

## **2. The Cabinet Factory**

### **2.1 A Business within the Business**

#### **2.1.1 Introduction**

There is a tendency amongst dealers and collectors to assume that any furniture, in what might loosely be described as the ‘Heal style’, was automatically designed by Sir Ambrose Heal and made in Heal’s own factory, particularly if it bears a Heal’s label. The objective here is to try to return to the facts, extracted from original documentation, in order to uncover for the first time the difference between his roles as designer, furniture manufacturer and shopkeeper and thus provide a firmer basis for assessing his work and his reputation. It is intended to clarify, as far as possible within the limitations of the records available and the scope of this thesis, what furniture can be properly ascribed to A.H., what furniture was made by Heal’s, what was bought in from elsewhere and what contributions to design were made by other employees of the firm such as Arthur Greenwood and J.F. Johnson.

In addition to what can be learnt about the operation of the Heal business, the case study of the Heal Cabinet Factory is instructive in illustrating the broader picture of a fairly typical set-up in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century furniture trade. Many furniture retailers had their own workshops, but the Heal archive is perhaps the only one that now provides an insight into the relative importance of this facility to the business as a whole. This study will provide confirmation that such cabinet factories were used for prestigious commissions or exhibition pieces and that most of the day-to-day, bread-and-butter merchandise was ‘outsourced’ and so came from other factories. However they played a vital role in enabling the in-house designer to realize ideas as part of the work of projecting the image of the company in actual products.

In the Heal case it will be shown that, to begin with, the Factory was an important and crucial resource that permitted A.H. to supply his shop with the sort of merchandise that he really wanted to sell. It was not just for prestige. However, as

the business grew it became easier to impose standards on other suppliers, perhaps better equipped to supply the needs of the times and in consequence the output of the Heal Factory became more marginal in importance to the business as a whole in terms of turnover, but still crucial as a means of making pieces that reflected the Heal paradigm and promoted its prestige.

The Cabinet Factory (and retail cabinet department) records provide the closest insight obtainable into what A.H. actually designed. Although some design drawings survive, the collection is far from complete and it seems likely that his reputation as someone who used the backs of envelopes to show his ideas is probably true. Even if not everything made by the factory was to his own design, the Cabinet Factory was undoubtedly his 'baby' and therefore he was ultimately responsible for its output and closely supervised its working. In contemporary press reports the design of certain items of furniture were sometimes attributed to A.H. and also to JF Johnson or Hamilton Temple Smith but as these attributions can vary from caption to caption, they have to be treated with caution. Arthur Greenwood (Heal's chief draughtsman for many years) maintained that it was he that took A.H.'s sketches and worked them up into produceable designs and therefore he should have been given more credit.<sup>201</sup> Whatever the truth, it is a fact that both Greenwood and Temple Smith did not join the business until the First World War, so that one can be fairly sure that most things made in the factory before then were A.H.'s own work. Although there is a tendency to ascribe any design in the Heal style to A.H. (and there is evidence that he was complicit in this in his lifetime), irrespective of who manufactured it, three broad categories of product can be discerned:

- Furniture with a positive AH attribution (from drawings, catalogues, notebooks, etc.).
- Furniture with a positive attribution to someone else, e.g. J.F. Johnson, Hamilton Temple Smith, Phillip Tilden, Arthur Greenwood.
- Furniture sold as Heal & Son designs with no positive design attribution, which one has to assume was probably designed by an outside manufacturer, perhaps

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<sup>201</sup> See Charles Gage, *Arthur Greenwood, (c. 1900-1990), An Evocation*, Heal's People in Retirement, June 1990. *He would tell us often how Ambrose would produce tiny neat little drawings, often on the backs of envelopes, for the Greenwood pencil to resolve into the working drawings necessary for the furniture to be made. ...A.G. always resented that all the credit was given to Ambrose and little if any to Arthur!*

exclusively for Heal's but which may have been modified following suggestions from J.F. Johnson, as the furniture buyer, or AH as the final arbiter of what was acceptable for admittance to 195 Tottenham Court Road. To this extent much in terms of 'authorship' must remain speculative owing to lack of concrete evidence.

This thesis, by defining for the first time what was really made in Heal's own workshops as a result of detailed primary research in the original business records, provides a basis for beginning to understand who was responsible for what, and by deduction will demonstrate that much of what has been assumed to be a 'Heal's own product' was in fact made elsewhere. However, even having established what was made by Heal's own Cabinet Factory, it will be seen that, particularly in the inter-war years, it is still not possible to be certain of the authorship of all designs, although the ultimate responsibility of A.H. for the output of this Factory is inescapable.

It is beyond the scope of this present study to explore in depth the relationship with other manufacturers such as Shapland & Petter, Bath Cabinet Makers, Greenings of Oxford or smaller 'unknowns' like Coote, Cooper and Mansfield, although there is no doubt that the relationship between the creative retailer and such manufacturers provides a rich seam for further research that would lead to a better understanding of twentieth century British furniture history. However some notes are included on some of these suppliers at the end of this section under the heading Key Suppliers.

In addition to establishing what furniture was made in the Heal Factory, the cabinet furniture department stock books enable furniture to be dated to the extent that the year of introduction and discontinuance can be discovered as well as the relative success or failure of particular items. Each article of furniture has an entry that includes the manufacturer's name, its stock reference number, a brief description, cost price in code, selling price and a slash (/) for each item taken into stock. When that item was sold it was crossed through (\) and (very occasionally) a customer's name would be entered against it, thus it is possible to see how many were sold year by year.<sup>202</sup> Naturally, as with any statistics, these come with a health warning. Firstly

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<sup>202</sup> It has not been possible to decipher the meaning of the forward slash sometimes having a

the figures remain open to interpretation and somebody else might reach different conclusions; secondly there are a few gaps in the record so sales of individual items are certainly underestimated but it was felt preferable to give a figure that is based on actual known sales and not add in estimates for the missing years; thirdly the stock books often show an article in stock (presumably the showroom model) and no sales until eventually this disappears. These items, at the end of a product's life, must also have been sold but for some reason this was not always recorded. Again in the absence of certainty these have not been included so sales may be in some cases one less than they ought to be. However, although for these reasons the total numbers sold may in some cases be slightly understated, it is not felt that this distorts the overall picture in any significant way and it is possible to get an reasonably accurate impression of the relative performance of individual designs.

The Heal business specialised in beds and bedroom furniture and from the stock books it is clear that the 'major unit of currency' was the bedroom suite. The first part of each stock book is devoted to bedroom suites and they were the first items to warrant a separate stock book of their own in 1914. Up to this time furniture for other rooms of the house was very much a subsidiary part of the trade being, initially grouped together at the back of the stock books under the heading 'fumed oak sundries' or 'bedroom sundries'! For this reason a picture of A.H.'s design development can best be pieced together by looking at the evolution of his bedroom suite designs and these have been traced through from 1897 to 1939. In addition details of other items of furniture made by The Factory are included and, although the records for these are not so complete, they serve to show that over the years output moved increasingly away from bedroom suites to more and more varied pieces of furniture with an emphasis on special orders and one-offs.

### **2.1.2 Background to the opening of a Cabinet Factory**

The foundation of the Heal family business as feather-dressers in 1810 and its growth as a mattress and bed making concern has been discussed elsewhere. This heritage is

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horizontal line added at top and bottom turning it into a capital *I*.

significant because it is clear that the Heals were not simply retailers who, through setting up a cabinet factory, moved into manufacturing, but that, conversely, even at the end of the nineteenth century, the firm was still based on that traditional model of workshop and shop combined. The memories of the family actually living over the shop would still have been vivid. The bedding factory was an integral part of the retail premises where customers could see their beds being made (fig. 1-6). Skilled upholsterers, seamstresses and mattress makers were available to realize whatever was required.

Curiously the little leaflet that the company published in 1910 to celebrate its centenary, mentions the establishment of a cabinet factory in 1864. However research for this thesis has not uncovered any indication that Heal's were making cabinet furniture before 1898 even though catalogues confirm they were retailing bedroom furniture from the eighteen-fifties onwards. The earliest cabinet furniture stock book that survives in the archive is from 1897 and that only records furniture bought in from other manufacturers. It is only from 1898 onwards that the word 'factory' is used in the suppliers' column to denote an in-house source.<sup>203</sup> The, admittedly incomplete, staff records for the period give no hint of cabinet makers being employed prior to 1898, although there were plenty of upholsterers and even a few carpenters.<sup>204</sup> The account ledgers show direct manufacturing labour costs for bedding but none for the cabinet furniture department and the gross margin obtained on furniture was lower than that on bedding.<sup>205</sup> All of this evidence leads one to conclude that Heal's did not manufacture any cabinet furniture until 1898 when the factory that is the subject of this study, was set up. The 1864 factory must have been simply for the making of bed-base frames that would have required simpler woodworking skills, although it seems probable that from 1897 they turned their hands to making A.H.'s range of wooden bedsteads and may therefore have been making bedsteads and fourposter beds before this as part of the bedding factory.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> AAD Heal & Son archive, 1897 Cabinet Furniture stockbook see AAD/1978/2/66 and for 1898 AAD/1978/2/67.

<sup>204</sup> AAD Heal & Son archive ref AAD/16/1146. The only exception is Edward Gareham who was taken on for *cabinet work* at sevenpence halfpenny per hour in May 1890 after *many years at Mr Cootes*.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>205</sup> AAD Heal & Son archive ref AAD/1978/2/38.

<sup>206</sup> The Wooden Bedsteads Stockbook that records the quantities sold gives no indication of the source of supply, which leads one to suspect that it was an internal source. AAD/1978/2/337.

### 2.1.3 The Cabinet Factory as a Business

It was probably typical for Victorian businesses to be meticulous about book-keeping but the influence of Alfred Brewer as the accountant and senior partner may have lingered on and had a particular impact on the Heal family approach to the matter, because right from the beginning, separate accounts were kept for the Cabinet Factory. This was no doubt partly due to the fact that the manager, Charles V. Adams, was to be paid on commission in addition to his basic salary, but mostly because the Heals were accustomed to controlling their business in this way. It is fortunate that the accounting records survive to provide a valuable insight and yet another dimension to this particular department of the firm.

The records show that in October 1897 premises in Castle Mews were rented and that although the factory was moved to its permanent home in Alfred Mews at the end of March 1898, rent on the first building still had to be paid until June. The accounts indicate that not only did this fledgling business have to pay rent but also five percent interest on the capital employed, a charge for electricity and gas consumed and insurance cover in addition to direct costs such as timber and wages. A.H. was expected to demonstrate that not only did he have some ideas for designs but that they were commercially viable as well.<sup>207</sup>

A key element in providing a sound basis for this enterprise was the recruitment of C.V. Adams to manage it. Alan Crawford has recorded the important role Adams played at C.R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicrafts as one of the five founding Guildsmen from 1888 onwards.

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<sup>207</sup> See appendix II for profit and loss accounts.



Fig.2-1 Alfred Mews looking East towards the Cabinet Factory (c. 1930s) which was housed in the building at the end with the machine shop on the ground floor. On the left are the loading bays with upholstery workshops above constructed in 1917. The building on the right was not part of Heal's premises. Note horse-drawn van. (AAD).

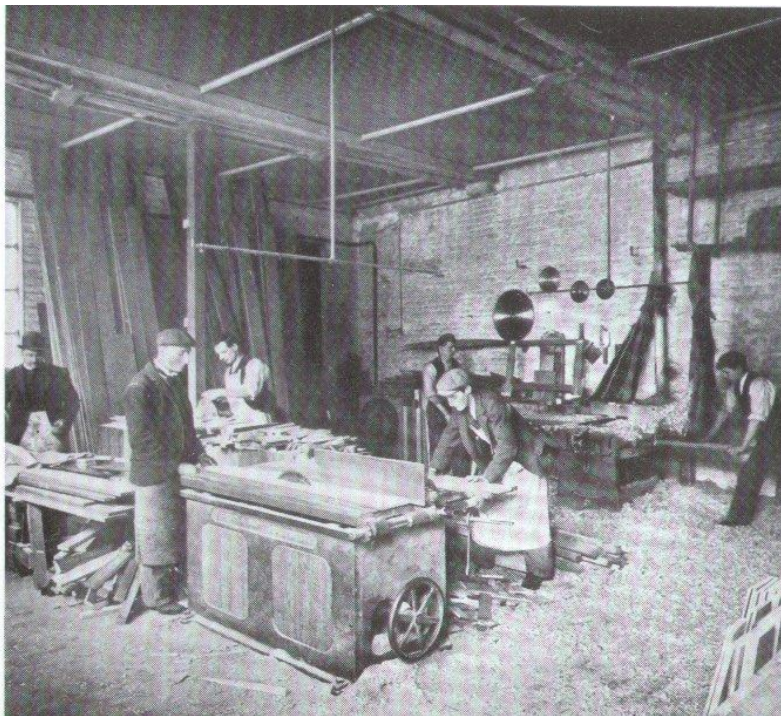


Fig. 2-2 Interior of the Cabinet Factory machine shop in 1899 showing circular saw and planer. (H&S catalogue).

Of the five, apart from Ashbee himself,

*C.V. Adams, cabinet maker, was also the most important. It was he who turned Ashbee's schemes into real workshop organization. He was an active trade unionist and fiercely democratic, but rather reserved in temperament, so Ashbee found him difficult to get to know; but together they worked out the rules of the Guild as a co-operative workshop; and in its day-to-day running Adams, as shop steward and later as manager, gave continuity, while his weight, added to the opinion of the men, stopped Ashbee in his enthusiasm from dictating too much. He was, in effect, co-architect with Ashbee of the Guild as a workshop experiment, and when he finally left in 1897 Ashbee described him as 'the man who has done more than anyone to making the place what it is, and a man with a wonderful tact and strength of character and absolute power over the men.'*<sup>208</sup>

A.H. would no doubt have dealt with Adams over the detail of getting his furniture made by the Guild of Handicrafts in 1897 and have come to appreciate his capabilities and maybe sensed some frustrations with his position. In his new position Adams was paid a basic salary plus a commission on the success of the Factory. It has not been possible to find any records that might confirm how many more Guild of Handicraft craftsmen joined Heal's in 1897 or even in 1902 when the Guild moved out to the Cotswolds, but A.H. later referred to Adams and some of his men having come over.<sup>209</sup> Adams continued to run the Factory until he retired in 1926.

It was only in 1899 that some machinery was bought and production achieved the level it was to maintain with remarkable consistency until the First World War. Over this fifteen-year period 'sales' (transfers from factory to retail) averaged £6600 per annum with a low of £5511 in 1904 and a peak of £7413 in 1900. Net profits fluctuated more wildly but a profit on manufacturing was made each year until 1912 when losses that continued through most of the war, started to accumulate. Over the

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<sup>208</sup> Alan Crawford, *C.R. Ashbee*, Yale University Press, 1985, p 33.

<sup>209</sup> Sir Ambrose Heal, R.D.I. speech, 1953.



same fifteen-year period (1899-1913) an average annual profit of £198 was made, representing approximately a meagre 3% return on sales, but the contribution to the business as a whole was much greater than this for not only was there the additional retail margin to be added on top but there was the immeasurable prestige of being able to make exclusive products. The introduction of the Cabinet Factory parallels the growth of cabinet furniture sales within the business as a whole – in 1895 retail cabinet sales were £6000, by 1900 they were four and a half times higher reaching £27000. If it is assumed that the mark-up (customary at that period) of 50% was applied to Cabinet Factory output, this would suggest that this in-house source was providing some 40% of retail cabinet furniture department sales at the time.<sup>210</sup> Even Alfred Brewer would have been happy to note that as a result the average gross profit percentage for the retail cabinet department had risen from 23% in 1895 to 29% in 1900.

The Factory continued to operate during the First World War, initially at about two-thirds of pre-war capacity which one assumes reflected the number of men who had gone to join the army, but towards the end of the war (1917 onwards) the impact of inflation confuses the figures and makes comparisons invalid. The hiatus that this caused was enormous and must have made sensible business planning impossible and the problems were no doubt exacerbated by the initial post-war rush for furniture that was rapidly followed by a severe fall-off in trade. Previously unpublished documents survive in the Heal archive which show how Mr Adams made pre- and post-war comparisons in March 1921, taking into account information about the rest of the furniture-making trade, to try to understand and to adjust his prices accordingly. The value of the pound sterling had dropped to just forty percent of its pre-war value which resulted in wages and raw material costs shooting up.<sup>211</sup> Heal's cabinet makers in 1914 were paid 11½d per hour and polishers 10d per hour. In 1920 these figures had both gone up to 2s 4½d per hour giving percentage increases of 148% and 185% respectively. The cabinet makers' pre-war wages were the same as

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<sup>210</sup> In 1895 H&S total sales were £37427 of which some £6000 (16%) were by the cabinet department. In 1900 total sales were £75164 and cabinet department sales were £27000 (36%). Cabinet Factory output in 1900 was £7413, multiplied by 1.5 gives retail price of £11119.5, equivalent to 41.18% of £27000.

<sup>211</sup> W. Johnson, J. Whymam, G. Wykes, *A Short Economic & Social History of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Britain*, Geo Allen & Unwin, 1967, based on the 1964 value of the pound = 20s, give its worth in 1900 as 110s, in 1914 100s, and in 1920 40s.

the London average but post-war Heal's were paying a penny an hour more than the trade. Incidentally London wages were 21% higher than Wycombe wages before the war but post-war the differential was reduced to 14%.

Raw material cost rises were more extreme as Adams noted that the cost of one inch oak in 1914 was between 3¾d and 5d and had risen to between 1s 6d and 2s 2d per foot in 1920. This represents increases of 380% to 420% which compare badly with the 91% increase for English Oak recorded by the Parliamentary Investigation into Furniture Prices, although it should be noted that they recorded an almost 300% increase in the price of American oak. However, even this is considerably below the increases Adams was having to pay.

Another complication for Adams in his costings was the fact that the furniture was taking longer to make than it had previously. He noted the following comparisons:

Average making-time comparisons				
Ref No	Description	1914	1920/21	% change
No. 7	Oak dining table	17hrs	19hrs	+11%
392	Chestnut wardrobe	135hrs	150hrs	+11%
144	Mahogany bedstead	20.5 hrs	24 hrs	+17%

This was no doubt due to the loss of skilled men to the war who had not been replaced by younger men being trained up to replace them, a fact confirmed by East London furniture makers who *alleged there had been a distinct falling off in productive energy and efficiency* for those reasons. Adams presented his findings to a meeting attended by A.H. (chairman), Hamilton T. Smith (director) and J.F. Johnson (furniture buyer) in May 1921 and was authorised to re-price all his jobs on the basis of current costs against a background where, because of the difficulties of trade, other departments were pressing to cut prices.<sup>212</sup>

At first glance the fact that the average annual output of the factory for the period 1921 to 1925 rose from its pre-war level of £6600 to just under £10,000 is

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<sup>212</sup> C.V. Adams' internal report is preserved in the Heal archive along with a copy of the report of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee Investigation of Prices for Furniture under the Profiteering Acts 1919 & 1920, ref AAD/ 1978/2/349. See also Board Minutes AAD/1978/2/1.

impressive, but in view of the foregoing figures about price rises one is forced to conclude that in reality the volume of output never regained its pre-war level. Certainly it was not consistently profitable as trading losses were recorded in four of the six years for which figures are available. Perhaps it is not surprising against this troubled background that C.V. Adams chose to retire from his position as factory manager in 1926, a post he had held for 28 years.

That event certainly resulted in considerable changes to the organisation of the factory and may even have led to it being closed down in the form in which it had existed until then. It certainly provoked a thorough physical stocktaking, the record of which survives in the archive. This document provides an insight into the variety of timber that was used at the period and also reveals what machinery was available to the craftsmen.

