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ECKHARDTS & CO AND THE SUPPLY OF WALL DECORATIONS FOR SHUGBOROUGH

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Shugborough, Staffordshire, was remodelled by Samuel Wyatt between 1790–1806 for Sir Thomas Anson, later first Viscount Anson (1767–1818). The survival of two detailed bills of goods and work by the Eckhardts at the house, together with a promotional booklet produced by the firm, reveals the role a London based paper hangings firm could play in the supply of wall decorations by the 1790s.¹

Paper hangings were an expanding area of the trade in decoration for much of the eighteenth century. Technical innovations enabled the creation of a much greater range of papers that could compete with other wall finishes. Improvements in paper quality and the pasting together of twelve individual 21” wide sheets, to form a ‘piece’ or length some 12 yards long allowed the creation of larger scale patterns, where the repeat exceeded a single sheet. There were also innovations in colour: by c.1720 opaque rather than just transparent colour could be stencilled over block printed outlines, whilst durable and fast drying distemper colours, combined with developing skills in block cutting, enabled more complex prints to be realised with a separate block for each colour. Finally, there were innovations in finish, in particular textures imitating textiles, since flocks, admired both for their ‘beauty and durability’, are documented from the 1730s.

However, the trade was a contested one. The gilt leather trade formed one point of origin; manufacturers such as Thomas Bromwich moved into the supply firstly of India (Chinese) papers and then into printing papers themselves. Those already involved

in the trade in printed papers and inks, notably stationers, also competed for a share, as did new specialists such as paper hangings manufacturers and paper stainers. Manufacture centred on London, where numbers of these specialists rose from ten in 1763, to seventeen in 1774 and thirty-eight in 1793. Retailing was also concentrated in the capital, although by the 1770s there was a well-developed network of regional suppliers of London made goods.²

A ‘manufacture of stained paper, stamped after a peculiar manner, the invention of Messrs. Eckhardt’s’ was set up by Anthony George Eckhardt (1771–98) and his brother Frederick c.1786, in partnership with a Mr Woodmason, on the site of the Chelsea porcelain works.³ Analysis of the Eckhardts’ claims and output offers insights into the growth of firms who both adopted earlier techniques and styles and brought in new ones, some Continentally inspired. The firm also demonstrated skills in self-promotion, both through their literature and the ways in which they sought to market their designs to consumers.

By 1792 the factory, by now styling itself under the patronage of the Princess Royal, had moved to Old Whitelands House, Kings Road, Chelsea, and had expanded to produce painted silk and varnished-linen, claiming to manufacture ‘everything that belongs to the fitting-up of Houses’.⁴ In the same year the site was visited by Sarah Harriet Burney, half sister of Frances (Fanny) Burney, with family friends:

‘I went about ten days ago to see Mr Eckardts manufactory with the Farquhars...I never saw any thing so beautiful as the paintings, & ornaments are. We saw all the children at work, & while we were in

their room, an engine was playing which changed the air in five minutes, & entirely carried off the smell of the paint, which might else be very prejudicial to them. This contrivance keeps them all in health, & they really look quite fresh, & strong.⁵

It is likely that what Burney admired was the painting (or perhaps silvering) of cloth or paper. The subtle effects that could be achieved by hand colouring copper printed outlines are very evident in the large scale floral patterned paper attributed to the firm (Fig. 1).⁶ The Eckhardts were equally careful to align themselves with the fine arts in their literature, advertising that 'Artists in the very first line' could prepare designs which corresponded both with 'the true Principles of Architecture' and 'the most approved taste'.⁷

Burney also received tickets to view two rooms that the firm had fitted up for a client, Lord Dover.⁸ For those unable to obtain such access the firm also issued tickets to a set of rooms at No.8 Old Bond Street. The Eckhardts claimed that it was the 'novelty' of their products that necessitated the need for these display spaces, 'fitted up In a Variety of Forms' where the effects 'of the many modes of disposing of the different articles' could be seen.⁹ It also implies that the firm was seeking ways to build an ongoing relationship with the client and expand their market.

