The Georgian Group Guides

No 6

WALLPAPER

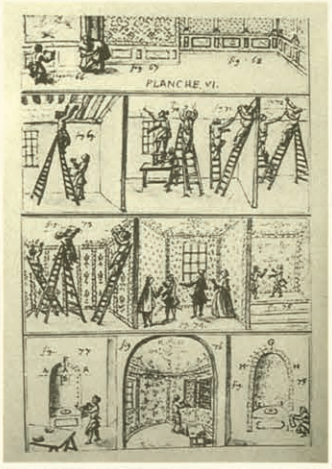
A Brief Guide to the History, Design and Restoration of Georgian Wallpaper

COVER PICTURES: FRAGMENTS OF ORIGINAL, EARLY 19TH CENTURY BLUE AND YELLOW AND LATE 17TH CENTURY FLOCK PAPERS *(HAMILTON WESTON WALLPAPERS)*

INTRODUCTION

IN 1976 BRENDA GREYSMITH, in her book on wallpaper, noted that wallpaper history "is less researched than most other aspects of decorative art". In recent years this imbalance has begun to be corrected – most notably through the V & A's wallpaper exhibition of 1983 and the founding of the Wallpaper History Society in 1988. However, despite the fact that wallpaper was very commonly used on Georgian walls, comparatively little is known about the medium. By 1700 London had become the home for the largest collection of wallpaper manufacturers in Europe, and fifty years later English and French manufacturers dominated the international wallpaper trade outside China. Yet the only museums in the world devoted to wallpaper are to be found not in Britain but in France and West Germany – although the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester does have an excellent collection of papers. At the same time Britain, unlike the United States, has only a very few firms which specialise in commercial wallpaper conservation (see Useful Addresses).

This short guide is not intended to be an exhaustive description of wallpaper history or restoration. It is designed to supply some basic information – including a list of essential Further Reading – which may be of help if you are contemplating matching or preserving Georgian wallpaper. As with any aspect of domestic repair or restoration, it is always advisable to consult a recognised expert before beginning; in the case of wallpaper, English Heritage, the Wallpaper History Society or the Interiors department of the V & A (see Useful Addresses, below) would be the most appropriate sources.



AN ENGRAVING BY PAPILLON FROM DIDEROT'S *ENCYCLOPAEDIA* OF C.1759, SHOWING THE HANGING OF WALLPAPER ON THE CEILING, NICHES AND STAIRCASE AS WELL AS ON THE FLAT WALL SURFACES *(HAMILTON WESTON WALLPAPERS)*

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

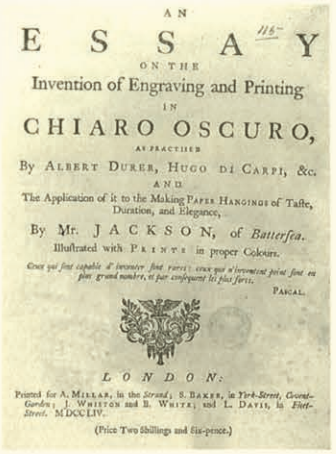
WALLPAPER APPEARS to have originated in China, around the 3rd century AD. The earliest European wallpapers, however, date from the 16th century: of the oldest wallpaper yet discovered in situ in Britain – at Christ's College, Cambridge – dates from c.1509, and imitates Italian damasks.

Wallpaper was a more sophisticated form of wall decoration than the hand-painted or stencilled patterns that had been applied directly onto plaster for centuries. It did not entirely replace these more primitive forms of decoration, however: stencilling was still being used during the 19th century, and has enjoyed a recent return to popularity.

Most of the early English papers were based on simple black and white designs, which, paper being scarce and expensive, were frequently printed on the reverse of book proof sheets, leaves from condemned titles, or even onto previously-printed pages – the latter being generally used for box linings. Patterns were either hand-painted, stencilled or printed with wood-blocks, and most often imitated expensive woven fabrics or decorated leather. They frequently featured some variant of diaper, cartouche, striped or flower patterns – stylised flower designs being particularly common in England. With block printing, the initial drawn pattern was committed to rough paper, which was then cut into small squares to facilitate blockmaking. Early 18th century block-printed patterns were heavy and pasty, and were usually thickened with glue (size); the blocks themselves were either hammered into place on the paper or set between two rollers fixed in a frame. In 1691 William Bayley received government assistance for his invention of brass, as opposed to wood, blocks, but little was subsequently heard of his innovation, and metal pressing was not widely introduced until the 19th century.