The list of timbers held in stock in varying quantities was as follows:

<i>Oak</i>	<i>Pi-ynma</i>
<i>Mahogany</i>	<i>Laurelwood</i>
<i>Eng Chestnut</i>	<i>Birch</i>
<i>Poplar</i>	<i>Gaboon mahogany</i>
<i>Ash</i>	<i>Basswood</i>
<i>Redwood</i>	<i>Cuba mahogany</i>
<i>Satinwood</i>	<i>African walnut</i>
<i>Sycamore</i>	<i>American chestnut</i>
<i>Kakwood</i>	<i>American oak</i>
<i>Padaouge</i>	<i>Jap oak</i>
<i>Greywood</i>	<i>Russian oak</i>
<i>Cherrywood</i>	<i>Australian redwood</i>
<i>Teak</i>	
<i>Thitka</i>	
<i>Rosewood</i>	
<i>Blackbean</i>	
<i>American walnut</i>	

Of the *Jap Oak* there was 98feet of 2inch in stock at 2s 6d which was presumably of superior quality to the 80feet of 2inch *Oak*, also in stock without its country of origin being ascribed, at 1s 8d.. The English Chestnut was considerably cheaper at 1s, whilst American Walnut was 2s and English walnut was taken into stock at 2s 10d. A small quantity of plywood was held faced in 'Jap oak' along with some in alder. In addition unspecified timber was being held at Sherry's yard and at Bloom's yard.<sup>213</sup>

The list of machinery in the factory confirms that, by today's standards, everything was still handmade. Even though in 1899 the company publicised itself as having installed the latest electrical machinery in its new workshops, a handwritten list, probably in Mr Adams' hand, shows that in fact this was very limited. In March 1899 (i.e. some eighteen months after setting it up) they invested in a Sagar & Co. saw bench and planing machine along with two 6-horsepower Brush Electrical Co motors and cables to power them.<sup>214</sup> In 1900 a 'Sagar fuel sawing machine' was acquired and the following year a 1-horsepower motor for the fuel saw came from Sunderland. The total investment came to £413. The next entry on the list was not made until 1924 when tenoning and mortising machines with two Maudslay motors were purchased. The stocktaking document of 1925/6 confirms that at that date this was still the only machinery available so it is a reasonable deduction that timber would simply have been roughly cut and planed to size by machine before being passed to the individual cabinet makers to be worked by hand in the time-honoured manner. Certainly the quality of their work, for example the very fine lapped London dovetails and the traces still to be found on surviving items of furniture of the use of marking gauges, suggests they were a band of highly skilled craftsmen. Although A.H. believed in the use of the machine to alleviate the craftsman's task, unlike Gimson and the Barnsleys who rejected machinery completely, he was still committed to the craftsman's skills for fine furniture and did not want a completely mechanised factory for himself. The Foreword to the 1899 catalogue of Simple Bedroom Furniture explains clearly the position at the time:

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<sup>213</sup> See Working Papers folder. AAD/1978/2/349.

<sup>214</sup> A new motor for the planing machine was fitted in 1921. See Board Minutes 01.07.21. AAD/1978/2/1. See also AAD/1978/2/349.

### Electric Power Machinery

*..we have erected in our Cabinet Factory a plant of the most improved type, driven by powerful electric motors, which is an example, in its way, of all that is most modern in cabinet making machinery..*

### Judiciously Applied

*Whilst taking advantage of all that is best in machinery, we have been careful not to allow the taint of the usual trade machine-made furniture to invade the workshop.*

### Craftsmanship

*We are, in fact, most careful to give free expression to that individual craftsmanship and excellence of workmanship without which no cabinet work, whatever its design, can hope to be in any real sense - artistic*

On quality of materials it states:

*...the woods are most carefully selected and seasoned. The drawers are all made of oak throughout and not of inferior woods as is too common custom, and our cabinet makers are the very best that liberal wages can command.*

*Our metal-work, which has always been such a feature on this class of furniture, is all made from our own designs by our own smiths on our own premises, and by this means we have been able to preserve the artistic feeling which is of so great importance in all good metal-work.*

Whereas up until 1920 it seems fairly clear that furniture made in-house can be identified relatively simply from the stock books as the word 'Factory' is inserted in the suppliers' column, the situation thereafter becomes a little less clear. Firstly at the beginning of 1920 the decision was made to take over the lease of 187a Tottenham Court Road which housed the cabinet works of Mr Page who had succeeded Frederick Coote, a long-term, major supplier to the firm of lacquered furniture (see Key Suppliers 2.3.1). Although it could therefore be argued that from this point on that those ranges were 'home-made' the stock books continue to list them under Page so it was evidently run as an independent unit with Mr Page still in charge. It was not until 1930 that the stock books were re-organised, presumably to reflect an internal reorganisation, and models made by both workshops appear under the same heading. A Mr Morley was appointed foreman in 1927 and it is surmised that he was in charge of a combined workshop from that point onwards. The accounts for the Factory indicate that by that time a veneer press had been acquired from the Coote/Page

workshop as the gas supply charge entry reads: *For veneer press & glue pots*. The thirties were a difficult period for such a small specialist factory and under Mr Morley (who obviously was not responsible for designs or sales, but only production and therefore probably cannot be blamed) sales sank below £8000 per year and losses were made in most years up to 1939.

A further complication is added to the picture of Heal's own production by the occasional appearance of the word 'Shop' in the suppliers' column. It seems likely that this referred to the service workshop through which furniture would have to pass for inspection or repair prior to delivery. This workshop would normally not be expected to manufacture furniture at all but skilled makers and polishers would have been employed and they appear to have made the occasional piece. For the purpose of this study and in the interest of consistency in recording the output of the Alfred Mews Factory, these other units have not been included.

## **2.1.4 Labels and their Significance**

### **2.1.4.1 Historical Background**

Although great significance is attached to the discovery of a piece of antique furniture that is labelled, and undoubtedly labels tell us more about the provenance of that article than we would know if it bore no label, the fact remains that labels tell us remarkably little and can sometimes obscure the truth. The labels on Heal's furniture are no guarantee that that particular item was made by Heal's and, conversely, items exist that are known to have been made by Heal's but bear no label at all. The only certainty is that something bearing a Heal's label was retailed by the firm.

It is ironic that one of the earliest scholarly discussions of the problem posed by markings on furniture was the chapter *The Problem of Identification* contributed by R.W. Symonds included in Sir Ambrose Heal's own book *London Furniture Makers* in 1953. One can only assume that as a young man when he started making furniture, A.H. was not so conscious of the problem of identification as he was when his book was finally published and he was eighty years old, with a lifetime of research behind

him. At that point he wrote, *Unfortunately, the general practice of labelling did not obtain in our furniture trade*, and he compares this to the custom of other trades such as gold- and silver-smiths, pewterers, gun-smiths and clock-makers.<sup>215</sup> Despite his membership of the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society that required the maker's name to be given on items exhibited, A.H. did not carry this policy through to all the furniture sold in his shop. The only maker in the first half of the twentieth century who seems to have consistently labelled furniture with his own name, the craftsman's name and the date, was Gordon Russell of Broadway.

The significance of labels and markings on furniture has been complicated since the very earliest days by the division of labour. For example the initials stamped on chairs from the late seventeenth century onwards are generally accepted as being those of individual journeymen and not of the master who would normally be considered as the manufacturer.<sup>216</sup> The more elements a piece of furniture comprised, the more likely it was that parts of the work were sub-contracted (for example to marquetry specialists) and the more difficult it became to assign authorship to a single individual. London was unlike Paris where since 1741 a Guild statute had ordered that the *maître ébéniste should place his own registered mark on furniture*.<sup>217</sup> The problem was then further exacerbated in the eighteenth century, as Christopher Gilbert explains in his book *Marked London Furniture 1700-1840*, as there arose

...during the Georgian period two main kinds of furniture business: firstly shops established by craftsmen who made all or most of their own goods, and secondly, shops, often known as warehouses, kept by commercial dealers who retailed all sorts of furnishings both new and second-hand.<sup>218</sup>

Gilbert traces the first use of labels back to the end of the seventeenth century when *a new breed of London cabinet makers skilled in the art of veneering* introduced the habit, however, by the reign of George II *labelling was restricted to workshops catering for the middle class market* and the 'top end' makers considered they were

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<sup>215</sup> Ambrose Heal, *London Furniture Makers, 1660-1840*, Batsford, 1953, p xii & R.W. Symonds, FSA, *Old English Furniture and its Makers: The Problem of Identification*, p 215.

<sup>216</sup> See John Stabler *We always stamped all we made, not being ashamed of our work*, Furniture History Society Journal, 2005, p 14. Stabler in turn cites Christopher Gilbert *Pictorial Dictionary of Marked London Furniture* and Adam Bowett *English Furniture 1660-1714* as authority.

<sup>217</sup> Christopher Gilbert, *Marked London Furniture 1700-1840*, Furniture History Society, 1996, p 2.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid*, p.2.

above the need to publicise their work in this fashion.<sup>219</sup> By the nineteenth century it would appear to have been quite common for dealers to stamp their names on high quality examples of eighteenth century furniture adding yet more confusion for the historian. As Gilbert records,

*Even Sir Ambrose Heal was baffled into recording the furniture broker William Priest, who started up in 1837, as a late 18th century cabinet-maker on the evidence of a stamped Carlton House writing table.*<sup>220</sup>

The nineteenth century growth of large West End furniture retailers put more distance between the consumer and the maker and the uneasy relationship that still exists today between retailer and manufacturer, in which each regards the other with some suspicion, can be traced back to this time. Manufacturers feel that retailers have a small-minded approach that inhibits the presentation of what they perceive to be the full glory of their wonderful furniture, and they accuse retailers of profiteering by taking a margin that exceeds the cost of the actual making. They begrudge the fact that the retailer seeks to remove all evidence of the maker's name. The retailer, meanwhile, is keen to suppress the manufacturer's identity from the public for fear of the consumer ordering direct or simply taking the references to a competitor. Many retailers attached their own labels to furniture they sold creating an impression that they were manufacturers, which indeed they very often were as well as being retailers, thus confusing matters still further.

A classic example of this mixture of retailer and manufacturer was Maples, who, despite the fact that by the late 1880s they were employing some 2000 people and could claim to be *The Largest and Most Convenient Furnishing Establishment in the World*, were called before the Lords Select Committee on the Sweating System in 1888 to answer charges that they took unfair advantage of their many small suppliers by deferring payment. It was also insinuated that by putting their name on the furniture they were misleading their customers. Blundell Maple's reply was:

*...we do stamp our name upon certain articles of furniture which, although not made by us, are made specially for us and for which we are responsible...The*

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid p 3, 5.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid p 2.



*fact that our name being thereon must be considered, not in any way as representing that each identical piece of furniture was made by us, but as a guarantee to the public of the durability of the article.*<sup>221</sup>

The fact that every piece of furniture sold by Maples' department store neighbour, Shoolbreds, *was sold under the firm's own name*<sup>222</sup> tends to confirm that this was common practice of the times, and it was one that continued into the twentieth century. The trade journal *The Cabinet Maker* published an article in the 1920s that criticised the practice of the retailer who

*...tries to suggest that he makes all the goods that he sells and announces in some prominent place in his shop that he is a "Cabinet Maker & Upholsterer", whereas he may merely have a repair shop where odds and ends of work can be done. It seems to be a needless fiction that the retailer makes every article he sells.*<sup>223</sup>

However this practice of retail branding is also a reflection of the economic power of certain furniture retailers who were able to build up a strong brand image that far outweighed that of any manufacturers who, on the whole, remained small and disparate without any public image. Although in the mid-twentieth century there were makers such as Parker Knoll, G-Plan and Ercol who were able to establish reputations known to the general public, the furniture industry continues today to be better known for its retailers (e.g. Habitat and Ikea) than for its manufacturers.

That retailers were justified in suspecting their suppliers would undercut them and sell direct if they had the chance is graphically illustrated in Kirkham, Mace and Porter's book about the East London furniture trade *Furnishing The World*, where they record:

*Copying was an accepted practice; it was part of the East End way of working...An easy way of copying work by other firms was to look at trade catalogues or photographs used by sales representatives. A more skilled task was sometimes carried out by boys, in their lunch break, who were sent up to*

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<sup>221</sup> Hugh Barty-King, *Maples, Fine Furnishers*, Quiller Press, 1992, p 38 quoting Blundell Maple. According to Sophia de Falbe, *James Shoolbred, late-Victorian Department Store Furniture*, p 58, Maples bought from around 1000 different furniture makers and made less than 10% of what they sold.

<sup>222</sup> Sophia de Falbe, *James Shoolbred, Late Victorian Department Store Furniture*, p55.

<sup>223</sup> Cited in Kirkham, Mace & Porter, *Furnishing the World*, p 47.

*West End stores, notably Heal's, to measure up pieces in the window by eye and to memorise construction details for the boss.*<sup>224</sup>

The authors also cite the example of a woman who found the Hille factory and ordered all her furniture direct with old *Mr Hille*.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Pat Kirkham, Rodney Mace & Julia Porter, *Furnishing the World, The East London Furniture Trade 1830-1980*, Journeyman, 1987, p 56.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, p 46.



Fig. 2-3. A wash stand in ash with white marble top and tiles by Moyr-Smith in 'aesthetic period' style. Circa 1875. Previously at Warwick Castle. Right drawer edge is stamped "Heal & Son London". ( B. Kearsley)

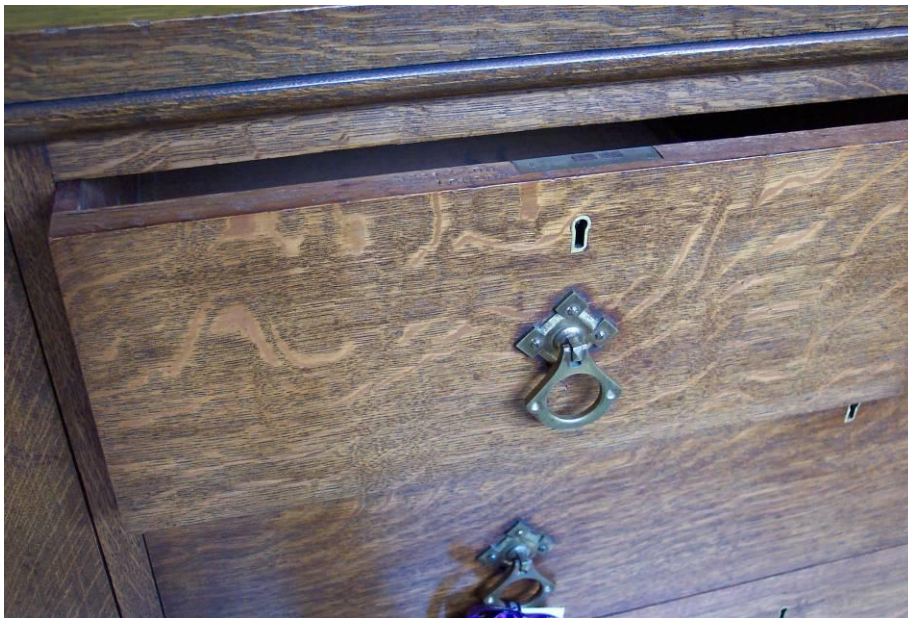
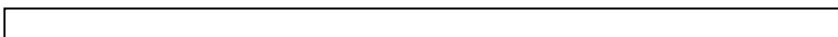


Fig. 2-4. Cupboard chest in oak. Circa 1880. Sold 2005 by Liberty. Drawer edge stamped "Heal & Son London". (photo. Author)

Both items demonstrate that furniture sold through Heal & Son was name-stamped long before they started manufacturing.



#### 2.1.4.2 Heal's Labelling

Against this background of practices in the trade where did Heal's fit in? It is one of the main aims of this work to demonstrate what Heal's actually made in their own workshops and thereby show, by deduction, that the vast majority of the furniture they sold was bought in from other makers. This is information that is simply not available about firms such as Maples or Shoolbreds, and whilst these two certainly had larger manufacturing facilities of their own, the Heal case study will throw light on this balance between in-house and external supply in the whole trade. As far as labelling is concerned it will be seen that Heal's followed, and increasingly reinforced, the trade practice of labelling with their own labels furniture made by other manufacturers. That the retail brand was more important than the source of the furniture is underscored by the fact that goods of their own manufacture were not distinguished by any special mark but on the whole carry the same labels as those applied generally.

Observation of surviving items of furniture and discussions with people involved in the trade leads one to the following conclusions about Heal labels.<sup>226</sup>

From sometime after 1852, when they commenced selling cabinet furniture up until the early 1900s, Heal's applied a stamp, usually to the lip of a drawer that embossed the wood with the words: *Heal & Son London*.<sup>227</sup> (Fig. 2-5) As they did not commence making any furniture themselves until 1898 it follows that the vast majority of furniture that is thus marked was manufactured elsewhere but retailed through the Tottenham Court Road shop. However some of the surviving items that are known to have been made in their own factory at this period (such as the St Ives bedroom suite) do carry the impress of this stamp although by no means all of their own produce is marked. Some items made around 1900 carry an oval embossed brass plate and it is possible that these were only applied to their own products. (Fig. 2-6)

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<sup>226</sup> Many thanks to Brian Thompson of The Millinery Works and Patch Rogers of Liberty for their assistance in the preparation of this section.

<sup>227</sup> Some of the furniture made in 1901 for Reigate Town Hall is stamped.



Fig. 2-5 *Heal & Son London* stamp to edge of drawer (author)



Fig. 2-6 Oval brass label in 'St Ives' wardrobe interior made by Heal & Son circa 1900 (the wardrobe was in production from 1897 to 1910 but very few were made after 1903). Label reads 'Heal & Son -196 - Tottenham Ct Road London'. (author)



Fig. 2-7 rectangular 'ivorine' label inside '429' 3ft 6in two door wardrobe in oak made by Heal & Son between 1904 and 1908 reads "makers of Bedroom Furniture". (author).



Fig 2-8 rectangular ivorine label on '372' 3ft 6in two door wardrobe in chestnut with deep drawer made by Heal & Son between 1903 and 1926. "Makers of Bedsteads & Bedding" label applied to inside of drawer front. (author)

From about 1905 onwards (but perhaps starting as early as 1902 when A.H. took over responsibility for publicity) rectangular ‘ivory’ labels were fixed with small pins to furniture. There appear to have been two versions of this which were used interchangeably with no apparent system of logical reasoning. One reads: *Heal & Son makers of Bedroom Furniture London W*, whilst the second reads: *Heal & Son makers of Bedsteads & Bedding London W*. Although these appear mainly on Heal’s own products there are recorded cases of them having been applied to other items.<sup>228</sup> (Fig. 2-7, 2-8)

Probably around 1920 little circular discs were introduced to replace the rectangular labels. These were let into the furniture so they were flush with the surface and the circumference bore the legend *Heal & Son Ltd London W* around a picture of the Fourposter trademark. (Fig. 2-9, 2-10) Around 1930 the Fourposter was replaced by the word *Heal’s* across the centre of the disc and *Tottenham Court Road, London W1* around the circumference.<sup>229</sup> (Fig. 2-11, 2-12) It would be interesting to know if manufacturers were provided with stocks of these discs for insertion before final finishing or whether they were fitted when goods arrived at TCR. Although still used after the Second World War their use seems to have faded out as the factory concentrated more and more on contract furnishing work and it became impractical to label furniture bought in from around Europe. Briefly in the late 1970s a circular bronze disc was introduced that was applied to furniture made in the Cabinet Factory which was by then in Essex Road, Islington.

In addition to these labels it is known that some items dating from around 1910 exist with “Heal & Son” stamped onto the brass lock cases but these are rare. Occasionally items of furniture are found with numbers stamped on the back. So far it has not been possible to identify the meaning of these as they do not correspond to model numbers and it can only be assumed that they represent job numbers in the works.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, as a way of highlighting the exclusivity and high

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<sup>228</sup> Patch Rogers of Liberty recalls having seen a bedstead known to have been made by Ernest Gimson bearing one of these labels.

<sup>229</sup> Signed edition desk dated 1929 (Millinery Works sale 2006) has ‘fourposter’ disc.