The firm's 'different articles' did not only consist of hand-coloured printed papers. Papers printed in imitation of the reflective effects of textiles are also associated with the firm. It seems likely that skills in this technique were acquired from another family business established in The Hague by the 1760s.¹⁰ A 'Patent Silver Damask varnished Linen, and Paper' was presumably also related to a patent received by Francis Eckhardt in 1793 to print linen and cotton in imitation of 'damask, lace and other silk stuffs, for hangings and other furniture for rooms'.¹¹ The firm claimed that the materials' production demanded 'great Labour, Perseverance, and Expence', and it was evidently a lengthy process since the hanging

was first brushed with size, before printing with gold size, onto which 'real fine silver leaves' were laid before varnishing.¹² However, the Eckhardts also emphasised this material's durability, claiming that the finish showed no 'diminuation' of its lustre for at least two years.¹³ This suggests that, even at the end of the century, paper's practical qualities were still an important factor in consumer choice.

The supply of panels (Fig. 2) and accompanying stiles (or wide vertical borders) was another area of the firm's work. Although manufacturers were supplying panels and borders in the 1760s and 1780s, the Eckhardts emphasised their responsiveness to changes in taste, claiming that 'by painting the Stiles a different Colour, or changing the Pannels' the consumer could be reassured that the scheme 'will appear as a total new Room.' However, once again practical considerations, here damage due to smoke discolouration, were highlighted:

'Agreeable to the present Taste of Decorations, being adjusted chiefly in Pannels, the most costly of their Articles, if at any Time soiled, either by Accident, Smoke of London, or other Situation, can be taken down, cleaned, and replaced, with the Brilliancy of the first Day, at a very trifling Expence.'¹⁴

Although such a service of updating and refurbishment was not new, since firms such as Bromwich carried out similar work on the India papers at Kenwood in the 1750s,¹⁵ it again implies that the firm was seeking to expand its market.

This claim also suggests the importance attached to skills in installation. These were crucial to any successful paper hangings business, but especially to the hanging of complex schemes such as panels and stiles or dropped repeats (where the pattern is offset in the next length). The latter is illustrated in the design of storks (or cranes) and floral garlands attributed to the firm, which incorporates Neoclassical as well as Rococo motifs (Fig. 3).¹⁶ Mary Schoeser has pointed out that the practice of dropped repeats originated in papers, rather than in textiles where the cloth was hung straight across, and that by the 1770s



Fig. 1 (top). Detail of printed and hand coloured paper, attributed to Eckhardts, c.1790–1800.

Manchester City Galleries 1934.22/12

Fig. 2 (right). Panel, attributed to Eckhardts.

*V&A Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Dept.
Information Section.*

Fig. 3 (above). Printed paper, attributed to Eckhardts, c.1780, from George Hill House, Robertsbridge, Sussex. *Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester W.1967.39*



Spitalfields weavers were complaining there was no market for damasks, suggesting they were being replaced by paper hangings.¹⁷

The Eckhardts also claimed that their manufactory specialised in fitting up ‘the ornamental part’ of rooms including dressing rooms, bedchambers and drawing rooms, and this is reflected in the Shugborough accounts for 1794–5, totalling over £630.

Significantly, it was not paper but linen, treated to imitate the patterns and sheen of more costly textiles, that was selected for two drawing rooms. 255 yards of ‘Varnished Silver Linen on Salmon Ground’ at 4s per yard was hung in the Great (now Red) Drawing Room, where dado and cornice height gilded wooden fillets and ‘blocks for corners with carved pateras’ were also installed (Figs.4 & 5).¹⁸ The silvering and gilt



Fig. 4 (above). Great (now Red) Drawing Room, Shugborough, Staffordshire.

