particular interest here is the ivory furniture he purchased while in India, most likely as Governor of Fort St George between 1711 and 1717. Ivory furniture acts an important signifier of Company connections for historians because it is one of the few Asian goods that can be identified in inventories. Because it was such a distinctive material, men writing up probate records often included the descriptor 'ivory' when itemising these objects.<sup>13</sup> In those cases where it is possible to trace a particular piece of ivory furniture to a specific family, distinct craft traditions in different parts of the

---

<sup>8</sup> Paul Sangster, *Balls Park, Hertford* (Caxton Hill, Hertford: Hertford Press, 1972), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> See Anthony Farrington, *A Biographical Index of East India Company Maritime Service Officers, 1600-1834* (London: The British Library, 1999), p. 355; Anthony Farrington, *Catalogue of East India Company Ships' Journals and Logs 1600-1834* (London: The British Library, 1999), p. 359 and 515.

<sup>10</sup> Sir Charles Lawson, *Memories of Madras* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1905).

<sup>11</sup> George K. McGilvary, *East India Patronage and the British State: The Scottish Elite and Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> British Library, India Office Records, 'Order and instructions to Captain Edward Harrison, Edward Herris and John Cooke, Supercargoes of the *Kent*, bound for Canton', 1 December 1703, IOR/E/3/95, ff. 83-86.

<sup>13</sup> This is in contrast to ceramic goods, which are often difficult to identify with any clarity in inventories, as 'The Willow Pattern Case Study' demonstrates.

subcontinent mean that these wares also signal the Indian locations where their owners lived and served. The craft traditions of the two main ivory carving centres in the subcontinent, Vizagapatam near Madras and Murshidabad in western Bengal, employed different techniques during the eighteenth century and thus produced pieces that were visibly distinct. The pieces traced to Edward Harrison, for example, confirm this trend. Produced in Vizagapatam, Edward Harrison's ivory furniture marks his tenure in the Madras presidency.



Figure 2. Armchair, Ivory, carved, pierced and partly gilded with a caned seat. Murshidabad, ca. 1785. 1075-1882 Victoria & Albert Museum. © Victoria & Albert Museum.

Before the Battle of Plassey in 1757, Murshidabad was an important centre of ivory carving, primarily producing solid ivory pieces of furniture and decorative items. After the Battle and as the British began to administer the diwani in the Bengal region, ivory carvers in Murshidabad increasingly sought to make goods that were desirable to Anglo-Indian consumers. Murshidabad workshops began to produce chairs, candle stands and worktables. Particular skills in solid ivory carving allowed these workshops to produce items with distinctive arms and legs made of turned solid ivory (see figure 2). Amin Jaffer has argued that Murshidabad 'can now be recognised as most probably the source of most surviving Anglo-Indian solid-ivory furniture.'<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Amin Jaffer, 'Tipu Sultan, Warren Hastings and Queen Charlotte: the mythology and typology of Anglo-Indian ivory furniture', *The Burlington Magazine*, 141:1154 (1999), p. 277.

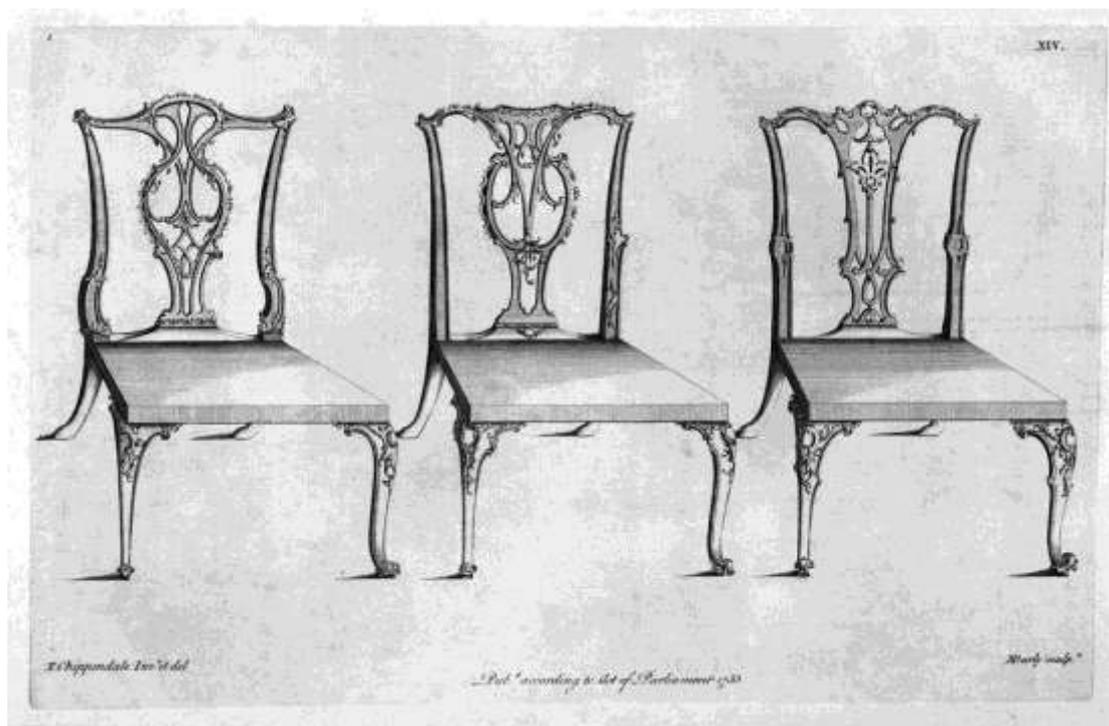


Figure 3. Thomas Chippendale, *The gentleman and cabinet maker's director* (1754), p. xiv. See full publication at: <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.ChippGentCab>. Note particularly the central design and the interlocking nature of the back plat, which is replicated in a different form in the ivory armchair in figure 2.