Fig. 2-9. Ca. 1920-1930 'ivorine' disc with Fourposter logo showing usual position on drawer. (Author)



Fig. 2-10. Close-up showing Fourposter logo. (Author)



Fig. 2-11. 1930s disc with Fourposter replaced by Heal's. (Author)



Fig. 2-12. 1950s disc, very similar to pre-war, still in use. (Author)

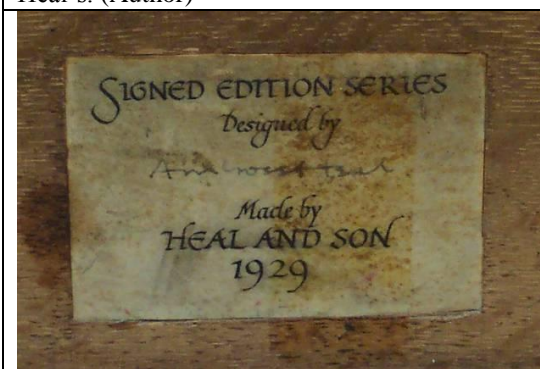


Fig. 2-13. 1929 'Signed Edition Series' label personally signed by A.H. (Author)



Fig. 2-14. 1932 label from a one-off semi-circular desk designed by AH for his brother Harold. (Author)

standard of making of certain pieces, a small collection of 'Signed Edition' pieces was issued. These were marked with vellum labels hand-written by one of the Heal calligraphers and signed by A.H. himself. (Fig. 2-13, 2-14) Usually they give the date of manufacture and sometimes the name of the client. This was perhaps inspired by the Parisian designer Ruhlmann (1879-1933) who, from 1928, made numbered editions of his furniture backed by a signed certificate.<sup>230</sup> However, although these vellum labels were signed by A.H. and may be therefore taken as confirmation that he designed such items of furniture, even this is no guarantee that they were actually made in the Cabinet Factory. For example the 'Signed Edition' 5ft weathered oak writing table No. 554 was made by Cooper and the 'Signed Edition' 3ft 6in escritoire No. 547 was made by Greenings.

### **2.1.5 Design Characteristics of Ambrose Heal furniture.**

Trying to identify furniture designed by A.H. by physical characteristics is not simple because his work covered a forty-year span and evolved considerably during that period, embracing a number of different influences along the way. It is notable that he was one of the few designers prepared to use compound curves (as did Cecil Brewer in his architectural detailing) although these do not appear very frequently. However a few details stand out as favourite re-occurring elements that are distinctively his own. The first is the slightly arched apron spanning the bottom front of wardrobes and chests etc. below the baseboard, that gives an air of solidity to the slab sides but lifts it in the middle for lightness. The first use of this was on the '240' bedroom suite in 1898 but the subtlety of the curve and the 45 degree mitred joints to the tapered foot can be well appreciated on the '347' wardrobe from 1902. (fig. 2-14) It can be found again, although in slightly simplified form, on the Cottage Furniture ranges such as the '510' dresser of 1906. (fig. 2-15)

A decorative detail that A.H. was fond of employing, when such things were not precluded by price, was a rebate around the edge of tops that then left neat parallel astragal mouldings top and bottom.

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<sup>230</sup> Anne Massey, *Interior Design of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Thames & Hudson, 2001, p. 93.





Fig. 2-14 Apron to '347' wardrobe. (1902) (AAD).



Fig. 2-15. apron to '510' dresser. (1906) (AAD).

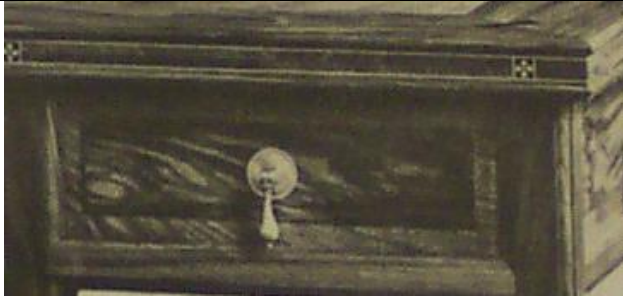


Fig. 2-16. detail of 1909 writing table illustrates favourite design details: raised fielded drawer front, ovolo moulding to legs, rebated astragal-moulded edge to top inlaid with cross-banded veneer and small squares. (AAD).



Fig. 2-17. plain rebated astragal-moulded edge to '404' toilet table. (1904) (author)



Fig. 2-18. Turned tapered leg of '404' toilet table . (1904) (author).



Fig. 2-19. detail of ebony and box squares inlaid on walnut cabinet '953' (c.1928) (author).



Fig. 2-20. sledge foot No. 7 dining table. (1905) (AAD).



Fig. 2-21 sledge foot No. 148 dining table (AAD).

On the more expensive models this rebate could be used to house more decoration with, for example, cross-banded inlays, mother o'pearl, and contrasting ebony and boxwood. These rebated edges can be seen, undecorated, for example on the '404' bedroom suite of 1904 (Fig. 2-17) and the mahogany and black sideboard '678' of 1916, and decorated, on the walnut writing table he designed for his own use in 1909 (Fig. 2-16) or the '670' sideboard from 1912. The decoration used often included a pattern of four small squares within a larger square carried out in contrasting ebony and box inlays. (Fig. 2-19)

Where the rebate was applied to wider sections of timber (for example to 1½ inch legs rather than ¾ inch top board edges) the mouldings were left square on either side, as can be seen on the No. 26 dining table of 1916 or the '433' gents wardrobe from 1905.

Although the use of a sledge foot is something that has a long tradition in furniture making, it became a favourite with A.H. and his examples are usually very neat and can be considered typical of his work. The No. 7 dining table from 1905 is an early example (Fig. 2-20) and the ogee moulding on the end of the foot can be appreciated on the '680' black and gilt sideboard. Heavier versions are represented by '148' dining table of 1924. (Fig. 2-21)

Details that reveal his skill as a furniture designer can be seen even in the least expensive bedrooms where functional details are used to create visual interest without in any way compromising the manufacturing needs. In order to keep costs to a minimum, doors were made up from straight softwood boards screwed to cross battens to avoid traditional jointed frame construction. Yet A.H. used a variety of techniques to turn the joints between the boards into decorative patterns whilst at the same time masking the inevitable natural movement between the planks. Butt jointed boards could simply be bevelled to create a stripe ('416', see Fig. 2-262) or covered with a domed moulding ('591', see Fig. 2-149) or ship-lapped with a shallow square rebate to create a play of light and shade ('431', see Fig. 2-217, 218).

## Heal Handles



Fig. 2-22. 1898 "Fine Feathers" '246' suite pewter handle (author).



Fig. 2-23. 1897 "Newlyn" hammered steel handle (author).



Fig. 2-24 1897 "St. Ives" hammered steel ring handle (author).



Fig. 2-25. 1904 '401' & '402' etc. suite handles. N.B. these were originally not polished but the colour of old brass. Drawer seals flush to front (author).

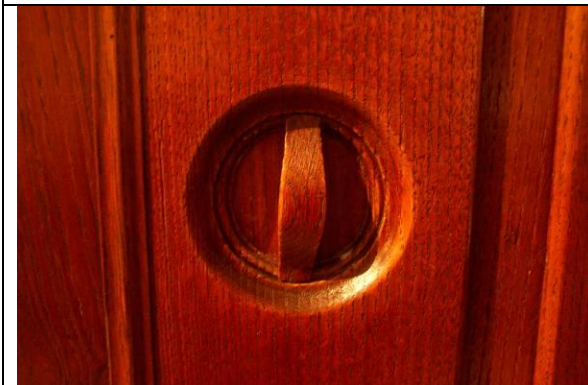


Fig. 2-26. 1903 chestnut recessed turnbuckle bolt '372' suite (author).



Fig. 2-27. 1905 '412' cupboard chest recessed 'squashed heart' handle (author).

It is not possible to be certain of the responsibility for designs in every case, particularly in the inter-war years, but it is hoped these details will help in the recognition of some unlabelled pieces.

## 2.1.6 Timbers, Quality & Finishes

### 2.1.6.1 Timbers

The inventory taken in 1926 (see pp 100, 101) lists a large number of very varied timbers held in stock at that time but the number actually used for main constructional display wood was quite limited as can be seen from the following chart that indicates how many bedroom suite models in different timbers were being manufactured at different periods.

Year	Mahogany	Oak	Walnut	Green stained Ash/Oak	Chestnut	Laurelwood	Total
1900	4	10	1	4			20
1910	5	16	1		2		24
1925	7	7	2		2	1	19
1936	1	2	1			1	5

Comparison of this list of timbers used by the Factory with the analysis of the selection of finishes offered by the retail department (see Appendix) as a whole reveals how specialised the Factory was in pursuing its version of Arts & Crafts furniture. Although mahogany was always available, oak was the Heal Factory signature timber in what remained a limited selection, presumably because it symbolized the very English Heal style.

With the exception of the Black Bean, which is known to have been used for a number of special pieces of furniture, one has to assume that the other timbers on the inventory list, but not on the above chart, were mainly for decorative details or for the odd special order.

**Black Bean** (*Castanospermum australe*) was an Australian timber grown in New South Wales and Queensland with a general effect similar to walnut that A.H. used on a number of occasions from around 1911 when it became available in England. One notable piece for which it was employed was a glazed fronted bookcase that is preserved at the Victoria & Albert Museum (Fig. 2-134).<sup>231</sup> C.H.B. Quennell in an article entitled *The Case for Modern Furniture* has an illustration of the bookcase and wrote:

*designed by Ambrose Heal jun., is interesting in that it has been made in a new Australian wood called "black bean." It is a very charming grey brown colour, with cream and dark brown figure, and has been left without any kind of polish. The inlay work is of mother-of-pearl, with lines and bands of brown ebony and boxwood and ebony star inlays. There are two slides in the bottom carcass for placing books upon*<sup>232</sup>.

**Walnut** (*Juglans regia*), whether English or Italian, was only used on more up-market models. Although J.F. Johnson in a letter to the *Cabinet Maker* in 1929 wrote that *walnut still seems the most popular wood – the public insist on having it*, his remarks evidently did not apply to the output of the Cabinet Factory as oak was still most common for them. Heal's retail department mostly turned to other suppliers better equipped for dealing with these tricky veneers for walnut furniture.<sup>233</sup>

Some notes on the background to the other principal timbers used illustrate that on the whole Heal's took advantage of developments in the timber trade as they occurred:

**Mahogany**. Much of the mahogany that was used was described as "Colonial Mahogany" being about 10% more expensive than oak but less expensive than traditional mahoganies, *having a very attractive brown mahogany colour...finished*

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<sup>231</sup> B.J. Rendle, *World Timbers*, E. Benn, 1969.

<sup>232</sup> C.H.B. Quennell, *The Case for Modern Furniture, The House & Its Equipment*, Country Life, 1911 (?) p. 58.

<sup>233</sup> *Cabinet Maker*, 23.02.1929, letter from J.F. Johnson.

*with a soft dull polish, which brings out the value of the fine graining, and yet gives a wearable finish.*<sup>234</sup> This was introduced in 1904 (Fig. 2-28) but evidently later (ca. 1911 to 1914) there was a demand for a richer, darker mahogany and some articles were also offered in “Cuba Mahogany” veneers. Mahogany was used for the most expensive inlaid bedroom suites as well. “Colonial Mahogany” seems to have been a name invented by Heal’s as it does not appear in timber reference books. It seems likely to have been an African Mahogany (such as *Khaya ivorensis*) which was being imported in increasing quantities at this period.<sup>235</sup> However the 1926 inventory confirms that both Gaboon mahogany and Cuba mahogany were still held in stock at that point, so it has to be a possibility that Gaboon was what was being used pre-war. Otherwise known as Okoumé (*Aucoumea klaineana*) it was not a British colonial timber but from the French colony of Gaboon and, according to Howard, *certainly not considered a mahogany. Pale in colour, soft and light in weight.* It was used mainly in automobile construction and for ship’s fittings. Confusingly he states: *It needs a good finish.* But also says: *French polish and stain generally causes a muddy and therefore unsatisfactory surface.*<sup>236</sup> In later years, as African mahogany became scarcer the timber trade turned increasingly to Gaboon as a replacement. Were Heal’s the instigators of this trend?

**Cuba Mahogany** (*Macrophyllia Swetania* - no Latin name given by Howard) The Heal stockbooks always refer to ‘Cuba’ and not ‘Cuban’ presumably to indicate the source rather than where it grew. In contrast it had a very hard close texture, generally heavier than any other mahogany and darkened rapidly to a deep red. The much sought after “curls” or “crotches”, which appear more often in Cuban mahogany than in any other, meant that *good well figured logs command very high prices for veneers.*<sup>237</sup>

**Oak.** Although oak (*Quercus robur*) was used throughout the period, its appearance

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<sup>234</sup> Heal & Son, *Simple Furniture*, catalogue 1905.

<sup>235</sup> Alexander L. Howard, *The Timbers of the World*, Macmillan, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1948. Howard records the volume of imports of African Mahogany into Liverpool growing from 9 million feet in 1894, to 18m ft in 1900, to 21m ft in 1903 and peaking in 1913 at 33m ft (in which year a further 10m ft came into London). By 1930 the combined total for Liverpool and London had dropped back to 14m ft. This would tend to suggest that Heal’s use of it came at exactly the moment when much of the trade were adopting the timber.

<sup>236</sup> Alexander L. Howard, *The Timbers of the World*, p 329. By 1913, 134,000 tons were imported.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.



could be changed considerably through the application of different finishes (see 2.1.6.3 Surface Finishing). The source of the oak used is not specified except on a number of jobs where, in the 1930s “Sussex” oak, or in earlier years “Riga” oak or “Austrian” oak is referred to, with no doubt the associated implication that this was the finest quality. According to Howard, Riga oak came:

*...from the forests in the interior of the Russian Baltic provinces and of Russian Poland. Around 1920, Riga logs were the best obtainable and realised the highest prices...The wood was bright, of uniform colour, close grained, hard and firm in texture and very durable. Whereas, Austrian oak is mainly yielded by the forests of Slavonia and Croatia...it is probably only slightly inferior to the timber obtainable from the more northern forests of South Russia.*<sup>238</sup>

Heal’s used Japanese Oak (*Quercus mongolica*) but from the stock book it is not possible to discern which models were made in this variety of timber and care has to be taken not to misread the information held there. The stock books in the earlier years contain many entries of “Jap. Oak” or “Jap’d Oak” and there is no doubt that these refer to a Japanned finish – i.e. a soft wood painted to resemble oak, - and not to the timber oak at all. However Susanna Goodden in *A History of Heal’s* states that *Heal’s developed the technique (of ‘weathering oak’) with Japanese oak, which gave a better ‘figure’ and grain than most other oaks, the timber being quarter cut around 1918.*<sup>239</sup> This would coincide with the information that imports of this timber really took off after the First World War presumably to fill the gap left in the European market by the ravages of that war. Howard records that the first shipment of Japanese Oak arrived in 1905 but due to lack of experience in dealing with it much of it was defective. In 1908, 4,349 loads were imported into the UK, but: *In 1920 the shipments to the Continent had reached the enormous total of 50,000 loads per annum...the timber is remarkable for its extreme regularity of growth and freedom from faults.*<sup>240</sup>

**Chestnut.** The use of Chestnut (*Castanea sativa* – sweet chestnut) was unusual in the British furniture trade even though in France and Spain there was a long tradition of its use and historically in England it had been *sought after by Carpenter and Joyner*

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Susanna Goodden, *A History of Heal’s*, Heal & Son, 1984. p 50.

<sup>240</sup> Alexander L. Howard, *The Timbers of the World*, Macmillan 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1948.

in the seventeenth century, according to Evelyn, and there are records of it having been used in the sixteenth century.<sup>241</sup> It appears that by the twentieth century its *production has unfortunately fallen away and its uses...are exceedingly limited*,<sup>242</sup> however the timber must have become available in some quantity at a reasonable price around 1903 as A.H. was not the only maker to take it up: both Romney Green and Peter Waals also exhibited items in chestnut that year at the Arts & Crafts Exhibition.<sup>243</sup> In appearance it is very similar to oak in grain and texture but is softer and lighter in weight, being more stable than oak when seasoned but not as strong.<sup>244</sup> Although A.H. used it on a limited, but very distinctive, range of furniture it is noteworthy that it continued to be available right through until the late 1920s and it is thought he was the only English maker to continue to offer it consistently over that period. (Fig.s 2-87, 2-88, 2-89, 2-90, 2-91, 2-108)

**Laurelwood.** Again according to Howard, Laurelwood (*Terminalia tomentosa*) imported from India was virtually unknown in England before the First World War but it was shown at the Empire Timber exhibition at Holland Park in 1920 and again in 1924 at the great Wembley Exhibition which

*Resulted in its general acceptance as one of the finest of all decorative woods.*

*It varies from yellowish brown to rich warm brown with dark brown streaks.*<sup>245</sup>

Heal's introduced a bedroom suite in the timber in 1925 (Fig.s 2-166, 2-167) and A.H. selected it for a bookcase for his own use (Fig. 2-135).

### **Plywood, Blockboard and Laminboard**

The author has yet to come across furniture made in Heal's Cabinet Factory that employs anything other than solid timber even for drawer bottoms despite it being clear from the 1926 inventory that they had some plywood in stock at that time. Even if none of these man-made improvements on nature's planks were used before

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<sup>241</sup> J. Evelyn, *Silva*, 1662, cited by C. Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Furniture Materials, Trades & Techniques*, Ashgate, 2000. Also the inventory of contents of the house of Sir William More of Loseley, 1556, included *table of Chestnut ...5 joyned stoles of chestnut*. Cited by Hew Reid, *The Furniture Makers*, Malthouse Press, Oxford, 1986, p 3.

<sup>242</sup> The Woodworker, *Timbers for Woodwork*, Evans Bros. 1936 (?) p 64.

<sup>243</sup> See Matthew Denney, *Arts & Crafts Furniture*, PhD thesis unpublished, BCUC, 1997.

<sup>244</sup> B.J. Rendle, *World Timbers*, E. Benn, 1969.

<sup>245</sup> Alexander L. Howard, *The Timbers of the World*, p 302.



the mid-twenties, it seems probable that laminboard and blockboard would have been used as substrates later on as J.F. Johnson wrote to the Cabinet Maker in 1929 that the *excellence of plywood and laminboard now available have contributed in a remarkable manner to ...a definite modern style.*<sup>246</sup>

#### **2.1.6.2 Quality of Construction**

There are constructional characteristics of Heal Cabinet Factory-made furniture which distinguish it particularly from Arts & Crafts furniture made by the great Cotswold makers but also from mass produced furniture of the same period. The most evident differences in detail are the very precisely executed lapped ‘London’ dovetails of the drawer sides such as might be found on the finest eighteenth century antiques and which compare to the wider cut pins of Barnsley’s work for example. Cotswold furniture made a feature of revealed construction with dovetails and other joints being visible and becoming something of a display of virtuosity. Heal’s professional cabinet makers came from the tradition which tended to hide constructional details, not needing to show off their ability, but close inspection reveals that the quality was consistently high. Accuracy is evident from the tell-tale marks of the cabinet makers’ marking gauges which can still be detected but restorations undertaken by the author over the last few years have also enabled hidden constructional details to be inspected that confirm that quality was not merely on the surface but went deep. The cutting of joints and standards of construction were high even where this would never be seen. It is interesting to note that the hidden lapped dovetail which the Heal makers used was originally developed by cabinet makers trying to overcome the problems associated with glueing veneers over endgrain. By sinking the joints below the surface these difficulties of long-term adhesion were overcome. Ironically, working in solid oak, Heal had no need to hide joints in this way but, for the craftsmen, lapped dovetails represented the best tradition of quality work, and so they were used.<sup>247</sup>

Heal’s use of smaller sections of timber than those used in much of the ‘over-engineered’ Cotswold-style furniture probably also partly reflects a quality cabinet

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<sup>246</sup> Cabinet Maker, 23.02.1929, published a letter from J.F. Johnson, Cabinet Buyer for Heal’s

<sup>247</sup> Hew Reid, *The Furniture Makers*, Malthouse Press, Oxford, 1986, p 6.

making tradition but can also be ascribed to A.H.'s sense of proportion based on a detailed study of historical precedents.

As has been discussed elsewhere the limited amount of machinery available in the Factory means that furniture with machine-cut dovetails but still bearing a Heal label, would not have been constructed in the Cabinet Factory. A.H.'s reputation as a designer of machine-made furniture cannot realistically be said to be based on the handmade output of his own factory but has to be sought amongst the designs made for the firm by other manufacturers. (see below page 252).

### **2.1.6.3 Surface Finishing**

#### **The “unfinished” look.**

By “unfinished” is not meant incomplete but furniture that has not had the layers of polish applied that were typical in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was a part of the Arts & Crafts doctrine that abhorred the furniture trade's tendency to make furniture look something that it was not. The application of exotic veneers glued onto inexpensive substrates could make items appear better than they were and failing this much could be achieved with stains and layers of French polish to deceive the eye – the antithesis of integrity. In 1901 *The Studio* even carried the statement: *To hate the French polisher is the beginning of wisdom.*<sup>248</sup> Integrity of construction, as epitomised by the work of Sidney Barnsley, was carried through by the Arts & Crafts movement, from the use of solid timber and revealed construction, into furniture left “in the white” (i.e. with no surface finish applied) sometimes straight from the cabinet-maker's plane, or simply lightly waxed to bring out the colour and to give a slight sheen. Similarly C.F.A Voysey specified that his chairs should be oiled slightly.<sup>249</sup> This was the “unfinished” look that typifies much Arts & Crafts furniture that was also partly inspired by earlier 19th century reform movements seeking to improve health conditions that favoured scrubbed tops. (see Chapter 1).