Author

Fig. 5 (left). Detail of gilded mouldings and carved corners supplied by the Eckhardts for the Great (now Red) Drawing Room in 1795. *Author*

effects would have been reflected in both the over-mantel mirror and pier glasses supplied for the room in 1794, whilst the gilded mouldings and corners complemented the Neoclassical plasterwork ornament by Joseph Rose II (1745–99) and disguised the cut edges of the hangings.¹⁹

A similar linen, this time in ‘Princess of Wales’ pattern with gilded mouldings, was hung in the First (now Blue) Drawing Room and Ante Gallery, but left unvarnished. Silvered linen was also chosen for the principal bedchamber (now the State Bedroom) and dressing room, where it was varnished *in situ* and again complemented by gilded fillets, but here the ground colour chosen was a more modest buff.²⁰

However, in a ground-floor dressing room (latterly known as Lady Lichfield’s Boudoir), described as

adjacent to the ‘Silk Room,’ a printed paper was hung (Figs. 6 & 7).²¹ The paper used matt distemper colours (light and mid grey printed on a cream ground) to imitate the effects not of damask, but of watered silk, and so rejected the reflective finishes used elsewhere in the house. Although it was hung to create a panelled effect, the panels are picked out not with gilt but with a cut-out border.²² This was printed with naturalistic flowers and foliage, including heather, daisies, honeysuckle and ferns, a choice which softens the panelled effect and rejects the formalised motifs used in the Neoclassical interiors elsewhere in the house. Another ‘Satin printed’ paper was hung in four closets, suggesting that printed papers were deemed suitable only outside the formal spaces of sociability at Shugborough.



Fig. 6 (above). Dressing Room (now Lady Lichfield's Boudoir), Shugborough, Staffordshire. *Author*

Fig. 7 (right). Detail of satin ground paper and cut-out borders hung by the Eckhardts in Dressing Room (now Lady Lichfield's Boudoir) to Silk Room in 1795. *Author*



Although at 8s per yard the paper was 7s cheaper than the 'Rich Fawn Coloured Sattin' hung in the Front Drawing Room,²³ it was double the cost of the silvered linens (perhaps due to the skill needed in printing to imitate moiré effects), so it was none the less a luxurious product.

It was not only at Shugborough that the Eckhardts were adept at accommodating differing tastes. A set of the panels attributed to the firm, from an unknown house, and described as painted in gouache en grisaille 'with silvery grey-green satin' (Fig. 2) incorporated motifs associated with arabesques, such as fantastical classical figures and anthemions. However, some vertical panels included rectangular tablets depicting 'Scottish Border landscapes and horses', whilst 'scenes from ritual

and domestic Greek life' appeared in other panels.²⁴ Once again, the Eckhardts modified Neoclassical styles, here incorporating landscapes featuring familiar architecture as well as classical scenes.

Although by 1793 the firm were sufficiently well established to be included in the list of subscribers to Sheraton's *The Cabinet Maker and Upholsterer's Drawing Book*, by 1796 two of the three brothers involved were bankrupt. However, study of the firm's work at Shugborough illustrates not only the nature of the goods they supplied and installed, from printed papers to silvered linens and gilt borders, but also their ability to accommodate demand for styles and products deemed suitable to differing room functions.