Murshidabad carvers produced furniture that readily conformed to European styles. The circulation of print sources, such as Thomas Chippendale's *The gentleman and cabinet maker's director* (1754) and George Heppelwhite's *The cabinet maker and upholsterer's guide* (1788), containing European designs facilitated this process (see figure 3). Information about European designs was also transmitted to Indian workshops through the arrival of skilled furniture makers from Europe. For example, Jaffer gives particular credit to the presence of Charles Rose, a British furniture maker who was recorded as being in Bengal from 1772 and was registered as an inhabitant in Murshidabad in 1793.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Jaffer, 'Tipu Sultan, Warren Hastings and Queen Charlotte', p. 278. BL IOR European Inhabitants in Bengal, 0/5/26.



Figure 4. Toilet glass, wood inlaid with ivory. Vizagapatam, 1730-40. 49-1905 Victoria & Albert Museum. © Victoria & Albert Museum.

Much further south from Murshidabad, Vizagapatam on the Coromandel Coast was also a key production site for ivory furniture. From the late seventeenth century until the mid eighteenth century, Vizagapatam was especially known for furniture that featured inlaid ivory work (see figure 4). As in Murshidabad, artisans in this area increasingly used their ivory carving skills to produce furniture in Western forms.<sup>16</sup> Between 1760 and 1780, Kamsali caste ivory carvers in Vizagapatam began to use new techniques involving ivory veneer (see figure 5). During this period ivory veneer gradually replaced ivory inlay as the main form of production. It was constructed by attaching a thin layer of ivory, by means of fixatives and rivets, to a wooden carcass. Decorative schemes appeared on these veneers, created by engraving the ivory and then filling the created spaces with black lac to create a monochrome design. While visiting Vizagapatam

---

<sup>16</sup> Jaffer and Corrigan, *Furniture from British India and Ceylon*, p. 172.

in 1801 with her mother and sister, Henrietta Clive witnessed the production of these ivory furniture pieces. On 4 April 1801 Henrietta described to her father watching monochrome ivory veneers being manufactured. She described how 'We have seen the people inlaying the Ivory [with lac]' and that 'it appears very simple'. Henrietta observed that 'they draw the pattern...they intend with a pencil and then cut it out slightly with a small piece of Iron, they afterwards put hot Lac upon it, and when it is dry scrape it off and polish it, the Lac remains in the marks made with the piece of Iron'.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 5. Toilet glass, sandalwood, veneered with engraved ivory, with silver mounts. Vizagapatam, 1790-1800. IS.31-1975 Victoria & Albert Museum. © Victoria & Albert Museum.

Switching to ivory veneer was an important change in aesthetic terms as it allowed makers a greater degree of flexibility when designing decorative schemes for furniture. Being able to implement a range of decorative schemes became important in the later eighteenth century as carvers began to incorporate increasingly elaborate figurative and architectural scenes into their furniture items (see figure 6). Decorative ivory veneers proved a popular innovation with consumers. Again the circulation of European prints was important to the construction of these wares. Many of the veneer panels included

---

<sup>17</sup> As cited in Mildred Archer, Christopher Rowell and Robert Skelton, *Treasures from India: The Clive Collection at Powis Castle* (Great Britain: The Herbert Press, 1987), p. 84.

scenes inspired by European prints, which became widely available on the subcontinent in this period.



Figure 6. Detail from Cabinet, rosewood, inlaid and partly veneered with ivory, with silver mounts. Vizagapatam, c. 1765. IS.289&A-1951 Victoria & Albert Museum.  
© Victoria & Albert Museum.

As Henrietta Clive's written description of ivory engraving for her father demonstrates, in Britain, people became increasingly curious about the material and the production techniques involved in making ivory furniture, workboxes, chairs and cabinets. Some elite women, such as Margaret, second Duchess of Portland (1715-85) and Mary Delany (1700-88) even took up ivory turning

themselves.<sup>18</sup> While a wider interest in ivory had emerged by the mid eighteenth century, in the early decades of the period elite East India Company families, such as the Harrison, were the dominant collectors of ivory furniture pieces.

On Edward Harrison's death in 1732 appraisers compiled an inventory of movable goods at Balls Park estate. Although Harrison had served as an MP in the later years of his life, in constructing the inventory the unnamed appraiser identified Harrison through his EIC career, as 'the Honourable Edward Harrison Esq deceased late-Governor of Fort St George at his seat Balls in the County of Hertford'.<sup>19</sup> The inventory demonstrates that the Harrisons were keen collectors of Indian (or Indian-inspired) textiles as well as of ivory furniture. Calico quilts appear in many rooms, including the Nursery, Drawing Rooms, Mrs Harrisons Room, the House Keeper's Room and Brown Room. The presence of calico in these rooms and not others marks both the rooms and the calicos as of less social importance. In contrast, those rooms specifically linked to Edward Harrison and his wife, contained more valuable Indian textiles such as chintz (spelt 'Chince' in the inventory).<sup>20</sup> Similarly the ivory objects owned by the Harrisons appear in some of the house's most public and socially important rooms. 'The Governors Bed Chamber', for example, contained 'a very curious [India Book case inlaid with Ivory](#)', while 'The Long Galery [sic]' included twelve ebony 'China' chairs inlaid with ivory, as well as two similar elbow chairs and two couches.<sup>21</sup> It is probable that Harrison bequeathed some of his movable household goods to his only child Etheldreda (commonly known as Audrey) (c.1708-1788), as an 1737 inventory for her London home in Grovesnor Street notes that her personal room contained 'A Desk and book case inlay'd with Ivory'.<sup>22</sup>

In 1723 Etheldreda married Charles Townshend (1700-1764) afterwards third Viscount Townshend. While the relationship between Etheldreda and Charles remained turbulent, the alliance instituted an important link between the East India Company and the Townshend family. Such links were further consolidated when Charles's brother Augustus captained the East Indiaman *Augusta*.<sup>23</sup> On his final voyage, destined for China, another Townshend, Roger (d.1759), the fifth

---

<sup>18</sup> Stacey Sloboda, 'Displaying materials: porcelain and natural history in the Duchess of Portland's museum', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 43:4 (2010), p. 464.