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<sup>248</sup> *The Studio* 1901, cited by John Collier, *The Cabinet Maker 1880-1980, a century of wood finishing*, p 150.

<sup>249</sup> John Brandon-Jones & Others, *C.F.A. Voysey, Architect & Designer 1857-1941*, Lund Humphries 1978. reproduction of dining chair design C46, March 1902.

Much of Heal's furniture produced in the early part of the century looked as though it was produced in line with this Arts & Crafts ideal of taking the work straight from the cabinet maker's bench and just applying a little wax before it went to the customer's home. In fact recent restorations have revealed that not only did A.H. have the benefit of skilled cabinet makers but also experienced polishers.<sup>250</sup> Oak surfaces were not untreated but were sealed with shellac to protect the wood from dirt and also to bring out the colour before it was waxed. This is known as "fadding in" – i.e. applying a couple of thin coats of shellac that remain matt and do not build up into a shiny French polish. To the inexperienced eye it would look "unfinished" but would have the advantage of protecting the timber from grime. Much of the furniture seems to have been treated in this way, although when it came to reducing prices as much as possible, even Heal's offered their Cottage Furniture range "in the white".

#### Fumed Oak.

From the 1890s through to the First World War most of the oak was "fumed" (exposed to ammonia fumes to permanently darken the surface through chemical reaction). This treatment can be used to produce a dark oak but A.H. appears to have used it sparingly to give a golden oak colour through a relatively brief exposure to the fumes. The chestnut ranges were similarly treated. Although fashions changed and no new 'fumed-oak suites' were introduced after 1918, a few of the pre-war designs lingered on until the mid-twenties being offered in this finish. As discussed above much of the fumed oak looks as though it is left unfinished but was in fact sealed with shellac. Despite the change in fashion Heal's still retained the facility to produce fumed oak and as part of the rebuilding works even installed a new fuming cupboard as late as 1936.<sup>251</sup>

#### Weathered Oak/Limed Oak.

Between the Wars "Weathered Oak" became the finish that was inextricably linked with Heal furniture and superseded the fumed oak finish. John Gloag in his

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<sup>250</sup> The author's restoration of a '404' bedroom suite and items from the 'John Dawson' range both revealed traces of shellac.

<sup>251</sup> See Board Minutes, 12.08.1936. AAD/1978/2/9.

*Short Dictionary of Furniture* describes how Heal's developed the technique. The entry for Weathered Oak reads as follows:

*The term was invented by Heal & Son Limited, a London firm of furniture makers, either during or just after the first world war, to describe the effect of a process for treating the surface of oak, which they had perfected. In this process, lime is used, among various other substances, to give an appearance similar to that of oak that has never been stained and has been allowed to weather and thus acquire a natural patina. Weathered oak is finished with a wax polish and kept in condition with polishing cream. The term has since been adopted by various makers to include such a variety of finishes and shades that an exact definition of its meaning is now impossible. (See also Limed Oak.)*

His entry for Limed Oak simply says:

*Oak that has been pickled with a coating of lime, which is subsequently brushed from the surface, though it is usually allowed to remain in the grain. Limed oak surfaces are generally left unpolished.*<sup>252</sup>

A.H. was given a copy of this dictionary by its author when it was published. He studied it closely and subsequently wrote suggesting Gloag should have included a definition of a Knole sofa, so it seems a fair assumption that he was happy with the description of Weathered Oak or this would have been raised too. However what the process was that Heal's polishers had perfected remains something of a mystery as does the difference between Weathered Oak and Limed Oak. The technique of using plaster of Paris, Whiting or lime as a grain filler was not new and, to cite a couple of examples, it was mentioned by Stalker & Parker in their *Treatise of Japanning & Varnishing* published in 1668, and in *The French Polisher's Manual* from 1885.<sup>253</sup> What was perhaps new was the idea of leaving this grain filler exposed as a contrast to the colour of the timber and in fact opening out the grain in order to obtain more contrast. The *Cabinet Maker* commented on an A.H. secretaire exhibited at an Arts & Crafts Exhibition, with a hint of sarcasm, that:

*what is now called 'weathered oak' from the circumstance, possibly, that the weather has nothing to do with its appearance, ...has the pleasant grey effect so*

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<sup>252</sup> John Gloag, *A Short Dictionary of Furniture*, Allen & Unwin, 1952.

<sup>253</sup> John Stalker & George Parker, *A Treatise of Japanning & Varnishing*, first published 1668, reproduced by Alec Tiranti Ltd, 1998, p 34. Also *A French Polisher's Manual*, by A French Polisher, published by Spon, 1885, facsimile edition by The Restoration Publishing Company, 2002.

*much admired – looks and is new and clean.*<sup>254</sup>

Heal's 'Weathered Oak' was achieved by working into the grain, plaster of Paris mixed with methylated spirits to aid penetration and slow down the hardening off process – this formula was passed down to the author by John Beadle, ex-managing director of Heal Furniture Ltd – and is a variation on the process generally known in the trade for 'limed oak'.<sup>255</sup> As Gloag stated there was no fixed definition of these terms and 'Weathered Oak' was adopted by other manufacturers to mean different things. For example E. Gomme Ltd of High Wycombe, already a major furniture manufacturer, in the late 1920s used the term 'Weathered Oak' for a dark oak finish (see Fig. 2-29) and Clive Edwards in his *Encyclopedia* adopts this definition rather than the Heal's paler oak version so it seems likely that this was more general in the trade.<sup>256</sup> Unfortunately for historians and restorers, the deduction that Heal's 'Weathered Oak' was just their version of what the rest of the trade called 'Limed Oak' is confused by the fact that Heal's still sold products in 'Limed Oak' as well. It can only be assumed that these were bought in from suppliers who did not know what the Heal full 'Weathered Oak' formula was. Restorations carried out by the author suggest that to get the desired effect Heal's were not only applying the plaster of Paris but also using a light stain to warm up the colour of the oak as well and it is the combined effect that was called 'Weathered Oak'.

From a study of the stockbooks it appears that the finish was introduced in 1922 – certainly the name is used there for the first time then.

Today there are various methods used to produce a "Limed Oak" finish, the simplest and most popular of which is the application of a liming wax. Another involves the use of oil-based paint but the traditional method is that of plaster of Paris which is messy and time consuming but gives a most pleasing appearance and less of a 'smeared look' than that often produced with liming wax. It is also less brilliantly white than the wax finish and so more in keeping with the look of the period.

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<sup>254</sup> Cabinet Maker, *The 14<sup>th</sup> Arts & Crafts Exhibition*, 27.10.1928.

<sup>255</sup> Although plaster of Paris and water was used in the trade and this method is now generally taught, the use of methylated spirits was not unique to Heal's. H.T. Davey, *Wood Finishing*, Pitman, 1940, p 31, wrote: *To convert the plaster into paste, water or methylated spirit is commonly used, although the latter is to be preferred. Water tends to raise the grain rather more than the spirit.*

<sup>256</sup> Clive Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Furniture Materials, Trades & Techniques*, Ashgate, 2000, p 239.



Fig. 2-28. example of AH designed furniture in “Colonial Mahogany” (Ruskin Decorative Arts).

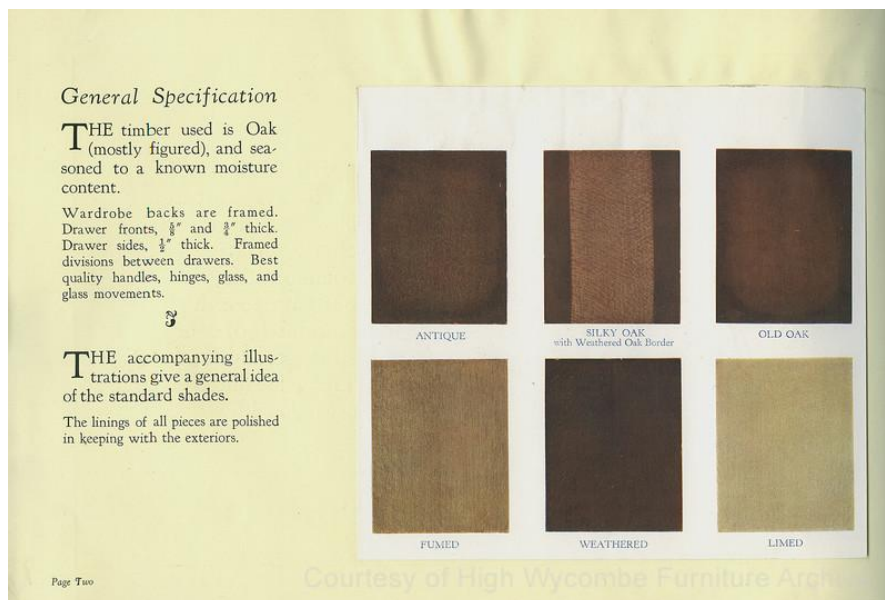


Fig. 2-29 Page from E. Gomme 1929 catalogue showing “weathered oak” (bottom row centre) as a dark oak colour. “Limed Oak”, bottom right corresponds more closely to Heal’s “Weathered Oak”. (High Wycombe Furniture Archive).

### Comb Painting

The comb painting of geometric patterns was a technique developed around 1918 (possibly earlier) by Shoreditch Technical Institute and based on earlier furniture decorating traditions. It was done at the request of the Design and Industries Association, the campaigning group with the slogan 'Fitness for Purpose', that A.H. and Hamilton Temple Smith had founded with Harold Stabler a few years before. According to the Studio Year Book for 1919 in a report on Cottage Furniture:

*The Design & Industries Association has been doing some interesting pioneer work...It has approached the London County Council authorities and obtained permission for two of the Technical Institutes to carry out experiments in the construction and finish of simple furniture suitable for cottages...The designs of the furniture were prepared by Mr Percy A. Wells...two bedroom sets have been made in deal by cheaper methods, and they have been painted at the Brixton School by a process known as combing.*<sup>257</sup>

Percy Wells, Head of the Cabinet Department of the LCC Shoreditch Technical Institute, was himself a founding member of the DIA and had exhibited at Arts & Crafts Exhibition society shows, so this was not just an attempt to find less expensive ways of producing furniture but the aim was to get better designed furniture produced for the public. As Stuart Evans has pointed out it was all part of the movement produce a new generation of *rational, economical, hygienic and attractive* homes for working people after the war.<sup>258</sup> Comb painting (using a variety of combs on wet paint to reveal the contrasting colour of previous coats and thus create patterns) harnessed many of the traditional skills and techniques of the woodgrain imitator but simplified them and most importantly (for the DIA) produced a finish that was not pretending to be something else.

The LCC gave permission for the designs developed by the Technical Institutes to be produced and put on the market by any manufacturer. Percy Wells, addressing the Incorporated Institute of British Decorators, stressed that the work of the colleges had been purely experimental, even though models had been on display up and down

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<sup>257</sup> Studio Year Book, *On Cottage Furniture*, 1919, p 76.

<sup>258</sup> Stuart Evans, *Furniture for Small Houses*, Furniture History Vol. XLII (2006) p 193.

the country, and it had required Heal's and Oetzmans to actually put them into production. Such a project was evidently close to A.H.'s heart as it coincided with his continuing interest in Cottage Furniture for his less well-off clients but also with his firm conviction that colour on furniture was an important area to develop. It was acknowledged at the time that A.H. had already *done so much by way of experiment, and ... successfully demonstrated the charm and interest of colour in furniture.*<sup>259</sup> A Decorating Studio had operated within the business since about 1909 painting and decorating special pieces of furniture (see below) and one of the early post-war exhibitions in the Mansard Gallery was dedicated to 'Painted Furniture'.

Strictly speaking comb painting was not a Cabinet Factory finish but one that was applied mostly to the products of the Coote factory but it would appear that Heal's and Oetzmans & Co were among the few who adopted the idea so it is worth recording and illustrating here (Fig.s 2-30, 2-32). Ambrose believed in it to such an extent that he had a comb painted bedroom installed in his own home in 1920.<sup>260</sup>

#### Other decorative finishes

Other types of painted decoration were rarely applied to the products of Heal's own Cabinet Factory, yet it was a way of finishing furniture that very much attracted A.H. to the extent that he employed it regularly throughout his career, but mostly on models made by other suppliers. Naturally there was a long historical precedent for such decoration that A.H. was no doubt aware of and was inspired by. He was not the only designer of his epoch to follow such precedent. Some attempts were more successful than others – for example a dresser designed by W.R. Lethaby and decorated by Alfred H. Powell moved the correspondent of *The Sphere* to comment in 1906:

*The meretricious essay into phantasy (sic)...suggestive of parsley sauce, were better left alone.*<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> *The Decorator*, 22.07.1922. Report of the meeting of Incorporated Institute of British Decorators addressed by P.A. Wells on *Painted Woodwork and Furniture Old & New*.

<sup>260</sup> Illustrated in *The Queen*, 28.07.1926 p 16.

<sup>261</sup> *The Sphere*, 27.01.1906.





Fig. 2-30. C788 comb painted dresser ca. 1920.(AAD)



Fig. 2-31. Decorated yellow cabinet, illustrated in *Furnishing Trades Organiser*, July 1920 (AAD)

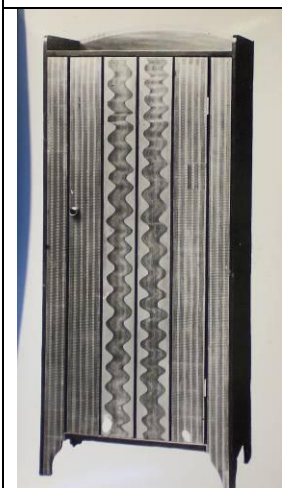


Fig. 2-32. Comb painted wardrobe ca 1920 (AAD)



Fig. 2-33. Black wardrobe decorated (AAD)



Fig. 2-34. Decorated sideboard (Country Seat). See also Fig.2-200.



Fig. 2-35 detail of painted decoration (Country Seat).

A.H. used the talents of Miss Hindshaw to decorate his furniture, who, according to *The Touchstone Magazine* was for several years a teacher of art in the L.C.C. Central School of Arts and Crafts. She started working for Heal's part time, after school hours, ca 1909 and a fourposter bedstead and a set of bedroom furniture, designed by A.H. and decorated by Miss Hindshaw, was displayed at the 1910 Arts and Crafts Exhibition. As the firm expanded she was given a studio to work in and an assistant. By 1920 this had grown to eight assistants: *most of whom come from the school in which she teaches*. They could carry out comb painted patterns as described above or decorate plain-painted furniture with borders or sprigs of colour as required (see Fig.s 2-30 to 35).<sup>262</sup> Occasionally they might be called upon to carry out larger projects such as the front of a new millinery shop decorated with a *somewhat futuristic design* by Miss Fisher and Miss Gray in 1920<sup>263</sup>

An indication of the amount of work involved in achieving these decorative finishes may be glimpsed from the number of hours work budgeted for in the cost price. For example, in 1930, on wardrobe No.886, covered in vellum and decorated, Miss Dix put in 36 hours, Scuffell 40 hours, and Miss Hindshaw 21 hours of work for a job that sold for £87 10s. 0d. However in 1932 Miss Dix was replaced by Miss Moore on this particular job who seems to have halved the time of that part of the operation. The idea of decorated vellum appears to have been developed in 1927 when a pair of bedsteads were produced and it was reported in the press that *Heal & Son were the originators of a new method...vellum stretched on a special plywood and hand decorated in Indian ink, in gay but quite simple colour*.<sup>264</sup>

In the mid-twenties a luxury-look was conceived that required wooden furniture to be decorated with silver gilt and sometimes painted with motifs as well. Much of this work was sub-contracted to Rowley.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Marguerite Wilkinson, *New English Furniture*, in *The Touchstone Magazine*, USA, December 1920.

<sup>263</sup> *Evening News*, 27.04.1920.

<sup>264</sup> *The Queen*, March 1927.

<sup>265</sup> Stock no. 894, bedroom suite, silver gilt & decorated, Miller and Rowley. 1926/27 bedroom stockbook.

## 2.2 Made by Heal's : The Cabinet Factory Output

### 2.2.1 The First Designs 1895-1903

Having trained as a cabinet maker (including a spell in Plucknett's drawing office) it was natural that Ambrose Heal should turn to designing furniture for the family business that was, in the mid-eighteen-nineties, selling a considerable quantity of bedroom suites but nothing that reflected the latest design thinking of those who were part of the Arts and Crafts Movement. It would appear that he started designing furniture around 1895 as the Archive contains one of his designs for a settle with this date on it and the motto "Rest not Rust".<sup>266</sup> One mahogany cabinet survives that is also dated 1895 which was made to celebrate A.H.'s marriage to his first wife Alice Rose Ripplingille in that year. It has a very wide almost flat cornice and other architectural details that are reminiscent of Cecil Brewer's design for the Mary Ward Settlement building, submitted in that year, so it is possible that it was in part Brewer's work. However these same details appear on other slightly later furniture that has been ascribed to A.H. (see Jeremy Cooper) so it seems just as likely that this first piece too was his own work, albeit very heavily influenced by Brewer.<sup>267</sup> However the detailing and proportions of the doors on the lower part with relatively wide framing are reminiscent of cabinets made by the wholesale manufacturer J.S. Henry, in very similar mahogany, leading one to conclude that A.H. probably commissioned Henry to make this and other similar pieces around this period.<sup>268</sup>

More central to the lifeblood of the Heal family firm were A.H.'s designs for *Wooden Bedsteads with Hygienic Iron-Lath Bottoms*. Pictures of the showrooms around this period and illustrations in the catalogues confirm that they offered a large range of iron and brass bedsteads but almost no wooden bedsteads which had been

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<sup>266</sup> Pencil sketch design for settle to be made in "painted pine or sycamore". AAD/1994/16/829.

<sup>267</sup> Jeremy Cooper, *Victorian and Edwardian Furniture and Interiors*, Thames & Hudson, 1987, p 240.

<sup>268</sup> J.S. Henry had a factory at 287-9 Old Street, London, E.C. and his name and address appear in A.H.'s address book (started in July 1894). See AAD/1994/16/1492.

According to Pauline Agius, *British Furniture 1880-1915*, Antique Collectors Club 1978, p98 John Sollie Henry was in business from 1880 until after 1910 and *concentrated on the new and the unusual*. By 1896 he advertised himself as Designer of Quaint and Artistic Furniture. A labelled J.S. Henry mahogany cabinet with similar doors to the Heal piece is in the Victoria & Albert Museum collection and another was sold in 2006 by Liberty.

effectively eliminated in the interests of hygiene. A.H., no doubt in conjunction with his father, put together a range of wooden bedsteads that overcame this objection by combining wooden head and footboards with bug-resistant iron frames. Offered as a basic model with iron laths, these beds could be made more comfortable by the substitution of a Staples-patent-spiral-spring-bottom, the U.K. patent rights for which Ambrose Heal senior had acquired in 1895. The records are not explicit as to whether these wooden bedsteads were made by the woodworking section of Heal's bedding factory or manufactured elsewhere but probably a mixture of both. (Figs 2-36, 2-37, 2-38, 2-39)

A.H. recalled many years later how his aspirations were given an unexpected boost at the time of the 1896 Arts & Crafts Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries. He had persuaded his father to put some of his designs on display in the shop window.

*One day during the exhibition a well-known artist-craftsman went in to Mr Heal senior and said, "Do you know you have some furniture in your window as good as anything at the Arts & Crafts show?"*

*"This was rather a shock for father. But it set him thinking, and in the end he relented a little and gave me more scope."*<sup>269</sup>

What is clear is that bedstead makers would not have been skilled enough to make cabinet furniture so that when Ambrose turned to designing bedrooms he was forced to look to outside sources.<sup>270</sup> For instance in **1897**, rather than turning to J.S. Henry or one of the firm's traditional suppliers to manufacture the first bedroom suites he had designed, Heal approached one of the leaders of the Arts & Crafts Movement, C.R. Ashbee, presumably because he felt that here was someone who would understand what was required. Ashbee, an architect by training, had set up the Guild of Handicrafts in 1888 as a socialist co-operative of East London craftsmen, that was part school, part workshop, that is perhaps now best known for its silverware and jewellery made to Ashbee's designs and for moving out to the rural idyll of Chipping Campden in the Cotswolds in 1902.