NOTES

- 1 Staffordshire Record Office (SRO), Anson Collection, D615/E (H) 2/5 (Samuel Wyatt's accounts for work done on the house No.29, Bought of Messrs Eckhardt & co No 8 New Bond Street, 1794), and D615/E (H) 2/6 (Accounts and vouchers, Messrs Eckhardts & Co for wallpaper, 1795); British Museum, Banks Collection (BM, BC) 91.12, Booklet advertising 'Royal Patent Manufactory' inscr. (rev) May 1793.
- 2 For details see C. Taylor 'Figured Paper for Hanging Rooms': The manufacture, design and consumption of wallpapers for English domestic interiors, c.1740–c.1800. PhD thesis, The Open University (2009).
- 3 T. Faulkner, *An Historical and Topographical Description of Chelsea and its Environs*. (London, 1810), pp. 34–35.
- 4 BM, BC 91.12, p. 1.
- 5 Quoted in L. Clark (ed.), *The Letters of Sarah Harriet Burney*. (Athens, GA, and London, (1997), pp. 1–2.
- 6 Entwisle thought the attribution 'doubtful': see E.A. Entwisle, 'Eighteenth Century London Paperstainers: the Eckhardt Brothers of Chelsea', *Connoisseur* (American edition), 142 (March 1959), p. 77. In 1792 Anthony Eckhardt, by then a Fellow of the Royal Society, took out a patent for 'laying a special composition on paper and other materials, for receiving copper plates': see M. Percival, 'The World of Wallpaper: Wallpaper of the Sheraton Period'. *The Journal of Decorative Art and British Decorator* (September 1925), p. 3 00. This Eckhardt also took out patents for mechanical furniture: see C. Gilbert, and G. Beard (eds.) *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers* (Leeds: Furniture History Society, 1986), pp. 265–66.
- 7 BM, BC 91.12, p. 2.
- 8 Clark, *op.cit.*, p. 4, n.12, Lord Dover's house was on Hill Street, Mayfair.
- 9 BM, BC 91.12, p. 3.
- 10 Although Johann Beckmann questioned this claim, the brothers may have been associated with the Mr Eccard who was making paper-hangings 'which appear as if worked through with gold and silver' in The Hague in 1768: see *A history of inventions and discoveries* (London, 1797), II, p.16. Lysons also claimed the brothers were originally from Holland: see D.Lysons, *The Environs of London, II: Middlesex* (London, 1811), pp. 88–9.
- 11 Patent no.1954, quoted in C. Edwards, *Encyclopaedia of Furnishing Textiles, Floorcoverings and Home Furnishing Practices* (London, 2007), p. 237.
- 12 Quoted in Entwisle, *op.cit.*, p. 74.
- 13 BM, BC 91.12, pp. 1–2.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 15 E. Harris, *The Genius of Robert Adam: His Interiors* (New Haven and London, (2001), p. 181.
- 16 An attribution discussed in A. Wells-Cole, *Historic Paper Hangings from Temple Newsam and Other English Houses* (Leeds: Leed City Art Galleries, Temple Newsam Country House Studies No.1, 1983), pp. 35, 38.
- 17 M. Schoeser, 'The Octagon Room at Danson: evidence for restoration with wallpaper', in E. Stavelow-Hidemark (ed.), *New Discoveries, New Research* (Stockholm: The Nordiska Museet, 2009.), pp. 73–4.
- 18 In May, 1795: see D615/E (H) 2/6, f.2.
- 19 Although the paper does not survive, the borders and corners were reused by John Fowler during his restoration of the room in 1965: see G. Jackson-Stops, *Shugborough, Staffordshire* (National Trust guidebook, 1980), pp. 18–19. Since Eckhardts also advertised the supply of furniture, glasses, curtains and light fittings for drawing rooms it is conceivable they had a hand in other fittings, although no bills survive.
- 20 SRO, Anson Collection, D615/E (H) 2/6, f. 2. Again, the gilt borders survive.
- 21 SRO, Anson Collection, D615/E (H) 2/6, f. 3. The wallcovering survives *in situ*. Croft-Murray suggested that the scheme, including a painted ceiling and mirror frame, was executed for Lady Anne Anson: see E. Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England 1537–1837*, II (London, 1970), p. 305.
- 22 From January–April 1795 six different paper and border patterns, some matching, were supplied to the house, ranging in price from 9s to 4s per yard: SRO, Anson Collection, D615/E (H) 2/6, fi.
- 23 SRO, Anson Collection, D615/E (H) 2/5, 1794.
- 24 Sotheby's, 19 July 1968, Lot 127A (V & A Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department, Information Section.