<sup>19</sup> Raynham Hall Archive, 'An Inventory and Appraism', 15 December 1732, RAS H1/4/3. With thanks to the Marquess Townshend's kindness in granting permission for information from the Raynham Hall Archive to be cited.

<sup>20</sup> 'An Inventory and Appraism', 15 December 1732, RAS H1/4/3.

<sup>21</sup> 'An Inventory and Appraism', 15 December 1732, RAS H1/4/3.

<sup>22</sup> British Library, Townshend Papers, *An Inventory of the Right Honorable the Lord Lynn's Goods taken at His Lordships House in Littel Grosvenor Street this 11 day of July 1737*, Ms. 41656, ff. 209-10.

<sup>23</sup> Anthony Farrington, *A Biographical Index of East India Company Maritime Service Officers, 1600-1834* (London: The British Library, 1999), p. 793. He captained the *Augusta* on the following voyages: 1738/9, 1741/2 and 1744/5.

son of Etheldreda and Charles, joined Augustus and further consolidated the family's links to global trade. Before preparations to sail on the *Augusta* began, Charles and Augustus worriedly wrote numerous letters, ensuring each other that Roger was sufficiently kitted out for the voyage. Augustus advised that around £200 would be required to see Roger set up on ship and during the journey.<sup>24</sup> After setting sail in February 1745, Roger finally returned to Britain in November 1749. He returned without his uncle who had died on board ship and despite the *Augusta* being captured by the French as it tried to return home.<sup>25</sup>

The difficulties Roger experienced might explain why on returning he was distinctly keen to switch profession, hoping instead to join the army or navy. Charles wanted Roger to remain in the Company, but remarked to his brother that at least a change would mean that the family were no longer dependent on the solicitations of the Court of Directors.<sup>26</sup> While the Townshend family's growing range of connections to the East India Company is made visible through these professional concerns, Etheldra's earlier connections to the Company through her father and his links to the Coromandel Coast were manifest through material possessions that were recognisably Indian. Ivory pieces were important in marking particular connections to geographical locations within the subcontinent. As noted in the [Englefield Case Study](#), Richard Benyon (1698-1774) who worked as Governor of Fort St George between 1735 and 1744 purchased a very similar bureau to that owned by Harrison (see figure 6).<sup>27</sup> As with the textiles they purchased, these bureau cabinets linked these men and their families to Madras and the Coromandel Coast. Unlike the textiles they purchased, however, these valuable and highly valued cabinets remain as testimony to such connections. They have been passed down through generations and retain a strong sense of provenance.<sup>28</sup>

Not all ivory furniture pieces, however, stayed within East India Company families, East India Company servants also purchased them to be later gifted or sold. Moreover, while it was the East India Company elite who predominantly purchased ivory furniture in the early eighteenth century, in the later decades of the period, those (slightly) lower down the social ladder were also able to

---

<sup>24</sup> Raynham Hall Archive, 'Letter from Augusta Townshend to Charles Townshend', 24 December 1744, RAS B2/6.

<sup>25</sup> Raynham Hall Archive, *A Journal of a Voyage from London to China on Board the Augusta Kept by Roger Townshend Anno Domini 1745*, RAS H4/3.

<sup>26</sup> Raynham Hall Archive, 'Letter from Charles Townshend to a brother', 5 December 1747, RAS B2/6.

<sup>27</sup> Kate Smith, 'Inheriting India' in 'Englefield House, Berkshire: processes and practices', *The East Indian Company at Home, 1757-1857*: <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/englefield-house-berkshire/englefield-house-case-study-inheriting-india/> (2013).

<sup>28</sup> This strong sense of provenance can be seen in the marketing materials produced for the piece during its sale in 2011. See <http://www.christies.com/features/audio-an-anglo-indian-ivory-inlaid-teak-ebony-and--1612-4.aspx>.

acquire such pieces. Evidence for the consumption of ivory furniture by those below the Governor rank can be seen through the example of Captain James Monro (1756-1806) who purchased a miniature cabinet with ivory veneers, made in Vizagapatam in the second half of the eighteenth century. Because it displays such an elaborate collection of ivory veneer sections, the piece can be dated to the post-1760 period when the majority of Vizagapatam ivory production shifted focus from ivory inlay work to ivory veneer (described above).



Figure 7. Miniature cabinet with ivory veneer. Vizagapatam, c.1770-1780.  
Image courtesy of Bonhams.

In researching the miniature cabinet, furniture historian Elizabeth Jamieson demonstrated how objects are sometimes able to allude to their histories.<sup>29</sup> On the sandalwood top of the lower section of the cabinet Jamieson found an inscription that reads 'Out of No. 201 Houghton / Capt Monro'. The inscription connects the cabinet to the East Indiaman, the *Houghton*. Between 1766 and

---

<sup>29</sup> Many thanks to Elizabeth Jamieson MA (Freeland furniture historian) for allowing me to include in this case study the research she completed for Bonhams.

1789 James Monro was a member of the crew on every voyage that the *Houghton* took. Monro, the third son of physician John Monro<sup>30</sup>, began his seafaring career at the age of ten when he worked as a captain's servant on the *Houghton* as it travelled out to trade at Whampoa near Canton. After this early engagement with shipping, Monro went on to work as midshipman and fifth mate on the *Houghton* before completing a further voyage as fourth mate on the *Osterley II*.<sup>31</sup> At the age of twenty Monro returned to the *Houghton* as second mate, a role he also performed on the *York* before finally gaining command of the *Houghton* for the first time in 1782. After this, James Monro captained the *Houghton* on three further journeys to Asia.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps most significantly for this case study, on his voyage to Bengal, as second mate on the *Houghton*, between 1777 and 1778 Monro stopped at Vizagapatam. The port had acted as an important English trading post or 'factory' since 1668. After 1768, however, when the Northern Circars came under the control of the English East India Company, Vizagapatam increased in importance as a place of settlement and a lucrative port for conducting Coromandel Coast trade in textiles.<sup>33</sup> Here Monro would have been able to see a range of ivory furniture pieces at first hand, perhaps encouraging him to purchase a piece later on when he became captain. As captain Monro would have been well placed to purchase pieces such as this (and to transport them back to Britain). With their popularity growing in late eighteenth-century Britain, such pieces would have proved a sound investment for private trade.