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<sup>269</sup> The Star, Philip Johnson, *Putting Art into Big Business, Sir Ambrose Heal*, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1936.

<sup>270</sup> Pat Kirkham, *The London Furniture Trade, 1700 -1870*, Furniture History Society Journal, July 1988, p. 11, wrote: *Within furniture making, the less skilled crafts, such as bedstead making and chairmaking were at the bottom of the hierarchy. Near the top came cabinet-making which was considered superior to any wood working craft except carving.*



Fig. 2-36. Wooden bedstead No. 102 (AAD)



Fig. 2-37. Wooden bedstead inlaid with pewter No. 117 (AAD)



Fig. 2-38. Wooden bedstead No.103 (AAD)



Fig. 2-39. Wooden bedstead No.124 (AAD)

When A.H. went to Ashbee in 1897, however, the Guild was installed at Essex House, Mile End Road, London and had a well-established cabinet-making workshop. It is interesting to speculate what influence Ashbee and his makers had on A.H.'s designs. Alan Crawford, who wrote the definitive book on Ashbee, suggests that up to that period Ashbee's own furniture was *uncertain... and heavy in its proportion* but maturing, and that the output *was much like that of any small trade workshop*. A few years before, the woodshop had been enlarged from four to ten men and at the Arts & Crafts Exhibition of 1896 the Guild displayed five pieces of furniture that would have ensured their capabilities were well known. 1897 was the year that Ashbee worked with M. H. Baillie Scott on the interior of a palace in Darmstadt, Germany, for the Grand Duke of Hesse, and it was this experience

*...that finally settled the direction of his work.*

*It was a squared-off style full of right angles; cabinets were treated as boxes on legs; legs were more often square in plan and met the body without brackets; and almost all furniture was built up of simple planks... not worked or moulded any further...* <sup>271</sup>

Certainly A.H.'s first designs were in many ways similar to this description in a box-like, not particularly elegant way, and contained a number of details that are also to be found in Ashbee's furniture. One of the Ashbee albums held at the National Art Library contains a photograph of a cupboard chest that is reminiscent of AH's St Ives suite, having a hinged flap and typical hammered strap hinges and the indications are that this dates from circa 1903.<sup>272</sup> (Fig. 2-43, 2-44) A.H.'s Newlyn and Bushey suites both featured a curiously shaped bracket detail that was also echoed in the mirror frame. A.H.'s sketch design for the latter survives, but it would appear that this is another detail that Ashbee also re-used at a later date, because a green stained bedroom suite, attributed to the Guild of Handicraft, was recently sold through Libertys with exactly this feature. (Fig.s 2-40, 2-41, 2-42, 2-43).

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<sup>271</sup> Alan Crawford, *C.R. Ashbee, Architect, Designer & Romantic Socialist*, Yale University Press, 1985, pp 279-295.

<sup>272</sup> This piece (or another identical to it) was sold through the Millinery Works, Islington in 2007.



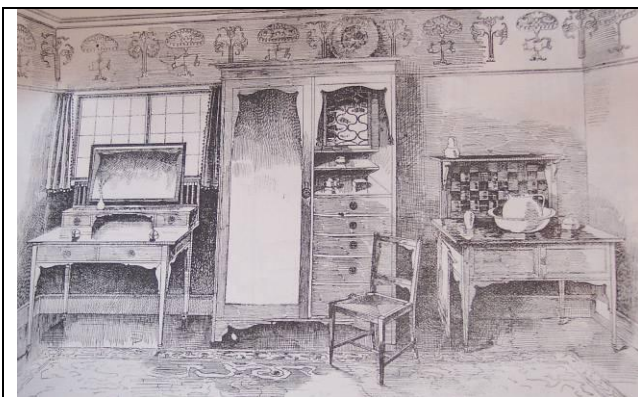


Fig.2-40. The 'Bushey' bedroom suite in mahogany illustrated in Heal & Son catalogue 1897. The 'Bushey' was initially manufactured by the Guild of Handicraft. (AAD).

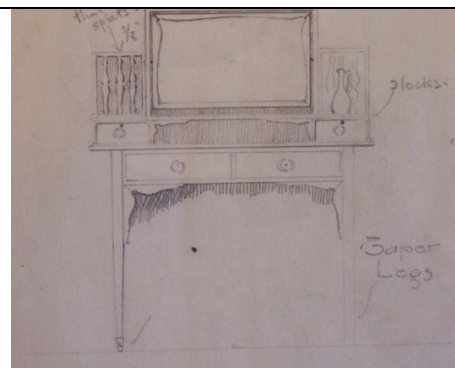


Fig. 2-41. Ambrose Heal's pencil design for the dressing table of the 'Bushey' suite. Note shape of mirror surround and brackets to legs. (AAD).



Fig. 2-42. 'Newlyn' dressing table in fumed oak. The 'Newlyn' suite was also initially manufactured by the Guild of Handicraft in 1897 although this example is a slightly simplified version made in Heal's own cabinet factory subsequently. Note shape of mirror surround.(author) (upper part is a modern reconstruction by author)



Fig. 2-42. Dressing table in green stained oak sold by Liberty in 2005, attributed to "C.R. Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft". Note shape of mirror surround. (Liberty)



Fig. 2-43. 'St Ives' wardrobe, 1897. Ambrose Heal. (Millinery Works).



Fig. 2-44. Guild of Handicraft wardrobe, 1903. C.R. Ashbee (Millinery Works)

On this rather scanty evidence one is tempted to conclude that if there was an influence it went from A.H. to Ashbee rather than vice-versa, however unlikely this may seem.<sup>273</sup>

Three suites of bedroom furniture, manufactured by the Guild of Handicrafts to A.H.'s designs, (216 Newlyn fumigated oak, 217 Bushey mahogany and 222 St Ives fumed oak – also available in ash stained green) were put on display in Tottenham Court Road in 1897 (Fig.s 2-45,2-46, 2-47). The St Ives suite, made up of a 3ft 6in wardrobe, a 3ft 6in toilet table, a 3ft washstand and two chairs (made by Cox), sold for £19 19s 0d and proved an instant success as the first suite was sold in April and by the end of the year 16 complete suites had been sold in oak with a further 5 in green ash. The other two designs were more expensive, reflecting their size, and may have appeared only in July (even though their model numbers suggest the reverse), but four sets of each of these were also sold in the year.

Even though this arrangement seems to have worked well it evidently did not satisfy A.H.'s needs or ambitions. One can imagine that he might have been keen to introduce other designs but found himself frustrated because the Guild of Handicraft workshop was fully occupied with the Grand Duke of Hesse's project.<sup>274</sup> Whatever the reason, A.H., encouraged by the success of his first designs, was able to persuade his father and uncle to invest in premises, men and, a little later, machinery to create their own cabinet factory. In October 1897 premises were rented in Castle Mews and C.V. Adams, up until then Ashbee's foreman cabinet maker, was recruited to manage it. Six months later this little unit was transferred to occupy part of the Tottenham Court Road premises in Alfred Mews.

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<sup>273</sup> V&A National Art Library, Ashbee photo Albums, RCLL42. For A.H.'s bedroom suite design sketch see AAD/1994/16/. For Guild of Handicraft suite see Liberty Arts & Crafts May 2005 exhibition catalogue, p 12.

<sup>274</sup> A.H. in his speech to the Royal Designers for Industry in 1952 recalled how he had been having difficulty getting his furniture made.



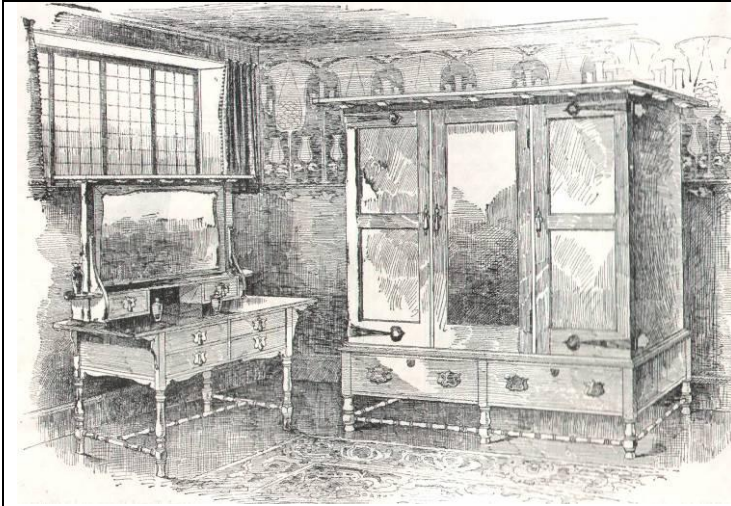


Fig. 2-45. '216' "Newlyn" suite as made by Guild of Handicraft, 1897. Subsequently simplified and made by Cabinet Factory. (AAD).

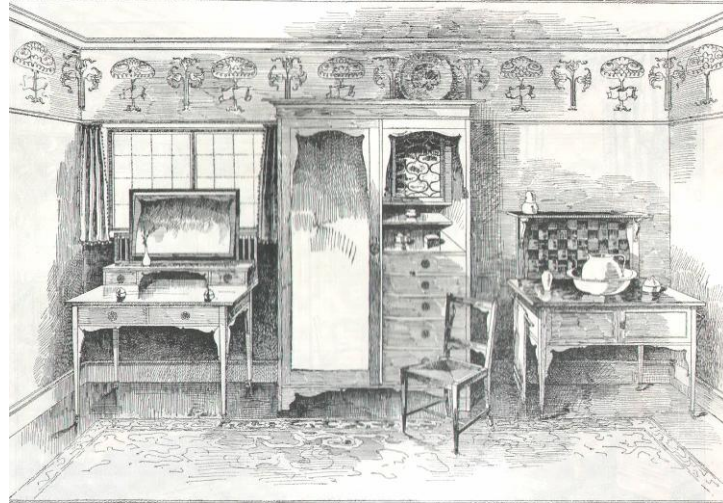


Fig. 2-46. '217' "Bushey" suite as made by Guild of Handicraft, 1897 and subsequently by Cabinet Factory. (AAD).

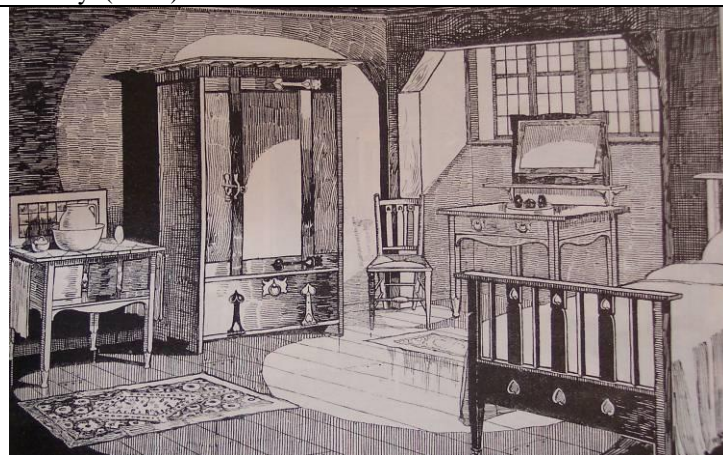


Fig. 2-47. '222' "St. Ives" suite as made by Guild of Handicraft, 1897 and subsequently by Cabinet Factory. (AAD).

The reason for this manoeuvre is not clear unless at the beginning it was intended that it should be a completely separate business. This could be a possibility because, in 1895, Ambrose Heal senior had purchased the British rights for the patent developed by an American, John Staples, to improve the support of springs in upholstery. His second son Harold (1876-1949) was put in charge of what was initially a tiny workshop under a railway arch in Deptford but which he developed to become a thriving independent bed-manufacturing business – Staples & Co.<sup>275</sup> Could it have been the father's intention to put A.H. junior in charge of an independent cabinet factory to be run in parallel? This hypothesis seems unlikely however as A.H. was the obvious candidate to follow in the footsteps of his father and uncle to run the existing retail and bed-manufacturing business, Heal & Son, when they retired. Harris Heal had no children and none of Alfred Brewer's sons had entered the business so A.H., as Ambrose senior's eldest son, was the first in line.

Whatever the thinking, having established a workshop, it was necessary for A.H. to design more furniture for it to make and there is no suggestion at this stage that anyone else contributed designs. The new designs produced by the Cabinet Factory can be traced year by year. In **1898**, in addition to the three suites made by the Guild of Handicraft the previous year, designs for a further four bedroom furniture suites were introduced. The '240' fumed oak suite (which is most notable for its longevity and the fact that the front apron on the wardrobe was of a shape that was to become a typical feature of A.H.'s work for many years thereafter) was the least expensive at 16 guineas (Fig.s 2-48, 2-49). As well as a walnut suite (249) there was the 'Chelsea' fumed oak suite (242) (Fig.s 2-50, 2-51) but most remarkable was the '246' Pewter Inlaid suite, subsequently known as the 'Fine Feathers' suite (Fig.s 2-52, 2-53). This last, reflecting the amount of work involved with the pewter inlays as well as the particularly fine work required to make the different components and the mahogany used, was priced at £60 and none were sold in that first year. It is a design

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<sup>275</sup> See Peter Brunskill, *Fifty Years at Staples Corner*, Staples & Co, 1976. Also conversations with David and Christopher Heal, sons of Robert G Heal who was Chairman of Staples following Harold's death, suggest that Harold Heal was an even more awkward character than his elder brother Ambrose. Family lore recounts that Ambrose senior was obliged to set up Harold in business separately to keep him out of the way of Ambrose junior! For a description of Harold Heal see John Mortimer, *Clinging to the Wreckage*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1982.

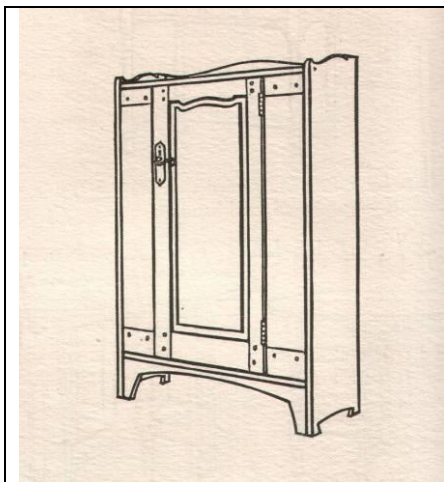


Fig. 2-48. '240' Hanging cupboard, 1898.



Fig. 2-49. '240' washstand and toilet table, 1898.

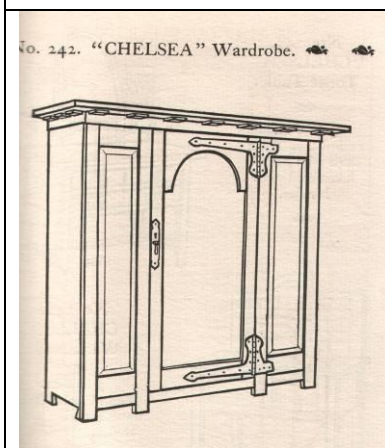


Fig. 2-50. '242' "Chelsea" wardrobe, 1898.



Fig. 2-51. '242' "Chelsea" toilet table and washstand.



Fig. 2-52. '246' "Fine Feathers" wardrobe 1898. (Millinery Works)



Fig. 2-53. '246' "Fine Feathers" toilet table, 1898. (Millinery Works).

that through the tall narrow fielded panels of the doors stresses verticality in a Glasgow School manner. This is also emphasised by the central portion with its impression of a high chest surmounted by a small recessed cupboard. It is surprising to discover that in reality this wardrobe is only 5ft 8in tall.

In addition to the suites a few individual items were introduced: the '390' fumed oak wardrobe with yin/yang hammered steel hinges (Fig.s 2-54, 2-55), a couple of bureaux (303 and 304) with long strap hinges, (Fig.s 2-56, 2-57) one on a stand, the other above a cupboard, and a little two drawer writing table to match the Newlyn suite (Fig. 2-58).

It is worth recording that having taken back his bedroom suite designs to make in his own factory, A.H. did not abandon the Guild of Handicraft completely and in 1898 they made eleven '235 Mansfield' 3ft 6in fumed oak gents' wardrobes, which was a new design introduced that year, but from 1899 they no longer appear as a supplier to the firm.

As an indication of the seriousness of A.H.'s commitment to making his own designs a special catalogue was printed in 1898 in which his designs were illustrated by drawings by C.H.B. Quennell, architect and draughtsman, around an article by Gleeson White editor of *The Studio* (see 3.3.1.1).

Right from the beginning special orders made up a significant part of the factory's output. On the whole these tended to be variations on existing designs but some things bore no relationship to stock items. In 1898 the most notable special order was for furniture for the Mary Ward Settlement building (then known as the Passmore Edwards Settlement) that had been designed by Cecil Brewer, which included a large twelve-sided library table and a conductor's stand.<sup>276</sup> (Fig. 2-59)

The designs which formed the basis of Heal's own range in that first year of production had varying degrees of success. The '249' walnut suite at £40 never took off and was sold off the next year and not repeated; the rather quirky '217' Bushey in mahogany limped on for a few years and few were sold, but most of the others formed part of the range for nearly ten years.

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<sup>276</sup> Photographs of the table are dated 3/98, so this 5ft 9in x 4ft 4in gate-leg table in fumed oak for the Passmore Edwards Settlement was one of the items made whilst the factory was at Castle Mews.





Fig. 2-54. '390' combination wardrobe, 1898. (author)



Fig. 2-55. '390' hinge detail, 1898. (author).

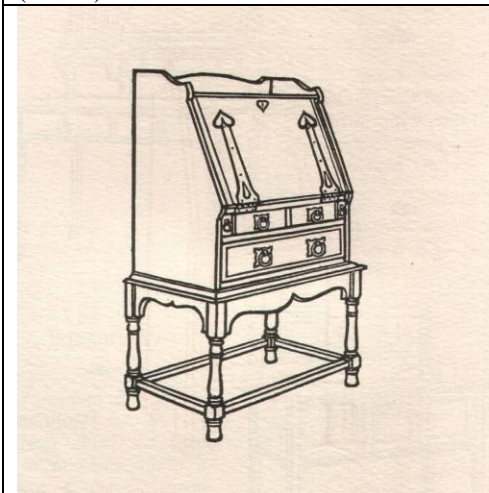


Fig. 2-56. '303' bureau on stand, 1898.

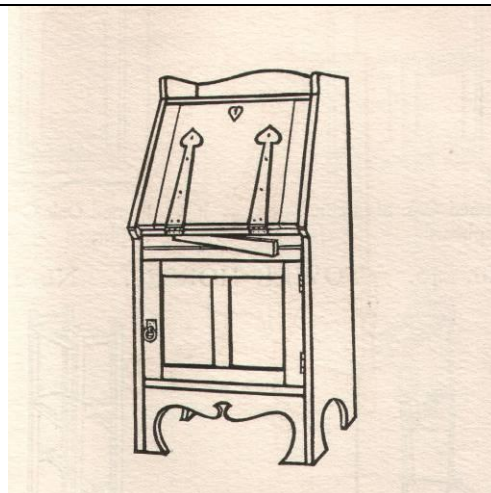


Fig. 2-57. '304' bureau, 1898.



Fig. 2-58. '305' writing table, 1898.



Fig. 2-59. Large gate-leg table for Common Room, Passmore Edwards Settlement, March 1898.(AAD)

The best seller was the '222' St. Ives suite in fumed oak of which some 200 were sold between 1897 and 1910 (when it was finally dropped) although, in common with the other ranges, 90% of these sales had happened before the end of 1902. The most notable single order was for 27 sets of the St Ives design sent to Sweden in 1899 to furnish the Hotel Standard in Norrköping, Sweden. The '222' St Ives bedroom was also available in green stained ash but this was much less popular; approximately thirty suites were made in this finish before it was dropped in 1904. The '240' range in fumed oak (which never seems to have been dignified with a name) was also selected for the Hotel Standard and 27 sets of this were sent to Sweden.<sup>277</sup> Why this suite was kept in the collection until the mid-twenties is unclear as total sales of the cupboard amounted to 118 of which 88% occurred before 1903 and the last one sold seems to have been in 1912. The '216' Newlyn suite proved popular despite its size (6ft wardrobe) and price (£45), remaining in production until 1908 and here again 86% of the 100 or so suites made were sold before 1903. The rather heavy-looking '242' Chelsea suite was less popular with only 35 wardrobes being sold before it was discontinued in 1910 and 77% of these were sold before 1903. The more spectacular '246' Fine Feathers suite of mahogany inlaid with pewter was understandably a rare bird and 22 were sold between 1899 and 1907. It became available in oak in 1900 of which 25 sets were sold before that too was discontinued in 1907. For both versions in excess of 70% were sold before the end of 1902.