A WALLPAPER MANUFACTURER'S TRADE CARD OF THE MID-18TH CENTURY *(HAMILTON WESTON WALLPAPERS)*

Britain led the way in wallpaper technology throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. John Baptist Jackson (1701-77) was the first Englishman to use oil-based colours rather than distempers – paints based on 'size', i.e. glue; this enabled him to achieve more intense colours and greater accuracy in patterning. Jackson's designs usually featured birds, amimals or fish, but his later patterns became more ambitious, to the extent of incorporating copies of Old Master paintings. In 1754 Jackson published the first British wallpaper book – a work largely intended to advertise his own Battersea factory – and the text grandiosely claimed that Jackson could provide papers featuring "all the best painters . . . every Bird that flies, every Figure that moves upon the Surface of the Earth from the Insect to the Human, and every Vegetable that springs from the Ground".


AN
ESSAY
ON THE
Invention of Engraving and Printing
IN
CHIARO OSCURO,
AS PRACTISED
By ALBERT DURER, HUGO DI CARPI, &c.
AND
The Application of it to the Making PAPER HANGINGS of Taste, Duration, and Elegance,
By Mr. JACKSON, of *Battersea*.
Illustrated with PRINTS in proper Colours.
Ceux qui sont capables d'inventer sont rares; ceux qui n'inventent point sont en plus grand nombre, et par conséquent les plus forts.
PASCAL.
LONDON:
Printed for A. MILLAR, in the *Strand*; S. BAKER, in *York-Street, Covent-Garden*; J. WHISTON and B. WHITE; and L. DAVIS, in *Fleet-Street*. MDCCLIV.
(Price Two Shillings and Six-pence.)

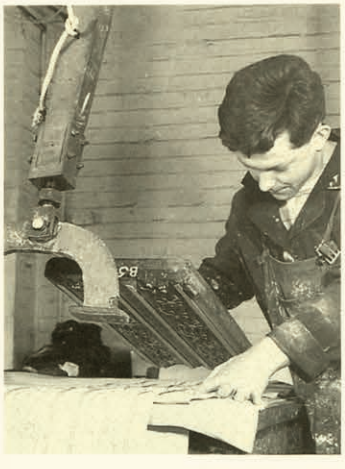
THE TITLE PAGE OF J.B. JACKSON'S *ESSAY* OF 1754 *(THE BRITISH LIBRARY)*

By the 1760s papers were being produced that directly mimicked Neoclassical architectural features – built-up layers of papier-mâché being used on occasion to suggest carved plasterwork. And by the 1770s the Eckhardt brothers of Chelsea were printing not only Neoclassical papers, but also printing their wallpaper designs onto silks and linens. Print rooms also became very popular during the period: prints, together with printed architectural borders, swags and urns, would be arranged so as to virtually cover the wall above the dado. Restored print rooms can be seen in a number of country houses – most notably Stratfield Saye in Hampshire and Rokeby Hall in Yorkshire.

The flocking technique of sticking powdered wool to paper in order to give the effect of cut pile was prevalent in Britain before 1626, in which year Charles I issued the Paper Stainers Company with a monopoly on the production of flock. The oldest surviving flock paper in the country dates from c.1680, and can be found at the Ivy House in Worcester. Flock had become hugely popular by 1750, and was often hung in the most important rooms of the house. William Pyne, for example, records that William Kent replaced the textile hangings in George II's Great Drawing Room at Kensington Palace with flock papers. British flock was also very popular in France, where by the mid-18th century such paper was known by the term 'Papier d'Angleterre'.

Another 18th century enthusiasm in the same vein as flock was 'lustre paper', produced by sprinkling powder-paints or powdered mica or isinglass onto the glued patterns. Flock paper was generally only printed using one colour; two-colour flocks do survive – Thomas Bromwich of Ludgate Hill, for example, produced a number of double-colour flocks for Chippendale – but are fairly rare. Lustre papers, on the other hand, often featured ambitious multicoloured designs, some of which included an application of flocking.

BLOCK PRINTING BY HAND *(COLES WALLPAPERS)*



Throughout the Georgian period Chinese wallpaper designs were also in much demand – at least with those more wealthy citizens who could afford such a luxury. Chinese papers had been imported in bulk by the East India Company since the mid-17th century, and in Britain were confusingly known as 'India' or 'Japan' as well as 'China' hangings. They were hand-painted, and as a result very expensive. The decorative subjects usually fell into three categories: landscapes, birds, or flowers, the designs of which were often derived directly from porcelain patterns. They were mostly not continuous, and often told a simple story.