James Monro's letters demonstrate that he purchased smaller items such as ceramics and furniture while on voyage, for gifting and sale once he returned to England. Writing to his elder brother Charles as he sailed from China to St Helena in November 1785, James described how he had managed to purchase some Chinese table and tea sets, as well as some small chairs.<sup>34</sup> He generously offered Charles and his new wife first refusal on his bountiful supplies.<sup>35</sup> Like other East India Company men studied in the East India Company at Home project (for example, [William Gamul Farmer](#) or Henry Russell of [Swallowfield Park](#)), James Monro appears to have depended upon his brother for support and

---

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Andrews, 'Monro, John (1715–1791)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18976>, accessed 21 May 2014].

<sup>31</sup> Anthony Farrington, *A Biographical Index of East India Company Maritime Service Officers, 1600-1834* (London: The British Library, 1999), p. 552.

<sup>32</sup> Farrington, *A Biographical Index of East India Company Maritime Service Officers*, p. 552.

<sup>33</sup> Jaffer and Corrigan, *Furniture from British India and Ceylon*, p. 172.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Jamieson mentions this letter in the research she completed on the cabinet for Bonhams. London Metropolitan Archives, 'Letter written by James Monro to his brother Charles', 22 November 1785, Acc/1063/034.

<sup>35</sup> In the letter James uses the advertising convention of '&c, &c, &c' to note the range of items he has at his disposal. For more on this convention see Kate Smith, *Material Goods, Moving Hands: Perceiving Production in England, 1700-1830* (Forthcoming with Manchester University Press), p. 62.

information.<sup>36</sup> Even when in England, but away from the centre of news and markets in London, James requested Charles to complete payments and order clothes on his behalf.<sup>37</sup> After James's death in 1806, Charles continued to play an important role in the life of his family. James's wife Caroline (d. 1848) outlived him and Charles took responsibility for her and the remaining children. For instance, a letter from 1811 suggests that Charles was actively involved in managing the family's financial affairs, particularly those of James's daughters. He carefully ensured that household goods such as furniture were turned into investments such as an 'Old South Sea Ann'ty' and kept distinct from the 'Estate'. After Caroline's death it was these items and not the 'Estate' that would have been allotted to her daughters and Charles realised that they would 'not be generally divisible' or financially useful.<sup>38</sup> If the Vizagapatam cabinet remained in the family rather than being sold when James returned from India, it may well have been unsentimentally sent to market to provide for his daughters and their future life.<sup>39</sup> These ivory objects, bearing materials from the subcontinent and Africa, produced through the enactment of highly-skilled Indian craftsmanship to European designs, remained valuable and desirable commodities. Their links to the subcontinent through the EIC were part of their allure. Moreover, they often experienced an afterlife linked to, but independent of, their East India Company history. The next section of this case study considers that afterlife and examines what it might reveal about what these objects meant in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain.

## 2. Sale

Throughout the late eighteenth century Warren Hastings (1732-1818) and his wife Marian (1744-1837) held an important place in Britons' imaginings of empire. The press and the public used the Hastings as an important conduit

---

<sup>36</sup> This close relationship appears to be the case as a selection of letters between the two brothers survives in the archives of the London Metropolitan Archive. The survival of these letters suggests they were valued, but it might also be misleading in terms of the wider network James Monro established and used while working as a captain for the East India Company. See London Metropolitan Archive, Letters written by James Monro to his brother Charles ACC/1063/014-043 (1775-1790). Many thanks to Elizabeth Jamieson for the reference to these letters.

<sup>37</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, 'Letter written by James Monro to Charles Monro', 31 January 1780, ACC/1063/015.

<sup>38</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, 'Letter written to Mrs Caroline Monro from her brother-in-law Charles Monro', 14 January 1811, ACC/1063/121.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the inheritance of household goods by women see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 'Hannah Barnard's cupboard: female property and identity in eighteenth-century New England', in Ronald Hoffman, Mechal Sobel and Fredrika J. Teute, *Through a glass darkly: reflections on personal identity in early America* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 238-273; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of An American Myth* (Vintage Books: New York, 2002).

through which to understand empire broadly and Britain's relationship to the subcontinent more particularly. They did so in three key ways: first, through Hastings' career, second, through his marriage to Marian and finally, through his estate – Daylesford.