With its interesting metalwork the '390' wardrobe proved fairly popular as 49 were sold before it was discontinued in 1903. Production figures for the bureaux '303' and '304' were both limited to the low twenties before being dropped in 1908/9 but the '305' writing table proved more popular with a total of 65 being sold over twenty years.

In 1899 two further new bedroom suite designs were added to the Heal factory range: the very simple '147' available in mahogany (also later in fumed oak and walnut) (Fig. 2-60) and '282' in both fumed and green stained oak (Fig. 2-61). The latter shows that A.H. at this stage was still trying to find his own style and here he had a

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<sup>277</sup> For a description of the substantial order for the Hotel Standard, and how it was obtained see Oliver Heal, *Ambrose Heal and Sweden 1899*, Furniture History Society journal, 2004.

go at the then commercially popular “Quaint style”.<sup>278</sup> More firmly based on traditional lines was the ‘401’ chest on stand in fumed oak reminiscent of late 17th century examples, but using Arts and Crafts style metalwork, showing that he was not only aware of current design trends but also historical precedent.

As already mentioned the major event of the year was A.H.’s success in obtaining an order to furnish the Standard Hotel in Norrköping, Sweden, which must have done much to establish his credibility within the business. The factory was well established and busy, branching out to make gateleg tables (464 and 465) (Fig. 2-62) illustrated in the revised catalogue, as well as a little occasional table (462) which sold well for 1 guinea. In addition to the substantial quantity of hatshelves made for the Hotel in Sweden a notable special order was for a large fumed oak sideboard and seat made for the Worshipful Company of Carpenters’ Hall in the City of London which, sadly, appears to have been destroyed by fire in World War II.<sup>279</sup> The 54 benches with heart-shaped splats made for Mr Ringborg’s hotel in Sweden were manufactured by Heynes as presumably the Cabinet Factory was fully taken up at the time with the bedroom suites.

Another notable event was A.H. exhibiting, for the first time, furniture at the Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society’s 6th exhibition towards the end of the year. In addition to an oak bureau (probably 308 – see 1900) and a mahogany wardrobe inlaid with pewter (probably 246 Fine Feathers) he showed a painted deal Cottagers’ Chest that had been made by Coote (see Key Suppliers) (Fig. 2-191). The wardrobe, made by G. Ravenscroft senior in the Factory, was sold for £37 0s.0d.<sup>280</sup>

The new bedroom suite design ‘282’ was not very successful and was discontinued within a few years as were the mahogany and walnut versions of ‘147’ but in oak it continued to sell until 1908 by which time 22 sets had been made.

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<sup>278</sup> For more information on the “Quaint Style” see Matthew Denney, *Quaint Furniture*, Furniture History Society journal, 2003.

<sup>279</sup> It was sold for £73.0.0. Information about the destruction of Carpenters Hall in May 1941 provided by Julie Tancell, Archivist, Carpenters’ Company. E-mail 10.12.2003.

<sup>280</sup> Matthew Denney, *Arts & Crafts Furniture and Vernacular Furniture*, unpublished PhD thesis, BCUC, 1997. A.H. in his speech to the Royal Designers for Industry claimed he had first exhibited in 1896 but this seems to be incorrect.

<p>Fig. 2-60. '147' suite, 1899. (H&amp;S catalogue)</p>	<p>Fig. 2-62 '465' gateleg table 1899. (H&amp;S catalogue)</p>
<p>Fig. 2-61. '282' wardrobe, 1899 (H&amp;S catalogue)</p>	<p>Fig. 2-62. '465' gateleg table (from 1905 catalogue, above is version from 1899 H&amp;S catalogue)</p>
<p>Fig. 2-63. '401' chest on stand, 1899 (Liberty).</p>	<p>Fig. 2-64. '235' "Mansfield" gents wardrobe made by Guild of Handicraft in 1898 and subsequently by Cabinet Factory. (H&amp;S catalogue)</p>



The '401' chest (Fig. 2-63) proved quite popular with 14 being sold in that first year of production (total sold 40 – 72% before end 02), whilst a little 2ft occasional table for 1 guinea was a good filler piece of which over 160 were made before it was finally dropped in 1917. The '235' Mansfield gents wardrobe (Fig. 2-64), made the previous year by the Guild of Handicrafts, was made 'in-house' where it continued in production until 1906 by which time a total of 75 had been made including the 11 made in 1898. (86% sold before end 1902).

The making of the '304' Paris Exhibition Suite was the most significant event for the Factory in **1900** (Fig.s 2-65, 2-66, 2-67, 2-68, 2-69). As an exhibition piece it was fairly extravagant both in scale and design in comparison to A.H.'s previous work, making use of pewter, holly and ebony inlays. Its style shows a notable move forward compared to the first suites and seems to echo Brewer's architecture with its polygonal central bow-fronted chest. This major suite (both in size and range) was valued at in excess of £360. The wardrobe, toilet table, washstand, pedestal, clothes horse and three chairs alone were priced at £250 and after being exhibited in Paris and a year later in Glasgow, they were returned to stock where they remained until 1907 when they were finally sold for £125. Perhaps this might partly explain A.H.'s jaundiced view of international exhibitions when he gave evidence before the International Exhibitions Committee in 1907 where he stated that Paris had been of no benefit to the firm.<sup>281</sup>

In commercial terms 1900 was a bad year for A.H.'s new designs. All the new bedroom suites, '185' Audley in fumed oak and green stained oak, '305' in inlaid walnut, '310' in oak Queen Anne style and the revamped '303' new Bushey, only had short lives but as no illustrations seem to have survived it is hard to gauge why this might be. Even the '308' bureau which appears for the first time in the 1900 stock book, (although it seems likely this was the model made for the previous year's Arts & Crafts Exhibition as it is recorded as *Best fumed oak (arts & crafts)*), was not a success and only 3 were ever sold, although a simpler version, '309' in fumed oak

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<sup>281</sup> Minutes of Evidence, International Exhibitions Committee, 07.03.1907, reproduced in J. Brandt, *Sir Ambrose Heal, Lifting up a Standard*, unpublished dissertation 1993.



Fig. 2-65. '304' Paris exhibition inlaid oak wardrobe, 1900. (H&S catalogue)



Fig. 2-66. '304' Paris exhib. toilet table, 1900



Fig. 2-67. '304' Paris exhib. washstand, 1900.



Fig. 2-68. '304' Paris exhib. writing bureau, 1900



Fig. 2-69. '304' Paris exhib. table and bedside cabinet, 1900.

with hammered iron handles, sold better (a total of 16), remaining in the range until the First World War.

More significant for the longer term was the introduction of the first two dining table designs (Nos. 1 & 5). No.1, a mahogany cottage table only sold two before disappearing from the records, whereas No. 5 in fumed oak was in production until 1909. A total of 26 of these were made along with a number in special sizes that included eight supplied to the London Fever Hospital.

Amongst the special orders made by the factory that year one notes with interest a mahogany inlaid bureau for a member of the Heal family, a fumed oak table and sideboard, both inlaid with ebony and pewter, for Mr Angus and five bedrooms with large wardrobes for a Mr Corderoy. One of these was a complete suite of an inlaid mahogany version of the '310' Queen Anne design that cost £118, another was an 8 foot wide mahogany and pewter wardrobe, whilst the others were made in fumed oak, unpolished oak and green ash.

In **1901**, one new bedroom suite was introduced ('345' in fumed oak) which begins to show signs of A.H.'s mature design style. The combination chest and wardrobe still has hammered steel handles but the proportions of the design as a whole have been refined to classical sobriety (Figs 2-70, 2-71). Three versions of a "Gents" wardrobe ('414', '416', '418') and another writing table ('311') were also added, and there is a note of a dressing chest for *Mr Arbo* which seems to have been a one-off.<sup>282</sup> A new departure was the making of a sideboard ('501' fumed oak 4ft 6in) marking a further slow broadening of the range, as did the 5ft settle ('500').

Amongst the special orders made in 1901 was a fumed oak, pewter inlaid, Steinway pianoforte case made for a Mr Johnson for £110. Some member of the Heal family commissioned more mahogany inlaid pieces consisting of a bureau, a china cabinet and a cupboard bookcase (it seems highly probable that these are the ones illustrated in Jeremy Cooper's book *Victorian and Edwardian Furniture and Interiors*, p 240) (Fig. 2-72), a 4ft fumed oak chest was made for Voysey, and Mr Corderoy ordered a further 7ft mahogany inlaid Queen Anne wardrobe '310'. However the major order

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<sup>282</sup> AH was known in the early days of his career as Mr Arbo (his boyhood nickname) to distinguish him from his father known as Mr Ambrose.

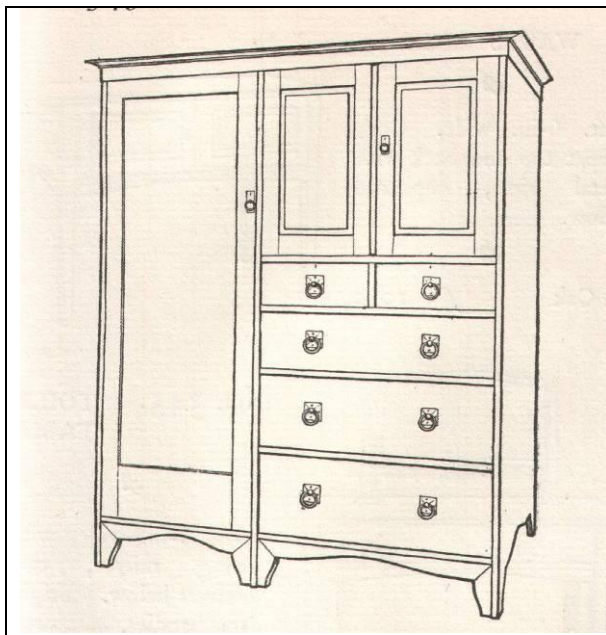


Fig. 2-70. '345' combination wardrobe, 1901. (H&S catalogue)

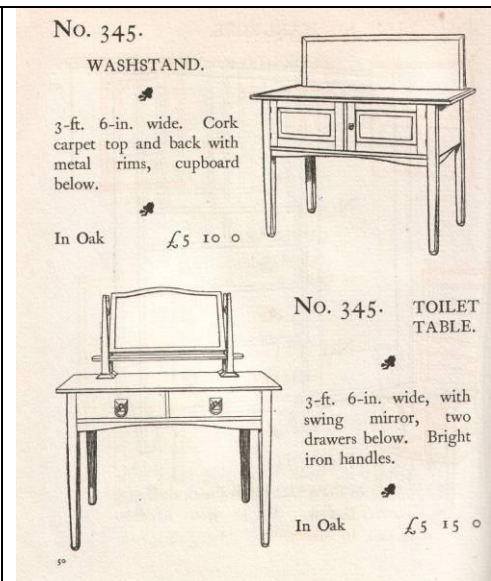


Fig. 2-71. '345' washstand & toilet table, 1901. (H&S catalogue)



Fig. 2-72. One-off pieces in inlaid mahogany, 1901. The motto inlaid around the top of the central cabinet reads: *As bees from flowers, do thou from books.* (Cooper).





Fig. 2-73. Bench, Reigate town hall, 1901. (McInally)



Fig. 2-74. Pen & ink design for Mayor's chair, Reigate town hall, 1901 (AAD).



Fig. 2-75. 1901 Desk in Mayor's Parlour, Reigate town hall, drawer stamped 'Heal & Son London'. Note size and shape of legs not AH style.(author)



Fig. 2-76. Pen & ink design for Ex-Mayor's chair, Reigate town hall, 1901.(AAD)



Fig. 2-77. 1901, Mayor's chair, Reigate town hall, photographed as displayed on staircase in 2006. (author).



Fig. 2-78. Reigate town hall façade by architects Mackintosh and Newman, 1901. (author)

of the year was that received for the furnishing of Reigate Town Hall just then being built and for which 30 pieces of cabinet furniture (see Appendix VII for list) were made as well as quantities of upholstered chairs (no Heal records survive for the chairs). This represents an interesting departure because inspection of surviving pieces still in use in the Town Hall and the pen and ink designs held at the AAD leads one to conclude that in this instance Heal's were working to designs provided by the architects, Macintosh and Newman, themselves. One of the items made, the large 14ft x 4ft table, was sold through the Brighton-based Art & Crafts specialist Mark Golding in the last few years but many other items remain at Reigate (Figs 2-73 to 2-78).<sup>283</sup>

In stylistic terms **1902** was an important milestone in A.H.'s development as it marked the introduction of the chequered stringing that he applied not just to his furniture but also to advertisements for which he was henceforth responsible.<sup>284</sup> Five new bedroom suite designs carried the theme in different variations for different pockets and different tastes. The '347' in fumed oak with ebony and boxwood inlay is notable for its lack of cornice on the dwarf wardrobe (Fig. 2-79), '348' was perhaps conceived for exhibition purposes in Silver Wood inlaid with pewter and blue wood and costing £80, whereas '349' was to a smaller scale and less expensive at £50 in inlaid Silver Grain wood. One of these two was displayed at the Arts & Crafts exhibition in 1903 and the *Architectural Review* described the handles as having a *dull silver finish with purple enamelled back-plates concaved and sunk in the wood* and noted the slightly canted back wings of the wardrobe.<sup>285</sup>

'363' and '364' were both in inlaid fumed oak, the former having arched panel top doors of even width and a two drawer base, on inverted acorn feet, slightly wider than the cupboard part, whilst the latter had slab sides, rectangular fielded-panel

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<sup>283</sup> John McNally, Conservation Officer, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council, e-mail to author 04.02.2005. "The Town Hall was designed in 1898-9 by Hugh Macintosh and Reginald Newman and was completed in 1901. Built in the Arts and Craft style, in a Renaissance manner, with red brick in English Bond and Welsh Green Countess Slates." The 14ft table was sold ca. 2005 but was still illustrated on [www.achome.co.uk](http://www.achome.co.uk) in February 2007.

<sup>284</sup> Eric Mercer, *Furniture 700 – 1700*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1969, p. 36, notes that: *a mosaic of light and dark woods and inlays in chequer-work and herring-bone patterns* can be found as decoration as early as the thirteenth century.

<sup>285</sup> *Architectural Review*, April 1903.



Fig. 2-79. '347' dwarf wardrobe, 1902 (AAD)

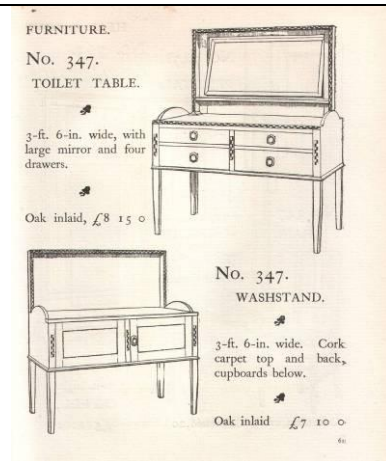


Fig. 2-80. '347' toilet table and wash stand (H&S catalogue)

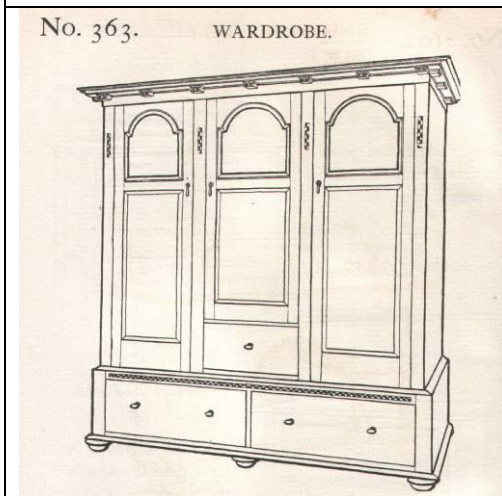


Fig. 2-81. '363' wardrobe, 1902 (H&S catalogue)

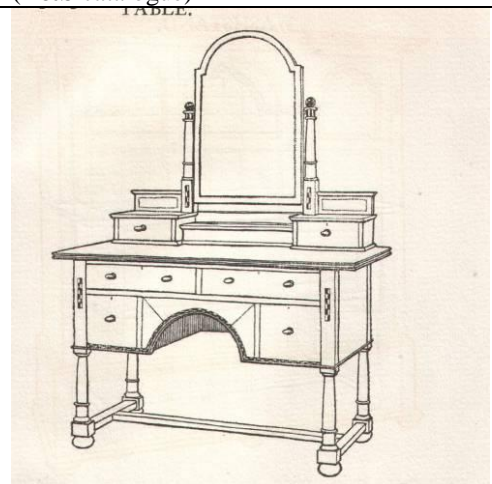


Fig. 2-82. '363' toilet table, 1902. (H&S catalogue)

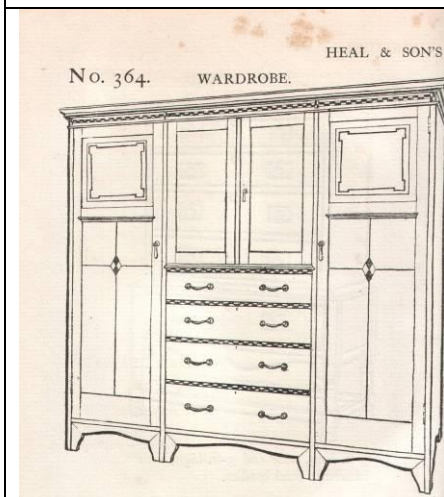


Fig. 2-83. '364' wardrobe, 1902. (H&S catalogue)



Fig. 2-84. '364' toilet table & washstand, 1902. (H&S catalogue)

doors and incorporated four drawers in the centre. The '363' toilet table and wash stand have for the first time simple pillar turned legs. Both '348' and '364' were exhibited at the 1903 Arts & Crafts Exhibition and the '364' wardrobe was selected by the A.C.E.S. for its exhibition in Christchurch, New Zealand in 1906 after having appeared again at the 1906 Arts & Crafts exhibition at the Grafton Gallery, London early in the year. (Fig. 2-81, 2-82, 2-83, 2-84)

Of the '347' twelve were made before it was dropped in 1908; three sets of '348' were sold in the first year but thereafter only a couple more were made; '349' seems to have been a one-off that was not repeated; '363' and '364' were kept in the range until 1911 despite little more than half a dozen of each being sold over the period.

Another dining table in fumed oak, design No.6, was added to the range that was available in two large sizes (7ft x 3ft 6in and 8ft x 4ft) of which a total of 17 were made up until 1911. Another sideboard ('502') was also added of which 14 were sold up to 1906 and a more expensive larger inlaid sideboard ('504' – 4 sold) as well as a 7-day striking clock.

Amongst the special orders of note was library panelling and shelving for a Mr. King for £110 and a built-in bedroom for a Mr. Cadbury. The fitment for Cadbury was made of *best pine japanned white with Havana cedar interior* and a table, toilet table and chairs were also supplied, all for £245.

After the introduction of so many new lines in the previous year it is perhaps not surprising that in **1903** there were few new ranges although they were quite significant additions. The '371' (Fig. 2-85) was unusual with its splayed wardrobe front taking up an idea used previously by Lethaby and Baillie Scott who were no doubt inspired by late 16th century court cupboards of this shape.<sup>286</sup> Made in fumed oak it was described in the catalogue as *slightly inlaid* and the toilet table had an adjustable octagonal mirror, a shape that became a Heal favourite. More original was

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<sup>286</sup> For canted front wardrobe attributed to W.R. Lethaby and Baillie Scott 'daffodil' dresser see John Andrews, *Arts & Crafts Furniture*, Antique Collectors Club, 2005, p 77 and pp 120, 121. For 16<sup>th</sup> century canted front oak cupboard see Ralph Edwards, *The Dictionary of English Furniture*, Country Life 1954 reprinted by Antique Collectors Club 2000, Vol. II, p. 190.