The import of Chinese papers continued well into the 19th century. As with porcelain, however, the prohibitive expense of the real product encouraged British manufacturers to produce cheaper copies of Chinese designs. These chinoiserie papers are generally recognisable by their heavy, crude outlines and particularly by the cramped arrangement of subjects; few, however, survive today, and thus they are now, ironically, more highly prized than the Chinese papers they sought to imitate.

Details of the mid-18th Century 'Pomegranate' Design, and the 'Oak Garland' Design of c.1790, as Found at Temple Newsam House, Leeds and Reproduced by Zoffany *(Zoffany Ltd)*

Water-based, distemper and oil colours were all in use as colouring agents for papers by the mid-18th century. Earlier papers were often decorated in 'domino' fashion – printed with black ink and then colour-washed – and whilst this particular technique became outmoded, the practice of using colour washes as a basis for hand-painted or block-printed patterns remained popular well into the following century. Whereas 17th century papers were most often block printed in black, with colours being brushed in by hand, as the period progressed the printing of one or even two additional colours became more commonplace. In 1753 Edward Dighton began printing from etched or engraved plates using a rolling mill; the resulting papers were, however, still hand-coloured and the great advances in wallpaper technology had to wait until the end of the century. Cylinder printing, with hand-operated cylinders replacing the customary wood blocks or metal plates, was employed from the 1760s onwards, but it was not until the 1830s that mechanised cylinders were substituted for blocks on a large scale. Many of these new machines were based on Edward Cooper's 1816 patent, designed to produce a continuous length of paper. The appearance in 1839 of Harold Potter's power-driven rollers, printing four colours and able to remove surplus ink, inaugurated the age of mass-produced wallpaper.

Georgian Border Papers *(Hamilton Weston Wallpapers)*

Wallpaper Restoration

Discovering Wallpaper

HISTORIC WALLPAPER can be found in many locations. Look particularly behind skirting boards, architraves, built-in cupboards, and of course behind recent plasterwork or panelling. Even if you do not want to retain or match the paper, remember that a future owner of the house may wish to do so; thus it is always advisable to preserve it in some form, and also to record it photographically if it has to be removed.

Some of the earliest English wallpapers were found directly tacked onto plaster. By the mid-17th century, however, they were more often set on a wooden frame stretched with canvas, the cavity between wall and canvas keeping the paper dry – a factor which is frequently forgotten in modern application – and incidentally also allowing the paper to survive reasonably intact through to the present day. By the 18th century papers were being glued directly onto canvas, which in turn was tacked or pasted onto plaster. The canvas lining enabled easier removal and rehanging and, again, additionally aids modern restoration. By the second half of the century, though, canvas linings had become distinctly unpopular; both this development and the late 18th century fashion for varnishing papers – a process which can seriously affect colour tones – serve to hamper the wallpaper restorer.

Paper of 1775 from Royal Crescent, Bath *(Hamilton Weston Wallpapers)*

Reproduction and Original of Paper Installed by Henry Holland at 44 Berkeley Square, Mayfair in 1760 *(Hamilton Weston Wallpapers)*

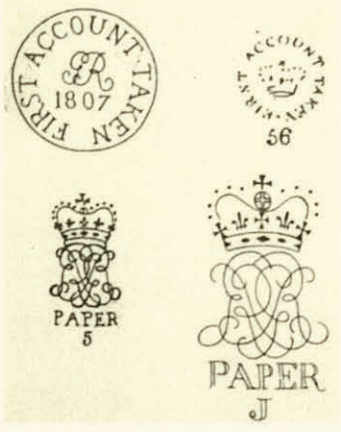
Wallpaper Removal

Old wallpaper can be eased off with a flat-bladed knife if glued onto plaster. If it is attached to wood, however, it is best simply to remove the whole piece of wood, since attempted separation can do serious damage. Wallpaper can be steamed off, but this is a complicated procedure which can easily result in disaster, so it is always better to consult a conservation expert (see below) before beginning.

If you wish your historic paper to be reproduced for the whole wall, you must ensure that a minimum of 21 sq.in. is salvaged. Samples destined for reproduction should preferably be taken from a point near the cornice, dado or skirting, so as to reveal any possible bordering.

Details of Paper Found at Bloomsbury Square, London of c.1810, Reproduced by Hamilton Weston (Right), and Zoffany's 'Diamonds and Flowers' Design of c.1760 *(Hamilton Weston Wallpapers; Zoffany Ltd)*

Once off, keep the samples out of bright light, and keep them flat –since, if rolled in the manner of modern papers, the fragments may crack. If you are faced with a number of wallpaper layers stuck together, these can be steamed apart (again, a task best done by a recognised expert) or manually separated after a brief soaking in lukewarm water – the glue dissolving before the paper colours do. But make sure that these layers are kept in sequence, to help with dating.