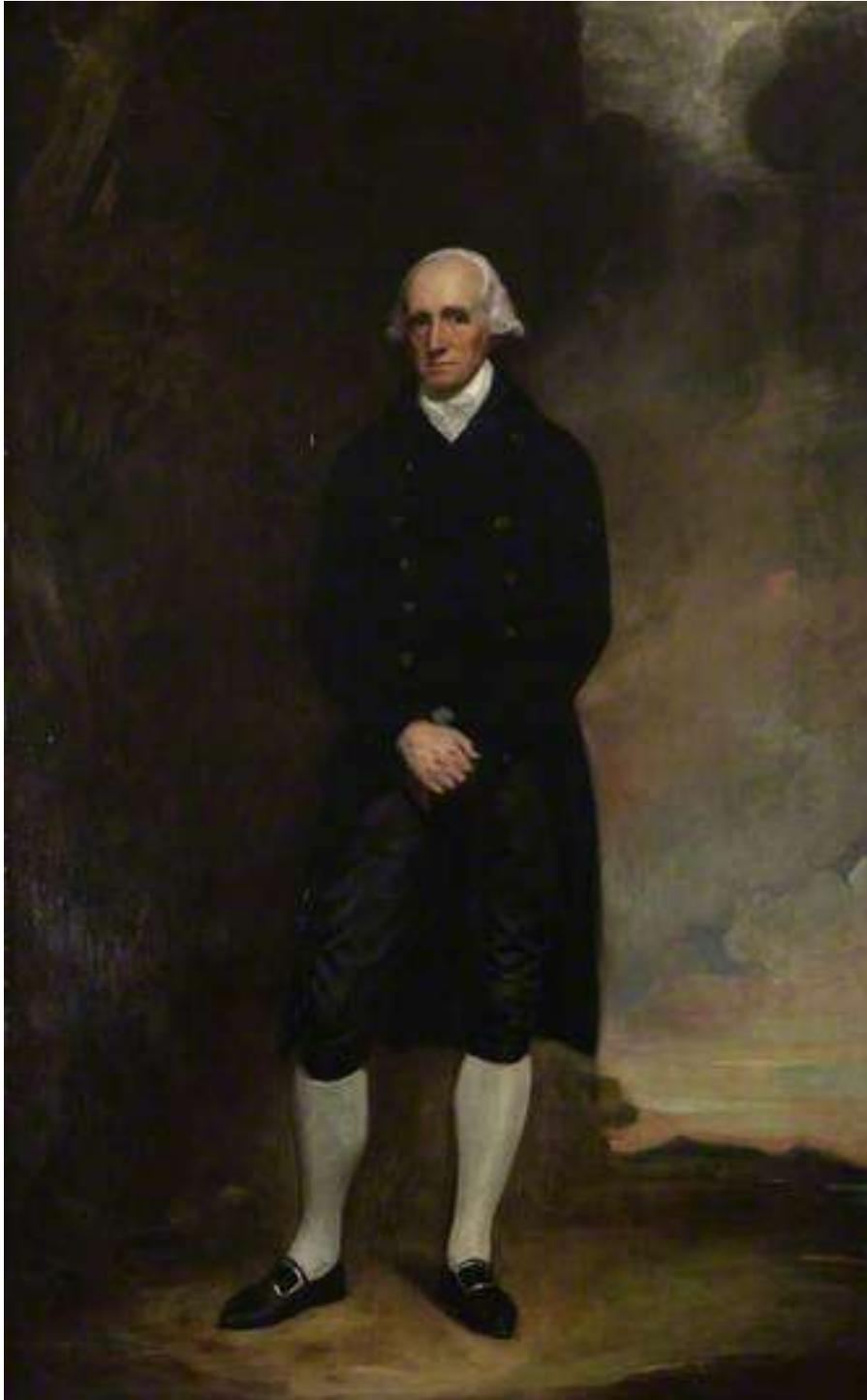


Figure 8. 'Warren Hastings (1732-1818), Governor-General of Fort William, Bengal, 1774-85', George Romney, 1795. © British Library Board, F1.

Warren Hastings' career path mirrored Britain's increasingly imperial role in the subcontinent and ended with his promotion to serve as the first Governor

General of India in 1772. Hastings joined the East India Company in 1750 after his guardian Joseph Creswicke secured him a writership in Calcutta. Twenty-two years later in 1772, Hastings rose to the position of Governor General. Although in many ways successful, his long tenure as Governor (thirteen years in total) was also marked by war and accusations of corruption.<sup>40</sup> As Britain's control of the American colonies became weaker during the course of the Wars of Independence, the British public's interest in India increased. When Hastings resigned in 1785 and returned to Britain, his impeachment and trial (1787-95) had a ready audience.

At the same time, as Tillman Nechtman has shown, interest in Hastings' personal life further consolidated and shaped the public's desire to understand the nature of Britain's empire.<sup>41</sup> Warren Hastings first met Marian von Imhoff (née Anna Maria Apollonia Chapuset) while sailing to India in 1769. At the end of the journey Marian went with her husband to Calcutta, while Hastings went to Madras to take up the post of second-in-council at Fort St George. Once appointed Governor in 1772, Hastings moved to Calcutta, the seat of the Company's government, where Marian and her husband Baron Carl von Imhoff remained resident. In 1773 Marian remained in India when the Baron returned to Europe. Her husband divorced Marian in 1776, and a year later she married Hastings. Their marriage underlined how the social rules structuring life in the metropole were worryingly indistinct once abroad.<sup>42</sup> When the couple returned to Britain in 1785, Marian was subject to further criticism because she both wore and distributed the fruits of empire. She supposedly appeared at court decked out in diamonds and offered up rich and elaborate gifts to the Royal family – including [ivory armchairs](#) from Murshidabad. Critics, such as Fanny Burney, feared that Marian would undermine the morality of court, bringing it under the influence of empire and imperial riches.<sup>43</sup>

The Hastings' country house, Daylesford, also acted as important part of the family's myth. During his trial, for example, the press used Hastings' purchase of Daylesford variously as a means to reaffirm his morality and immorality. The Hastings family had been linked to the Daylesford estate since the thirteenth century, but as they came to experience reduced circumstances during the early years of the eighteenth century, the lands were sold off. Both Hastings' father and grandfather continued to live near the estate and Warren Hastings' desire to re-acquire it and re-establish the family fortune acted as a compelling part of his life

---

<sup>40</sup> P. J. Marshall, 'Hastings, Warren (1732–1818)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12587>, accessed 19 May 2014]

<sup>41</sup> Nechtman, 'Nabobinas', pp. 8-30.

<sup>42</sup> Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 197.