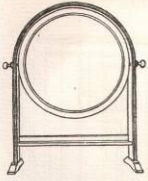

the '372' bedroom suite as this not only featured recessed wooden turnbuckle latches but introduced a new timber to the range – *sweet Spanish Chestnut, fumigated to a pleasant grey-brown tone and left unpolished* (Figs 2-87, 2-88, 2-89).<sup>287</sup> This timber must have become available in some quantity at a reasonable price at this period as Heal was not the only maker to take it up: both Romney Green and Peter Waals also exhibited items in chestnut that year.<sup>288</sup> A.H.'s design and the others that he derived from it later are perhaps the most aesthetically pleasing of any that he was to produce being very soberly, simply, classical yet with Arts & Crafts touches, such as the latches and squashed heart drawer pulls, to give warmth and homeliness, characteristics no doubt enhanced by the warm colour of the timber. The only weakness was the applied moulding to the door fronts but there was evidently a need to get back to a more reasonably priced range after the previous year's up-market designs, and the '372' at 19 guineas achieved this. A corner wash stand ('424') was also introduced in fumed oak with a marble or tiled top.

The '371' suite stayed in the range until the mid-twenties, by which time inflation had put its price up from £35 to £95. Over the period sales trickled on with the wardrobe proving more popular than the rest of the suite. A total of 24 wardrobes were sold of which more than 60% went before World War One. Of the '372' wardrobe 30 were sold over its production span (plus another 7 in polished chestnut in the first couple of years) so it was a bit more successful, with 70% of those sales coming before 1914. However, unlike '371' which remained an oddity, A.H. was able to develop the theme he had started with the '372' range, building a significant collection of items in chestnut with the same design features, in subsequent years.

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<sup>287</sup> Introduction to Heal & Son, *Simple Bedroom Furniture Catalogue*, 1905, p 12.

<sup>288</sup> See Matthew Denney, *Arts & Crafts Furniture*, PhD thesis unpublished, BCUC.

	<p>No. 371. WASHSTAND.</p>  <p>3-ft. 6-in. wide. Top and back fitted cork carpet and metal rims, cupboards below.</p> <p>In Oak, slightly inlaid, £5 10 0</p> <p>No. 371. TOILET TABLE.</p>  <p>3-ft. 6-in. wide, with adjustable octagonal mirror, trinket boxes, 2 drawers in lower part.</p> <p>In Oak, slightly inlaid, £6 0 0</p>
<p>Fig. 2-85. '371' wardrobe 'slightly inlaid' 1903 (AAD)</p>	<p>Fig. 2-86. '371' washstand &amp; toilet table, 1903. (H&amp;S catalogue)</p>
	<p>FURNITURE.</p> <p>No. 372. WASHSTAND.</p>  <p>3-ft. 6-in. wide, with tiled top and back, cupboards below. Towel rails at ends.</p> <p>In Chestnut or Oak £5 0 0</p> <p>4-ft. wide £5 15 0</p> <p>No. 372. TOILET TABLE.</p>  <p>3-ft. 6-in. wide, with mirror above and two drawers below.</p> <p>In Chestnut or Oak £4 15 0</p>
<p>Fig. 2-87. '372' wardrobe, 1903 (AAD)</p>	<p>Fig. 2-88. '372' washstand &amp; toilet table, 1903 (H&amp;S catalogue)</p>
<p>No. 778. CIRCULAR MIRROR.</p>  <p>Frame, 21-in. diameter.</p> <p>In Chestnut or Oak, £2 12 6</p> <p>No. 372. CHEST OF DRAWERS.</p>  <p>2-ft. 6-in. wide and 3-ft. high, with four long drawers.</p> <p>In Chestnut or Oak £5 10 0</p>	
<p>Fig. 2-89. '372' chest of drawers &amp; circ mirror, 1903. (H&amp;S catalogue)</p>	<p>blank</p>

### **2.2.2 Mature Designs – 1904 -1917**

Although the elements that make up A.H.'s mature design style had been emerging since the turn of the century, by 1904 they were firmly in place and any 19th century detailing, such as hammered steel handles, had gone; his designs from that year were to make up the core of the 'home produced' range of bedroom furniture until the First World War. It is not possible to say definitely what motivated A.H. to return to the drawing board with a vengeance in 1904 but there was certainly a commercial imperative as the original group of designs were no longer popular and in need of replacement; the Heal retail business as a whole was showing signs of decline again after years of formidable growth at the end of the previous century and Cabinet Factory sales were also starting to reflect this. However it might also be partly a reflection of an improvement in his personal life; his first wife (Rose Ripplingille) had died in 1901 leaving him in turmoil and with a young son to care for. But, in 1903 he had met the woman (Edith Todhunter) who was to become his second wife in 1904 so personally he was on the up.

It seems safe to ascribe all the designs produced by the Cabinet Factory in this period to A.H. as there is no evidence of anyone else's involvement despite his increasing business and family responsibilities. He was appointed Joint Managing Director in 1907, when the firm was transformed from a partnership into a limited company, and Chairman in 1913 following the death of his father.

Interestingly these 'mature designs' did not enjoy the same individual sales success as some of the earlier ones, despite increased elegance and sophistication, but in part this must just be a reflection of a less beneficial economic climate. The period is particularly notable because, in parallel with more upmarket designs, A.H. developed at the same time a "Cottage Furniture" collection to provide less expensive but still well constructed furniture as an alternative for less wealthy clients. Some of his most 'revolutionary' designs stem from the less expensive ranges of this period that, through their simplicity, remained appropriate and popular for twenty years and therefore are amongst the most common items to survive to this day. At the same time this was the period that witnessed the expansion of the business away from

being purely bedroom specialists to increasingly include furniture for the other rooms of the house as well.

Many of the more upmarket models appear to have been designed with Arts and Crafts exhibitions in mind and were virtuoso displays of craftsmanship in that spirit. It is interesting that A.H. himself must have felt these represented the peak of his own achievements as not only would they be revived as exhibition pieces in the post-war period, but also he bequeathed some to the Victoria & Albert Museum in his Will.

The first introduction of **1904** was '389' an up-market fumed oak bedroom suite inlaid with ebony and pewter to retail at 60 guineas. This was not a success, bringing no orders until the showroom set was finally sold off in 1911. The next was an extension to the unpolished chestnut range by the addition of the '392' suite and its 3-door, 3-drawer wardrobe which was still only a modest 5 feet wide (Fig.s 2-90, 2-91). Then he created a basic fumed oak suite, catalogued as "School Furniture", ('393') that consisted of a 3ft wardrobe, a 3ft dressing chest, a 2ft 6in wash stand and one chair for just £13 (Fig.s 2-96, 2-97). The next two modestly scaled designs, '401' and '402', were not just available in fumed oak but also in a "new" timber, described as Colonial Mahogany that was about 10% more expensive than oak but less expensive than traditional mahoganies, having a *very attractive brown mahogany colour...finished with a soft dull polish, which brings out the value of the fine graining, and yet gives a wearable finish.* (Fig.s 2-92, 2-93, 2-94, 2-95) The handles used were especially designed and had *the colour of old brass*, and these were also common to the final suite, the '404', known initially as the Blenheim suite but soon renamed Yattendon, presumably to fit in better with the more modest aspirations of the clientele. (Fig.s 2-98, 2-99) The '404' was essentially a simplified version of the '363' from 1902 – for example the '363' wardrobe cost £30 whilst the '404' wardrobe was £25. As individual wardrobes that could be 'mixed and matched' with these suites there was a 3ft 6in, 2-door chestnut wardrobe (428) to go with '372' suite (Fig. 2-101) and a 3ft 6in, 2-door fumed oak wardrobe (429) to go with '404' suite. (Fig. 2-100).



Fig. 2-90. '392' chestnut combination wardrobe (Millinery Works)



Fig. 2-91. '392' toilet table, chestnut (Millinery Works)

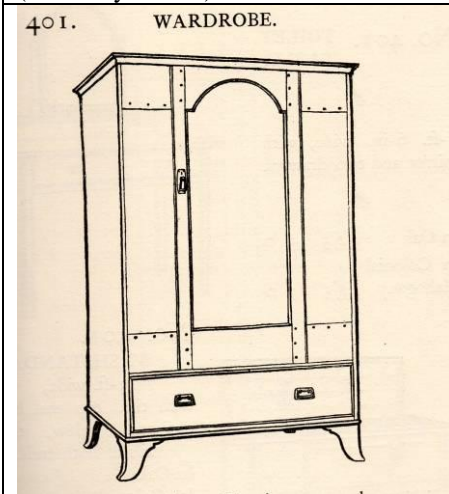


Fig. 2-92. '401' wardrobe (H&S catalogue)

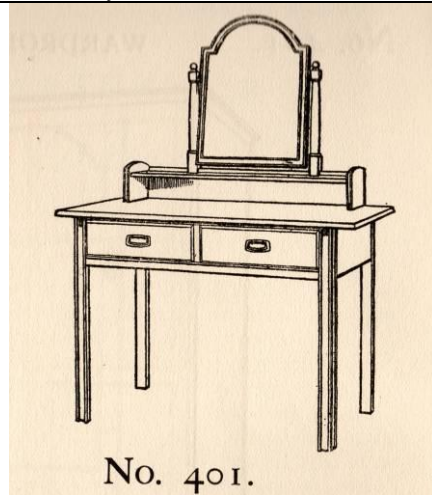


Fig. 2-93. '401' toilet table (H&S catalogue)

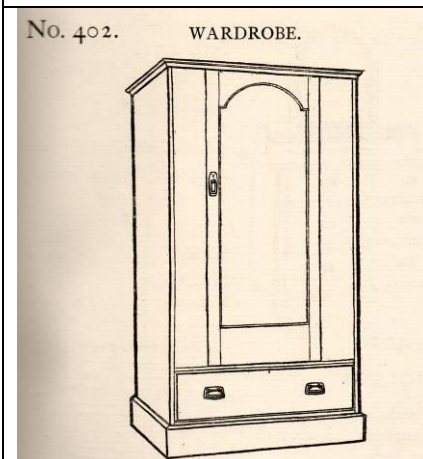


Fig. 2-94. '402' wardrobe (H&S catalogue)

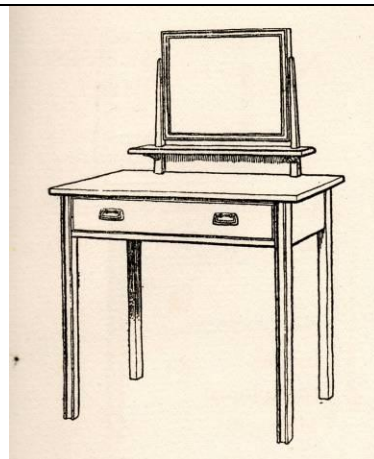


Fig. 2-95. '421' toilet table (H&S catalogue)

In commercial terms these new introductions were slow to take off but they included models that were to form the backbone of the range until the First World War and that would continue to be made for over twenty years. The '392' chestnut range for example was modestly successful, complementing the '372' from the previous year and selling equally well. It remained available until 1927 although three quarters of the 35 toilet tables sold were made before 1914. The complementary '428' two-door chestnut wardrobe without any drawers was discontinued after a couple of years after only two had been sold. The basic '393' suite was not a success and was faded out in 1907 after only half a dozen had been made, although the design of the dressing chest was to reappear later slightly modified on several occasions. '401' "Latimer" suite was moderately successful as was the '402' which had the advantage of offering more choices (two sizes of washstand and three sizes of chest of drawers for example) but it is notable in both cases that the fumed oak version outsold the mahogany version by a ratio of approximately 3:1. The bestselling items of the '402' range in oak were the 3ft washstand of which a total of 104 were made before the mid-twenties (77% before 1914) and the 3ft 6in chest of drawers (75 made, 87% before 1914) which compares to 31 wardrobes produced. The '404' Yattendon suite is remarkable in that this 1904 design was kept on the showroom floor right up until the Second World War. The commercial justification for this is not evident to see as only about thirty suites were sold (including one in mahogany in 1906 and one in special burr oak in 1926). Three quarters were sold before 1914 and the balance went before 1921 so one can only assume that A.H. felt this to have been one of his most successful designs from an aesthetic point of view. The complementary 3ft 6in two-door wardrobe '429' was much more successful selling 61 (40 in oak, 21 in mahogany – of which 14 in Cuban mahogany) before it was dropped in 1927 (61% of sales prior to 1914).



<p>393- WARDROBE.</p> 	
<p>Fig. 2-96. '393' wardrobe (H&amp;S catalogue)</p>	<p>Fig. 2-97. '393' dressing chest (H&amp;S catalogue)</p>
	
<p>Fig. 2-98. '404' "Yattendon" wardrobe (n.b. this suite has hammered steel instead of standard brass handles – no doubt specified by customer when new) ( Millinery Works)</p>	<p>Fig. 2-99. '404' "Yattendon" toilet table (Millinery Works)</p>
	<p>428. CUPBOARD.</p> 
<p>Fig. 2-100. '429' wardrobe (Millinery Works)</p>	<p>Fig. 2-101. '428' wardrobe</p>

The only notable special order of the year was a 5ft unpolished oak writing table for *Mr Arbo's office* which cost £31 (Fig. 2-102).<sup>289</sup> It is known that A.H. was invited to exhibit a stand for the display of playing cards at the 1904 St Louis Exhibition, U.S.A., but no trace of it being taken into stock at Tottenham Court Road has been found so perhaps it was sold direct from the exhibition.<sup>290</sup>

**1905** was the year of the Letchworth Garden City's Cheap Cottages Exhibition, an event that was to have tremendous impact in the longer term on the Heal business's marketing strategy. Among the notable introductions was the 'No. 7' dining table in unpolished oak, 6ft 6in long and only 2ft 6 wide, that remained in production until 1937 by which time in excess of 500 had been made, making this the most successful model to be made by the Factory (two thirds of the sales occurred before 1920) (Fig. 2-104). This model highlights A.H.'s production strategy which by this stage involved the use of subcontractors to manufacture Heal-designed products. The in-house facility was excellent when top quality work in small quantities was required but when price became critical or quantities rose he had to look elsewhere. In this case, although tables were produced by the Factory in 1905, by sometime in 1906 (see 1906 below for probable reasons) capacity was insufficient and the tables were made by Mansfield (who also initially made tables No.s '8' and '9') for the next three years, but with the Factory still fulfilling orders for special sizes and finishes. From 1910 to 1927, No. '7' (now generally known as the Letchworth dining table although not called that by Heal's), along with Nos. '8' and '9', was made again in the Factory before being put across to the Page workshop. The 6ft long oak bench (No. 506) was also made by the Factory at first, subcontracted for a few years, before being manufactured in house again - by 1937 over 150 of these had been sold. The chairs that were almost invariably sold with this set were always bought in from Cox of High Wycombe (see Key Suppliers 2.3.5.1). Another significant introduction in 1905 was the '505' lattice-back 4ft 6in oak sideboard also displayed at Letchworth,

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<sup>289</sup> This is thought to be the desk removed from what had been A.H.'s office in the 1970s. Although the office had been used following his death by the Finance Director, Mr D.A.W. Hamilton, its furnishing had remained unchanged. The desk was moved to Baylins Farm where it remains.

<sup>290</sup> The original design is preserved at the Archive of Art & Design, AAD/1994/16/797



of which 117 were made by the Factory until 1926 (although here again Mansfield may have been involved, the record is not completely clear – they certainly priced to do the job in 1910 being about 8% cheaper than the Factory).<sup>291</sup> It was offered in three different finishes; *Left quite plain for scrubbing, £6 15s 0d, Oiled and waxed £7 2s 6d, Fumigated to any shade and waxed polished £7 5s 0d.* One of these is preserved in the Cheltenham Museum. (Fig. 2-105).

With all this activity around Letchworth (which also included getting bedroom suites made elsewhere) it is not surprising that the Heal Cabinet Factory range of bedroom furniture was not much extended. A three-door wardrobe version of the previous year's '401' was introduced ('409' the Yewden suite) initially just in mahogany but a year later it was available in fumed oak (from 1923 limed oak) as well, and true to form, this sold better (28 mahogany toilet tables/43 oak toilet tables over a twenty year period). Additionally a couple of "gents wardrobes" were added that coordinated with the previous year's ranges ('432' & '433') having the same handles and design features such as the taper column legs and the recessed square moulding. The '432' 'gents wardrobe/cupboard on stand' in Colonial mahogany was exhibited at the 1906 Arts & Crafts Exhibition and by the time it was finally discontinued in 1927 some 97 had been sold (66 in oak, 18 in Colonial mahogany, 13 veneered in Cuban mahogany) (Fig. 2-106). The '433' with its practical three drawers beneath the cupboard proved even more popular and 128 were made over the same period of which 70% (92) were in oak, 12 in Colonial mahogany, 20 veneered in Cuban mahogany and 4 in the late twenties were made in fiddleback mahogany (Fig. 2-107). Two new bureaux in fumed oak were introduced with the same design detailing as the cabinets – one ('325') with a writing slope and the other ('326') with a fall front (8 of the former and 12 of the latter were made over 15 years) (Fig. 2-103) and two new small writing tables ('327' and '328') also appeared. The '327' was fitted with the novel feature of ink pots that rose automatically when you pulled the top towards you (only 10 were made over 15 years) but the simpler, smaller and somewhat cheaper '328' sold better (46 oak, 15 mahogany of which 9 in Cuban mahogany, were sold between 1905 and 1925) (Figs 2-112, 2-113).

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<sup>291</sup> There is a gap in the Cabinet Factory production of this dresser between 1908 and 1912. It seems probable that Mansfield made it during those years.



Fig. 2-102. 1904 special order – desk for Ambrose Heal's own office (Author)



Fig. 2-103. 1905 writing tables '326' and '325'(AAD).



Fig. 2-104. 1905 No. 7 dining table (Millinery Works)



Fig. 2-105. 1905, '505' dresser (H&S catalogue)



Fig. 2-106. 1905, '432' gents wardrobe (AAD)



Fig. 2-107. 1905, '433' gents wardrobe (AAD)

No new complete bedroom suites were introduced in **1906** but the Factory was busy in the first half of the year producing 103 sets of the birch suite that A.H. had designed especially for the bedrooms of the King Edward VII Hospital, a tuberculosis sanatorium at Midhurst, which opened in June that year (Fig.s 2-114, 2-115).<sup>292</sup> The '*Nursing Times*' recorded, under the headline Dust Proof Furniture that

*Heal & Son have aimed at avoiding any trap for dust and at making it possible to readily clean every part. The wardrobe is made with a smooth semi-circular top; dressing table and washstand have glass surfaces which can be wiped in a moment.*<sup>293</sup>

However one very significant addition was made to the chestnut range of furniture in that the '412' 'chest of drawers with cupboard over' (now known colloquially as the 'owl cabinet') was added (Fig. 2-108). Although this appears in the 1905 Simple Bedroom Furniture catalogue and it was displayed at the Arts & Crafts exhibition in January 1906, (so must have been designed and made in 1905) it does not appear in the cabinet department stockbook until 1906 in which year 5 were sold. It remained in production until 1927 by which time a total of 80 had been sold – 56 in chestnut, 19 in fumed oak and 5 (in 1925/6) in weathered oak. Another cabinet that also appears in the 1905 catalogue and was also shown at the 1905 exhibition held by members of the Junior Art Workers Guild<sup>294</sup> and at the 1906 Arts & Crafts exhibition, was the '416' chest on stand which again shows how A.H. sought inspiration from the past to come up with solutions to contemporary furnishing needs (Fig. 2-109). In this case he has returned to late 17th century/early 18th century shapes reinterpreted in a simplified manner. Only twelve of these were ever made of which 9 were in mahogany and only 3 in oak. The 'Cottage Furniture' range was extended by the addition of a 4ft fumed oak settle with storage space under the seat (509) but only 10 were sold before it was discontinued at the end of World War One (Fig. 2-110).

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<sup>292</sup> The archives of the Sanatorium are now held by West Sussex Record Office but are not sorted or catalogued and therefore not available for consultation. E-mail from Richard Childs, County Archivist 23.09.05. The architect was A.H.'s cousin H. Percy Adams working with his assistant Charles Holden and Gertrude Jekyll who planned the gardens.

<sup>293</sup> *The Nursing Times*, 24.02.1906.

<sup>294</sup> At the Junior Art Workers' Guild exhibition AH also exhibited a fourposter bedstead in chestnut.