18TH CENTURY WALLPAPER TAX STAMPS
(HAMILTON WESTON WALLPAPERS)

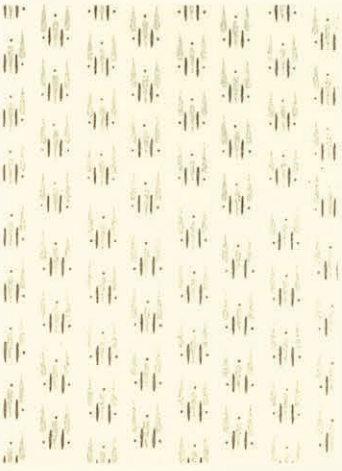
Dating Wallpaper

An obvious way of dating paper is to look at the use of period colours and motifs. Blue papers, for example, are likely to date from the first half of the 18th century, when there was an embargo imposed on the use of any colour but blue for use in fabrics or papers – a measure designed (in vain, as it turned out) to protect the native indigo dying trade and to prevent the import of French silks and damasks. Alternatively, mustard yellow and black is a colour combination characteristic of the 1750s and 60s. Other fashions can be determined from the histories of papers during this period (see Further Reading, below).

It is also useful to look at the structure of the paper itself. Thin, friable, brown paper with slightly dragged patterning probably indicates the paper is a 19th century, machine-printed wallpaper. Thicker paper with water marks, horizontal joints, tax marks and thick printing with a lip suggests a hand-blocked, 18th century paper. Note too that most wallpapers were sold as joined sheets, pasted together before printing and sold in a 'piece' or roll, usually about 11 yards long.

Imperfections in the colours may also help determine the printing method, and thus the date. Tiny air bubbles, introduced during block printing, are often discernible in thick colours on old papers; thin colours of the 18th century, on the other hand, are often streaked. European colours tended to run when paste was applied underneath the paper, and it was only in the 1780s that the French began to introduce Chinese-type insoluble dyes. Alas, the pioneer of this technique, Jean-Baptiste Reveillon, was unfortunate enough to have his factory razed by the mob during the tumults of 1789.

If you are lucky enough to find a tax or date stamp on the reverse side of the paper, this will date it rather more precisely. In 1712 a duty on wallpaper of 1d. per square yard was levied; by 1809 this had risen to 1/-, and was only finally repealed in 1836. After 1714 the stamps recording this duty featured the monogram 'GR', together with code letters whose significance is now, unfortunately, not known. Other stamps may enable more precise dating: for example, in 1716 a First Account tax stamp was introduced, now quite commonly found on historic wallpapers, whilst in 1773 a duty stamp appeared on all foreign papers except those imported by the East India Company. From 1778 each sheet was stamped twice, once at either end, and in 1786 a 'Duty Charged Remnant' stamp was added, which often incorporated the exact date of manufacture in the frame mark. Some foreign sheets also carry an import stamp, indicating at which port the paper entered Britain. As with all attempts to defend private property in the Georgian era, wallpaper taxation was taken very seriously: in 1806 the death penalty was applied for the forging of wallpaper stamps.



REPRODUCTIONS OF MID-18TH CENTURY ORIGINALS — DETAILS OF 'COLEVILLE' (TOP) AND 'HUNTINGDON TRELLIS' (MIDDLE) *(COLEFAX AND FOWLER)* — AND BOTTOM, REPRODUCTION OF A PAPER FOUND IN A HOUSE IN THE STRAND, LONDON, OF C.1790 *(HAMILTON WESTON WALLPAPERS)*

Matching Wallpaper

In the past few years a number of firms have appeared which are able to restore and match historic wallpapers from existing fragments. A list of some of these firms can be found in Useful Addresses, below.

When seeking to reproduce old papers, don't forget that the colours you see may have faded considerably – most historical paper colours tending to oxidise to green or brown if left constantly exposed. The original tones may still be detected under the paper borders or the fillets of papier-mache or gilded lead which were commonly used above dados and other continuous mouldings to hide tacks or unsightly joins.

If you are considering the removal and/or matching of wallpaper, it is always advisable to contact an expert before doing anything. The best immediate sources are the Wallpaper History Society, the Furniture and Interiors Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, or the conservation experts at English Heritage; addresses of all these are given below. The conservation department of your local museum or art gallery may also be able to give technical advice or practical help. Remember: if in doubt, always ask a recognised expert first.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Baer and Ingram, 152 Walton St, London SW3 2JJ, tel. 01 581 9077. *Baer and Ingram have historic reproductions from a wide range of London outlets.*

Colefax and Fowler, 39 Brook Street, London W1, tel. 01 493 2231.