<sup>43</sup> Nechtman, *Nabobs*, p. 190.

narrative. As the trial wound on, writers explored Hastings' desire and motives for different ends. For example, articles in both the *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* and the *World* discussed his purchase of Daylesford in terms of his family's long attachment to the estate. An anonymous letter published in the *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* on 29 September 1785 (after Hastings had returned to England) noted that although Hastings had been linked to several houses, he never had any intention of purchasing anything other than Daylesford.<sup>44</sup> The writer went on to note that Daylesford had been in the possession of his family from '1281 to 1715' and that in reacquiring it Hastings sought to return to the status of 'respectable Country Gentleman'.<sup>45</sup> Similarly a biographical sketch published in the *World* at the height of his trial in 1792 noted that Hastings' grandfather had been forced to sell the Daylesford estate, 'which had been possessed by the family of Mr Hastings from 1280 to 1715'.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to using Daylesford to make claims regarding the respectability and longevity of the Hastings family, other publications used Daylesford (and more particularly its rebuilding) to suggest Hastings' duplicity. On 6 October 1795 (long after the final acquittal), for example, rather than take pity on Hastings and the high costs he incurred as a result of the lengthy trial, *The Morning Post and Fashionable World* took umbrage at the Indian profits he was seen to retain. They particularly noted the money Hastings had spent on ornamenting his gardens. Its writer quipped that 'To throw away [£]50,000 in making Shrubberies and Gravel Walks is an unquestionable proof of poverty.' It further asked 'When a man throws away [£]90,000 in merely ornamenting the grounds about his Country House, what may we calculate his whole fortune to be?'<sup>47</sup>

By examining how the Hastings family were described in the press and other print forms, it is possible to understand the role that objects, such as ivory furniture, played in consolidating links that others perceived as existing between individuals and empire. That Daylesford was an important site through which the public could discuss Hastings (and by implication empire) becomes doubly apparent during its sale in the 1850s. In this instance, ivory furniture was of particular importance in providing signifiers that clearly linked Hastings to empire.

The sale of Daylesford in the early 1850s and the subsequent sale of its contents in August 1853 attracted the attention of newspapers across Britain. Such was the perceived public interest in these events that following the sale, on 10

---

<sup>44</sup> The Hastings landed at Plymouth on 13 June 1785.

<sup>45</sup> *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London), 29 September 1785.

<sup>46</sup> *World*, (London) 16 July 1792.

<sup>47</sup> *Morning Post and Fashionable World* (London) 6 October 1795.

September 1853 the *Oxford Journal* republished an article that had appeared in *The Times*, which proposed that:

It is scarcely possible to read this announcement of the sale of Daylesford without emotion – so much of hope and feeling had been bound up with the trees and pastures of that pleasant spot ... Well did he [Hastings] keep his word [to reclaim Daylesford] ... He did purchase the estate – he did build upon it a mansion suitable for the Inhabitants of an English country gentleman.<sup>48</sup>

Why was the Daylesford sale such an important event? Cynthia Wall has drawn our attention to the importance of understanding auctions and house sales as ‘dismantlings’. For Wall ‘The auction is the site for the disassembling of one instance of the existing world and the promise of the reconstruction of a new one.’<sup>49</sup> As *The Times* article reprinted in the *Oxford Journal* demonstrates, the attention that the sale of Daylesford and its contents attracted, focused specifically on the house’s relationship to Warren and Marian Hastings rather than its most recent owner (Marian’s son by her first marriage) Charles von Imhoff or its purchaser, a finance man called Mr Grisewood.<sup>50</sup> The catalogue and its later dissemination constructed and consolidated this focus. It too primarily understood Daylesford House as ‘The Seat of the late Right Hon. Warren Hastings’, while the sale itself was framed as occurring ‘By orders of the Executors of the late Mrs Hastings’.<sup>51</sup> Playing to the connection between Warren and Marian Hastings and Daylesford, the frontispiece of the sale catalogue hints at the end of such connections and the dismantling of their lives. Its wording suggests that overspending on ‘valuable’ and ‘costly’ items from Asia, the Caribbean and Europe (as well as their deaths) has led to the end of Daylesford and its present chaotic state.

Even in the 1850s, as his house and contents were sold, Warren Hastings’ connection to empire remained the key frame through which he was understood. Such connections were, I argue, significantly underlined through material manifestations of empire – such as ivory furniture. In its first few lines, the frontispiece to the Daylesford sale catalogue highlighted the ivory furniture belonging to the Hastings. It described itself as ‘A catalogue of the valuable contents of the mansion embracing a unique & costly drawing room suite of solid ivory, finely carved and gilt, and finished in the Richest Style of Oriental

---

<sup>48</sup> *Oxford Journal*, 10 September 1853.

<sup>49</sup> Cynthia Wall, ‘The English auction: narratives of dismantlings’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 31:1 (1997), p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Information regarding Mr Grisewood taken from the *Dundee Courier*, 14 September 1853.

<sup>51</sup> *Catalogue of the valuable contents of Daylesford House, Worcestershire, the seat of the late Right Hon. Warren Hastings* (London: J. Davy and Sons, 1853).

Magnificence, comprising Two beautifully formed Sofas, Nine Chairs, Two Ottomans, a Table, and a pair of Screens'.<sup>52</sup> Ivory furniture, brought from the subcontinent, was the first type of object that any potential purchaser was asked to consider. Inside the catalogue ivory furniture was further highlighted, this time through the use of typographical techniques, rather than hierarchical positioning. Other pieces of furniture in the Daylesford collection were described through a standardised font of the same point size. In contrast, bolding, capitalizing and italicizing marked out the ivory furniture pieces as distinctive, important and (it could be assumed) valuable – here there were important things to see that required special billing. In employing typographical strategies to emphasise certain goods, the catalogue reimagined the sale as spectacle and show.<sup>53</sup> For instance the catalogue listed the drawing room contents as:

**A SOFA OF SOLID IVORY**, *in the richest style of Oriental magnificence, superbly carved and richly gilt, the elbows finished with tiger heads, stuff seat and two bolsters, covered en-suite with curtains, and extra Indian dimity cases – 6 ft. 6 long*  
THE COMPANION COUCH  
A PAIR OF ELBOW CHAIRS, **IN SOLID IVORY**, *of corresponding style, and of equal magnificence with sofas*  
A PAIR OF DITTO  
A PAIR OF DITTO  
ONE DITTO  
ONE DITTO  
ONE DITTO (damaged)  
**A SOLID IVORY TABLE**, *of elegant form, on shaped legs, beautifully carved and gilt, fitted with two drawers with silver locks and handles, and covered with fine green cloth, edged with silver lace*  
A SQUARE FOOT OTTOMAN, **OF SOLID IVORY**, gilt, stuffed and covered en-suite with sofas  
A DITTO  
A PAIR OF CARVED IVORY ORIENTAL OFFICIAL STAFFS (5ft. long), ornamented with silver gilt bands and wire, mounted in ebonized and gilt frames and silk mounts to form fire screens, and white Indian dimity covers

Despite little significance being placed on the material qualities of other items, in promoting the ivory objects, the catalogue was at pains to highlight the importance of 'solid ivory' furniture. In nineteenth-century Britain, as

---

<sup>52</sup> *Catalogue of the valuable contents of Daylesford House, Worcestershire, the seat of the late Right Hon. Warren Hastings* (London: J. Davy and Sons, 1853).

<sup>53</sup> Barbara Benedict, 'Encounters with the object: advertisements, time, and literary discourse in the early eighteenth century thing poem', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 40:2 (2007), p. 196.

understandings of ‘vener’ shifted from skilled practice to false and cheap rendering, claims of ‘solid ivory’ would have been quickly understood as holding higher value.<sup>54</sup> As noted earlier, underlining this quality might have also made certain purchasers aware that these items were likely to have come from a particular part of the subcontinent – Murshidabad. For those with an understanding of the subcontinent, the catalogue provided grounds on which to establish a connoisseurial engagement with the auctioned items.

While the catalogue imagined the ivory furniture within the expected space of the drawing room, it also destabilized the idea of a domestic setting by listing out the pieces. As with other auction catalogues, lists here also create a productive tension between the idea of plenty (something for everyone) and exclusivity (particular objects are of special import). At the same time, by using the convention of newspaper articles, which artlessly itemised many goods, auction catalogues underlined that these objects were for sale and could sell themselves.<sup>55</sup> Rearranging the items for sale both by randomising their location in the lists and giving importance to some over others, the Daylesford catalogue reordered the Hastings’ possessions and allowed them to be reimagined within other homes and lives.<sup>56</sup>

Alongside the dismantling Hastings’ home, articles appearing in newspapers across Britain in 1853 used the event to re-examine Hastings’ life and legacy. Central to these re-examinations was (perhaps inevitably) Hastings’ imperial career. The importance of imperial connections in shaping what Daylesford (and Hastings) was and meant, was further confirmed through the way in which the objects were arranged for sale. The subcontinent loomed large in the contents sale, through the presence of a collection of ivory furniture. It was this and not the mahogany and satin-wood furniture that received top billing. As such this example reminds us of the important role furniture played in representing the subcontinent and Britain’s imperial ambitions there.

The sale of the contents of Daylesford also reminds us that by the nineteenth century an active market arose that enabled the recirculation of goods originally linked to East India Company families in the eighteenth century. The dismantling of collections, such as that belonging to the Hastings family, also offered up an occasion upon which to dismantle their family narrative. Yet as the Hastings example shows, it also reified the Hastings drama, allowing others to purchase pieces understood as important to the imperial story. Chief amongst these, as the

---

<sup>54</sup> Peter Betjeman, ‘Craft and the limits of skill: handicraft revivalism and the problem of technique’, *Journal of Design History*, 21:2 (2008), p. 189.

<sup>55</sup> Benedict, ‘Encounters with the object’, p. 198.

<sup>56</sup> Wall, ‘The English auction’, p. 14.

sale catalogue promised, was the ivory furniture largely bought from skilled craftsmen in Murshidabad. What happened to pieces such as these as they entered new settings and new narratives? How were they presented and understood? What position did they hold?

### 3. Recirculation



Figure 9. Basildon Park, Berkshire.

By studying examples of ivory furniture situated in British country houses in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we can begin to understand the changing positions that objects such as these held for contemporaries. This section of the case study examines ivory furniture pieces held in two specific collections – Basildon Park, Berkshire in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and Sezincote, Gloucestershire in the mid-twentieth century. Both these collections were (and *are*, in the case Sezincote) situated in country houses that were significantly rebuilt in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a result of East India Company money. Both sites have East India Company narratives to reclaim and explore, making them productive comparative examples. I will first explore a pair of ivory chairs owned by the Morrison family in the nineteenth century and then briefly contrast these purchases with those made by the Sir Cyril and Lady Kleinwort in the 1940s. Is it possible to recover the intention of these individuals in purchasing these items? What were the narratives told by these pieces? What did they mean and what purposes did their

purchase enable or allow? What histories are revealed by the long afterlives of imperial objects?

James Morrison purchased Basildon Park in the late 1830s. Originally built by East India Company servant Francis Sykes in 1776, the mansion and estate at Basildon passed to Sykes's son and then soon after his grandson Sir Francis (3<sup>rd</sup> baronet), who was just four years of age when he inherited. Mismanagement during his minority and the fulfilment of the expensive tastes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet and his wife meant that the family duly fell into serious financial difficulties. The estate was put up for sale in 1829 and after much negotiation was finally sold to James Morrison in 1838. Morrison made his wealth not through the EIC, but rather through a textile trading business based in London. His financial successes allowed him to also establish a career as a Member of Parliament and accumulate a large and prestigious art collection, which he housed at Basildon Park.