Coles, Mortimer St, London W1, tel 01 580 1066.

The Design Archive, 79 Walton St, London SW3 2HP, tel. 01 581 3968.

Guy Evans, 51a Cleveland Place, London W1, tel. 01 436 7914. *French papers.*

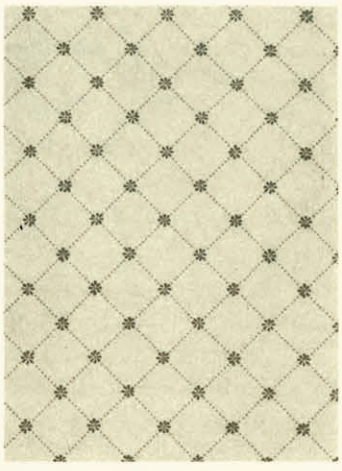
Hamilton Weston, 18 St Mary's Grove, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1UY, tel. 01 940 4850. *Hamilton Weston have a range of modern reproductions of historic papers, a wallpaper archive and reference library — including a list of tax marks — and offer an advisory service on dating, removing or reproducing papers.*

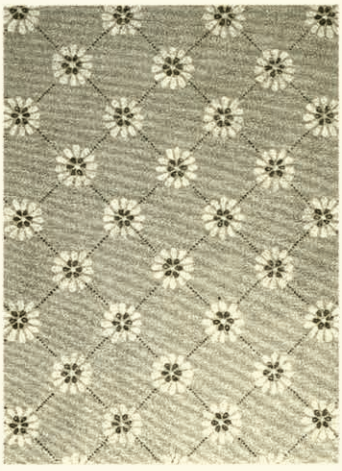
Orde Solomons, 50 Amersham Road, London SE14 6QE. *Professional wallpaper and paint removal.*

Temple Newsam House, Leeds LS15 0AE, tel. 0532 647321. *Wallpaper archive, restoration advice and public exhibitions.*

Department of Furniture and Interiors, The Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Rd, London SW7 2RL, tel. 01 938 8278. The Wallpaper History Society *can be contacted through the V & A.*

Zoffany, 63 South Audley St, London W1Y 4BF, tel. 01 629 9262. *Zoffany reproduce a collection of historic wallpapers found at Temple Newsam House.*





MODERN REPRODUCTIONS OF EARLY GEORGIAN GEOMETRIC DESIGNS *(ZOFFANY LTD)*

FURTHER READING

Phyllis Ackerman, ***Wallpaper, its History, Design and Use*** (1923)

Robert Dossie, ***The Handmaid to the Arts*** (1758)

E A Entwisle, ***The Book of Wallpaper*** (1970)

Brenda Greysmith, ***Wallpaper*** (1976)

Jean Hamilton, ***An Introduction to Wallpaper*** (1983)

John Baptist Jackson, ***An Essay on the Invention of Engraving and Printing in Chiaro Oscuro*** (1754)

Catherine Lynn, ***Wallpapers in America*** (1980)

Allyson McDermott, 'Decorative Discoveries' in ***Traditional Homes,*** vol.3/no.11 (August 1987)

Charles Oman and Jean Hamilton, ***Wallpapers*** (1982)

A V Sugden and J L Edmondson, ***A History of English Wallpaper 1509-1914*** (1926)

Anthony Wells-Cole, ***Historic Paper Hangings from Temple Newsam and other English Houses*** (Temple Newsam, 1983)

Robert Weston, 'Paper Trace' in ***Traditional Homes,*** vol.1/no.2 (November 1984)

LEFT: DETAIL OF THE CHINOISERIE PAPER IN THE DRESSING ROOM AT NOSTELL PRIORY, YORKSHIRE *(THE NATIONAL TRUST PHOTOGRAPHIC LIBRARY/J. WHITAKER)*; RIGHT: A DERIVATIVE OF THE FASHION FOR CHINESE PAPERS — AN EARLY 19TH CENTURY 'CHINTZ' DESIGN FOUND AT TEMPLE NEWSAM, LEEDS *(ZOFFANY LTD)*

The Georgian Group exists to save Georgian buildings, townscapes, monuments, parks and gardens from destruction or disfigurement, and to stimulate public knowledge of Georgian architecture and Georgian taste. The Group offers a yearly programme of visits and educational events; applications for membership can be obtained from the Group office at 6 Fitzroy Square, London W1T 5DX, tel. 020 7529 8920. The Group is a registered charity (no. 209934), and benefits from Covenants.

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