Financial difficulties had meant that the original Sykes house designed by John Carr remained incomplete. In 1839 Morrison employed architect J. B. Papworth and his team of builders to begin working on the mansion at Basildon. Within the grounds Morrison wished to create a home for his extensive family as well as space in which to display his growing collection of art and furniture.<sup>57</sup> Already established as a keen collector of art, Morrison continued to acquire new pieces. Alongside Papworth, Morrison created the interiors and extended his collections at Basildon in collaboration with a range of dealers including Peter Norton, Robert Hume and William Buchanan (1777-1864).<sup>58</sup> While different rooms often concentrated on the display of particular parts of his painting collection, such as Morrison's collection of Dutch paintings in the green room, other more recognisable 'themes' were also developed within the interior scheme. For example, Papworth imagined that the family breakfast room would become a Chinese room. He soon changed his mind, however, and settled on an Indian room. Nevertheless, when Morrison died in 1857, the room was described as Chinese rather than Indian and included both 'Chinese' and 'Japan' wares, suggesting either at Papworth's continued indecision or the continued fluidity of terms such as 'Indian' and 'Chinese' in nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>59</sup>

On James Morrison's death in 1857 the house passed to his eldest son Charles and was inhabited by Charles's sister Ellen. On Charles's death in 1909 the house passed to his son Archie. In straitened circumstances the house was sold in 1929 and was purchased and lovingly restored by Lord and Lady Iliffe in the 1950s. Before the sale of the estate itself, Archie Morrison sold its furniture collection in

---

<sup>57</sup> Caroline Dakers, *A Genius for Money: Business, Art and the Morrisons* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 170.

<sup>58</sup> Dakers, *A Genius for Money*, p. 184.

<sup>59</sup> Dakers, *A Genius for Money*, p. 192.

1920. Amongst other items, the furniture sale catalogue demonstrates that the Morrison family owned a pair of ivory chairs (see figure 10). The chairs do not appear in the 1859 inventory of Basildon Park or the Morrison's London house in Harley Street.<sup>60</sup> It seems likely therefore, that Charles or Archie purchased them on the English or European market. Their intention in purchasing them is unclear – did they buy them to reference the earlier connections of Basildon to the East India Company? Did they purchase them because they had become a de rigour piece within British country houses? Did he purchase them because in the late nineteenth century they once again became fashionable?



Figure 10. Lots 769 and 769a. Two chairs, wooden frames veneered with ivory engraved in floral designs and borders. 1760-80. India.<sup>61</sup>

The Morrison family's intention in purchasing these intricately designed goods appears opaque in the historical record. In contrast the Kleinwort's intention is perhaps more available. As [Jan Sibthorpe's work on Sezincote](#) has shown, in the mid-twentieth century the Kleinwort family worked to restore Sezincote to its nineteenth-century splendour, reinvigorating its Indian elements and features. As part of this renovation, Lady Kleinwort purchased a set of six sandalwood chairs, veneered with ivory, highlighted with black lac and gilt, with cane seats at auction in the 1940s. As with the Morrison pieces, the veneering on the chairs suggests that they were made in Vizagapatam in the 1770s. Displayed in the house they did and do reaffirm Sezincote's early nineteenth-century connections to India. These objects then managed to retain a sense of connection to the subcontinent over a period of around 170 years.

<sup>60</sup> Many thanks to Caroline Dakers for her help in ascertaining this.

<sup>61</sup> *Antique and Modern English and Continental Furniture, 1920 October 26 – November 3* (London: Waring & Gillow Ltd, 1920). 608.AF.0189 (Sales Catalogue). Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 11. Chair, sandalwood with ivory veneer, black lac and gilt, cane seats, maker unknown, Vizagapatam, c.1770, Sezincote. Photograph by Diane James © 2013.

This example underlines the ways in which ivory furniture could continue to hold its East India Company connections, in more potent ways than other objects, such as armorial porcelain or textiles. Moreover these pieces continue to hold and exemplify such connections to the present day. In recent years when ivory furniture pieces have come onto the market, their provenance and thus their links to an East India Company past through reference to a particular individual, have been distinctly highlighted. When the bureau cabinet featured at the beginning of this case study came onto the market in 2011, the auction house selling the piece Christie's highlighted its links to the East India Company generally and Edward Harrison more particularly.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> See <http://www.christies.com/features/audio-an-anglo-indian-ivory-inlaid-teak-ebony-and--1612-4.aspx>. Such provenance is also helpful in showing that the piece was sold and transported prior to the regulation of the ivory trade.

## Conclusion

As in the case of the Englefield case study, this study has found that ivory objects were important to EIC families. Bequeathed between generations, families valued ivory inlaid cabinets both in monetary and emotional terms – as pieces that acted significant material reminders of their connection to the subcontinent. When families did not bequeath objects but rather placed them on the open market, the items similarly experienced important afterlives. When marketing ivory furniture, retailers and auctioneers often explicitly linked these pieces to their East India Company origins, naming the family or individual who initially brought them from the subcontinent. Similarly, when families publicly gifted ivory furniture to important individuals at court, publicity focusing on their East India Company origins further consolidated these links. In doing so, such individuals and firms ensured that objects continued to act as ‘souvenirs’, representing their place of origin.<sup>63</sup> They played important roles in consolidating the narratives of empire constructed by and about particular families, particularly in the case of the ivory furniture possessed by Marian and Warren Hastings. The materiality of these objects significantly aided the construction of their narratives, as it spoke directly to particular regions, through the veneering techniques of Vizagapatam and the solid ivory turning technologies of Murshidabad. At the same time, ivory itself was recognisably ‘Indian’ as European furniture using large amounts of ivory furniture was distinctly rare.

Uncovering these histories and links is important in demonstrating the ways in which objects from the subcontinent acted as sites upon which and through which contemporaries recognised that familial links to the East India Company and empire. Despite being made to European designs, these pieces often resisted naturalisation and remained linked to the narratives of empire that families and other individuals constructed. Becoming entangled in different forms of meaning making, these objects came to embody empire.

---

<sup>63</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 135.