Fig. 2-108. 1905/06 '412' cupboard chest in chestnut (Millinery Works)



Fig. 2-109. 1905/06 '416' chest on stand (AAD)



Fig. 2-110. '509' settle 1906 (H&S catalogue).



Fig. 2-111. 1906 '510' dresser with hanging plate rack '508' above. (AAD)

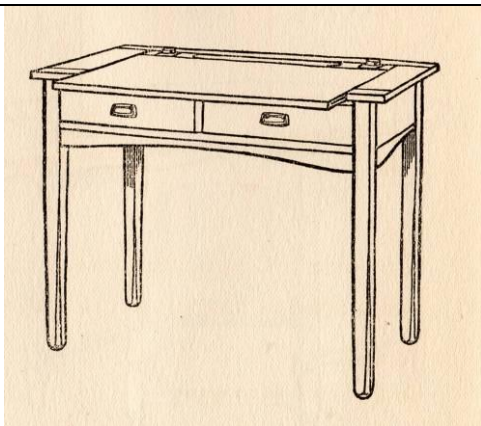


Fig. 2-112. '327' writing table 3ft wide 1905. Sliding top fitted with automatically rising ink pots.

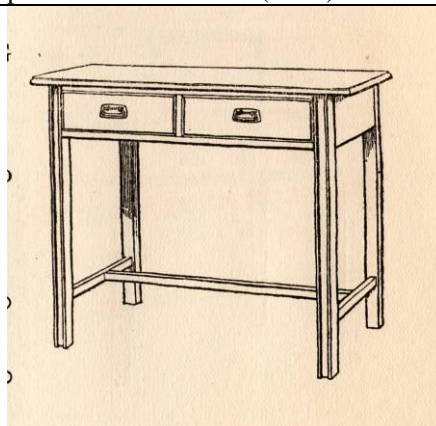


Fig. 2-113. '328' writing table 1905 (H&S catalogue)





Fig. 2-114. 1906 "Hygienic Furniture" in birch for the King Edward VII Sanatorium at Midhurst. (AAD)



Fig. 2-115. A.H.'s original pencil sketch for the sanatorium furniture. Note detail of curved interior corner to wardrobe to avoid dust trap. Interiors were also to be polished, wash stand and pedestal to have opal glass tops, handles to be gunmetal, finish was to be mahogany colour. (H&S Archive AAD/1994/16/824)

More significant was the introduction to the 'Cottage Furniture' range of the '510' 4ft unpolished oak dresser (Fig. 2-111) and the variation on it with curtains instead of doors '507', but these were made mostly by Mansfield until 1912, after which production was taken back in house. They then remained in the range selling consistently until the mid-thirties. Because early production was sub-contracted the total quantities sold (approx 70 for '507' and over 300 of the '510') are thought to be understated by at least twenty percent. The '510' was slightly redesigned in the early thirties as model no. '1090' and this remained in production until the War.

The year **1907** was marked by a singular lack of creative input in terms of new products for the Cabinet Factory which is probably explained by A.H.'s attention being taken up by corporate administrative matters following the death of his uncle, Harris Heal, and the decision to turn the business into a Limited Company. The only new bedroom suite introduced was the '450' fumed oak suite at £35 that was moderately successful, although again one sees here repeated the pattern of the dressing chest and wash stand proving to be more popular than the wardrobe, (23 of each sold compared to 8 wardrobes between 1907 and 1924). Amongst the special orders was a fumed oak bedroom suite at £29 fitted with oxidised silver fittings for Mr Wright.

Two of the three new bedroom suites introduced in **1908** may perhaps be taken as an indication that simple modern furniture was not proving sufficiently popular and that it was necessary to explore other styles. '473' was a dark oak suite and '495' a Jacobean suite but neither was a success – only half a dozen sets of '473' were made before the War and although '495' lingered on in the stock books until 1917 one suspects this was just because of the difficulty of selling off the last of the five sets made. With the benefit of hindsight it is possible to see that in fact the 'typical' and distinctive AH design, '494' with its semi-circular toilet table and wash stand, proved more popular being made up until 1916 in oak and from then until the mid-twenties in chestnut. (90% of the production is pre-1921 and nearly half pre-1916). One of the wash stands was exhibited at the 1910 Arts & Crafts exhibition and was sold from there complete with a backcloth hanging designed and embroidered by A.H.'s wife Edith (Fig. 2-116). As usual with A.H. designed furniture much thought

went into the practical detailing and in this case C.H.B. Quennell observed, in an article for *Country Life* entitled The Case for Modern Furniture, that

*...the absence of angles making it very suitable for a small room. It is not Jacobean or Georgian, Elizabethan or Adam. The designer thought that a semi-circular front might make it useful and planned it so... with four legs... at the proper place to take the weight...It was felt that...when washing the face, a hanging that would save the wallpaper and be removable for washing was a good idea...But if this wash stand is of no dated style, it has the merits of those mentioned. It has been designed to suit its purpose.*<sup>295</sup>

One new inlaid fumed oak suite, '521', was introduced in **1909**, priced at £52, of which 4 sets were sold by 1916 (Fig. 2-117). It was very similar to the earlier '364' range but the wardrobe stood on a solid plinth and the inlay on the front was slightly different. It was exhibited at the 1910 Arts & Crafts exhibition and Quennell noted that it was very satisfactory and well proportioned showing that

*There is again evidence of abundant knowledge of style, but the designer, while keeping to the traditions of his craft, has expressed his own individuality.*<sup>296</sup>

In 1920 it was reintroduced briefly with larger toilet table and wash stand than originally (4ft instead of 3ft 6in) but only a few more were then sold. The '504' mahogany suite was described as 401 which is something of a mystery as '401' was still available and selling better than this newcomer which was dropped after four years and only very few sales. The next suite ('523') in inlaid mahogany was a real 'tour de force' being priced at £120, with a 7ft wardrobe and 4ft toilet table and wash stand. It too was displayed at the Arts & Crafts exhibition and C.H.B. Quennell commented of the wardrobe that it

*...is a very stately piece of furniture, depending for a good deal of its effect on the pleasant grain of its veneers...Though obviously inspired by late eighteenth century furniture it is not in any way a reproduction; rather does it very successfully carry on the traditions of that time, and is thus suitable for*

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<sup>295</sup> C.H.B. Quennell, *The Case for Modern Furniture*, in Lawrence Weaver (ed), *The House and its Equipment*, *Country Life*, c. 1910 (undated), pp 54-60.

<sup>296</sup> C.H.B. Quennell, *The Case for Modern Furniture*,



Fig. 2-116. '494' semi-circular washstand 1908. photograph is of model exhibited at 1910 Arts & Crafts exhibition with hanging embroidered by Edith Heal. (AAD).

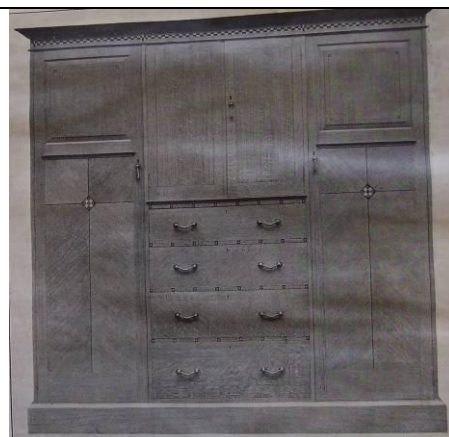


Fig. 2-117. '521' wardrobe 1909. exhibited at 1910 Arts & Crafts exhibition (AAD)



Fig. 2-118. wardrobe exhibited at 1910 Arts & Crafts exhibition.(AAD) photo captioned '523'



Fig. 2-119. wardrobe in mahogany and black, part of bedroom suite. (AAD) photo captioned '523'.



Fig. 2-120. '423' cupboard over chest 1909.(AAD)



Fig. 2-121. another unidentified variation on the above theme.(AAD)



*smarter folk than would use the oak chest of Mr Gimson.*<sup>297</sup>

So it is interesting that A.H. has deliberately moved from his more usual source of inspiration, the late 17th and early 18th centuries, to a modern interpretation of a more classical, Sheraton-type design, for an effect of grandeur. For such an expensive model it is an achievement that 7 sets were sold altogether (4 before 1914, 1 in 1917 and another in 1920 with the showroom model finally being sold off in 1934). These in turn give us an insight into inflationary pressures of the times; initially priced at £120 this had increased to £140 by 1916, to £250 in 1918, to £315 in 1921 but by 1934 it was reduced to clear to only £100. (There is some confusion about this design as photographs of two different wardrobes in the archive are captioned '523'. The one illustrated in Quennell's article appears to be smaller than 7ft wide and I have only found pictures of the wardrobe and not the rest of the suite whereas the other is part of a complete suite. Yet the first one is the one that was illustrated in the press at the time.) (Fig.s 2-118, 2-119).

A further chest with 'cupboard over' ('423') in unpolished fumed oak was introduced that proved to be increasingly popular throughout WWI and continued in production until the end of the twenties, by which time 194 had been sold (Fig. 2-120). This was a smaller version, much simplified, of the owl cabinet.

An important special order in 1909 was the making of a 6ft x 3ft English walnut library table for A.H.'s own use. Made with a flush panelled top, with drawers beneath (apparently some secret) and standing on eight legs it was inlaid around the edge with ebony and boxwood and had bronze drop handles. It was displayed at the 1910 Arts & Crafts exhibition where the craftsman's name was given as W. Johns. Thereafter it was used in the Heal family home and can be seen in photographs published in the article on The Fives Court, Pinner and later at Baylins Farm.<sup>298</sup> Ex-factory cost price is recorded as £17 and A.H. was charged £23, but Matthew Denney notes that in the exhibition catalogue it was stated that replicas could be ordered for £30. A.H. bequeathed this table to the Victoria & Albert Museum where it has been since 1960, erroneously dated as 1905 and described as being made of mahogany

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<sup>297</sup> C.H.B. Quennell, *The Case for Modern Furniture*,

<sup>298</sup> For article on The Fives Court see: Lawrence Weaver (Ed.) *Small Country Houses of Today*, Country Life, c 1911, p 152.

(see appendix VI) (Fig. 2-122).<sup>299</sup> It is thought that the design reappeared in 1919 as a 7ft x 3ft 4in dining table (No. 54) without drawers (see illustration in *The Studio* year book 1921) of which a couple were sold before 1928 when it returned to being a writing table in its original size as model no. '551' and was displayed at the Arts & Crafts exhibition that year (Fig. 2-124).

In **1910**, perhaps as a continuation of his exploration of different historical styles reinterpreted for the needs of the times, A.H. introduced an English walnut suite ('538' 'Rusper') in a Jacobean-inspired style that even included barleytwist turned legs and retailed at 50 guineas (Fig. 2-127). It stayed in the collection until 1926 by which time around twenty sets had been sold of which three quarters went before the end of the War. Another introduction was the '426' chest of drawers that sold quite well until 1919. The very simple Cottage Furniture tables, no.s '8' and '9', were manufactured internally from this year and remained available right through until World War Two by which time nearly 200 of the former and over 300 of the latter had been made (Fig.s 2-125, 2-126). Amongst the specials it is interesting to note a dressing chest for a Mr Lester unusually made in pearwood.

In **1911** no new bedroom suites seem to have been introduced for the Factory to make. One small item that went into production for the first time was a book rest ('387') and another that proved very popular and was still being made at the end of the twenties, by which time over 260 had sold, was '348' unpolished oak linen or toy cupboard (Fig. 2-128). Amongst special orders completed was a significant one for the offices of Vickers Maxims that involved making a kneehole desk, a cupboard, a slope top desk, a 7ft 6in drawing table, a fitted bookcase, radiator casing, wall panelling, and even a rubber stamp stand all made in blackbean. For the same company there was also some panelling in English walnut. On the domestic side a waxed teak bedroom suite was made for Farrar and a £70 mahogany painted white bedroom suite for Rothschild.

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<sup>299</sup> Matthew Denney, *Arts & Crafts Furniture & Vernacular Furniture*, BCUC Faculty of Design, PhD thesis, July 1997, unpublished. Whether any exact replicas were sold is not known but it seems unlikely as, even though an example with fluted wooden drawer pulls stood in the Heal's boardroom for many years (see photo of AH in 1952) a study of the stockbooks has not revealed any others. However a simplified version with a planked top was sold through Liberty in 2005 that was probably made as another special although it could be model '54' from 1919.

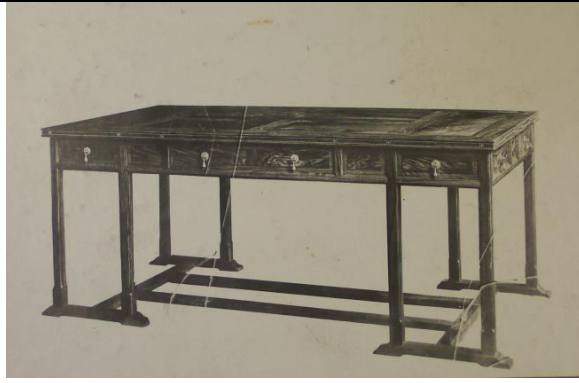


Fig. 2-122. 6ftx3ft English walnut library table with ebony and box inlay, peardrop handles designed by AH for own use, 1909. Displayed at 1910 A&C exhibition, bequeathed to V&A Museum 1959.(AAD)

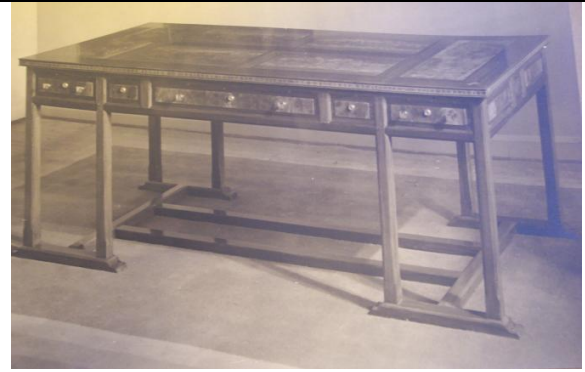


Fig. 2-123. special order version of walnut library table with Bramah locks, ca. 1930.(AAD)



Fig. 2-124. '551' design revived in 1928 with mother o'pearl inlay and fluted knobs, shown at A&C exhibition.(AAD)



Fig. 2-125. No. 8 table plain oak 3ft diameter. (H&S catalogue)



Fig. 2-126. No. 9 table (AAD)



Fig. 2-127. '538' "Rusper" Jacobean bedroom suite in walnut, 6ft wardrobe, £52 10. 0. (H&S catalogue).

A further attempt was made in **1912**, after the addition of the walnut suite in the previous year, to broaden the choice of timbers available in the Factory's range by adding a polished sycamore suite ('587'). Only two sets were sold before it was dropped again in 1918. 1912 was notable as the year A.H. designed a number of top quality show pieces that would reappear regularly over the years as examples of the Cabinet Factory's finest work. The first was a bureau bookcase in Italian walnut ('346') which was exhibited at the Arts & Crafts exhibition at the end of the year and again at the 1913 Ghent Arts & Crafts exhibition in Belgium and at the 1914 Paris Exposition des Arts Décoratifs de Grande Bretagne. According to his notes on the drawing it had a curl veneer on the flap front and peardrop handles, in the interior were divisions in red and black drawer fronts with ivory knobs, as well as an inkpot and china pen tray.<sup>300</sup> One of these was sold in 1912, another in 1913, another in 1914 and another at the end of the war (presumably when it got back from Paris), but when the same model was exhibited at the BIIA exhibition in 1920 it was made in English walnut and this one remained in stock until it was finally sold off in 1929 (Fig. 2-130). Also designed and made in 1912 was the refectory dining table 'No. 14' which in turn was displayed at the Arts & Crafts exhibition that year, also at Ghent the following year and again at the 1916 Arts & Crafts exhibition (Fig. 2-132). Made in fumed chestnut, with an unpolished top, five of the standard size (7ft x 3ft) were made and sold up until 1921; after 1924 they were offered in weathered oak of which 26 were sold before 1930 – latterly their manufacture was sub-contracted to Cooper. One of the five original tables, that belonged to the Chipping Campden etcher F.L. Griggs, survives in the collection of the Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum.<sup>301</sup> A.H. had a special 8ft long version made in 1920 for his own use which also survives. A 3ft china cabinet with a stand ('221') was made in blackbean for display at the Arts & Crafts exhibition of which two were sold and another seems to have gone to the

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<sup>300</sup> Matthew Denney gives the cabinet maker's name for the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition, 1912, as J. Cooper. The Paris exhibition catalogue gives the maker's name as Ernest Ravenscroft from which one concludes that this confirms that the first one was sold, as stated in the text, and a new one had to be made for Paris. An original sketch drawing by A.H., dated 12.03.1912 is preserved in the archive AAD/1994/16/831.

<sup>301</sup> See Carruthers, A., & Greensted, M., *Good Citizen's Furniture*, Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum, 1999, p. 105.

Paris exhibition (Fig. 2-131).<sup>302</sup> For the 1916 Arts & Crafts exhibition what appears the same cabinet was made in mahogany although under a different model number – ‘954’. Also shown at the 1912 A&C exhibition and sold from it was a sideboard in walnut (‘670’) for £48 (Fig. 2-133). The following year another, priced at £52 10s 0d, was sold and in 1914 one was sent to Paris as part of the Arts & Crafts exhibition. War intervened and the sideboard was stored in the basement of the Louvre until hostilities ceased when it was possible to repatriate it. It is thought that this one was sold by the company in 1919, but in 1975 it was acquired by the V&A Museum from a private owner complete with an inscription that records its early history. Others were made and sold in 1920 and 1922 and it was displayed at the 1923 Arts and Crafts exhibition with the last of the total of around seven of this model being sold in 1930.<sup>303</sup> Another item displayed at the 1912 Arts & Crafts exhibition, in addition to A.H.’s black bean bookcase for his own use (now preserved at the V&A) (Fig. 2-134), was a dresser in fumed chestnut (‘669’) which appears to have been a one-off, finally being sold in 1917.<sup>304</sup>

Anthony Ludovici, the controversial conservative author writing for the weekly literary magazine *The New Age*, lambasted most of the exhibits at the 1912 Arts & Crafts show. He criticised the design and quality of work by Sir Robert Lorimer, Walter Crane, Romney Green and Hamilton T. Smith amongst others. Of A.H.’s contributions he wrote that the china cabinet (‘221’) was *quite devoid of imagination or power*, the two sideboards (‘670’ and ‘669’) were *hideous* and the writing bureau (‘346’) apparently demonstrated *careless workmanship*. His most damning comments were reserved for what he perceived as a lack of proportion in the design of the dining table (‘14’), which he thought must have been *conceived in the mind of a stone mason ...certainly no skilled worker in wood would ever have designed such a colossus*.<sup>305</sup> !!

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<sup>302</sup> See original AH pencil design AAD/1994/16/828.

<sup>303</sup> AH’s original pencil design for this sideboard is dated 22.IX.12 and is preserved in the archive AAD/1944/16/818. See also *The Queen*, 10.02.1926. photograph of Prudence Maufe standing in front of what appears to be this sideboard still on display at T.C.R. which suggests it was not sold until the late twenties.

<sup>304</sup> Curiously this blackbean bookcase is illustrated in I. Sparkes, *English Domestic Furniture 1100-1837*, Spurbrooks, 1980, pg 95, where it is captioned as being a *late 18<sup>th</sup> century glazed china cupboard*.

<sup>305</sup> A. Ludovici, *The Arts and Crafts Exhibition at the Grosevenor Gallery*, *The New Age*, 30.01.1913, p 305. My thanks to Benedict Heal for drawing my attention to this reference.



Fig. 2-128. '348' toy or linen cupboard, unpolished oak, 1911. (AAD).



Fig. 2-129. painted and decorated version of '348' cupboard. (AAD)



Fig. 2-130. '346' bureau bookcase, Italian walnut, red and black lacquer interior, exhibited at 1912 A&C exhibition. (AAD)



Fig.2-131. '221' china cabinet in blackbean with '346' bureau bookcase, 1912. (AAD)



Fig. 2-132. 'No.14' dining table in chestnut, exhibited at 1912 A&C exhibition.(AAD)



Fig. 2-133. '670' walnut sideboard exhibited at 1912 A&C exhibition. (AAD).



A much simpler design produced by the Factory from 1912 onwards was the '204' 4ft bookshelf (introduced around 1907 as part of the Cottage Furniture range and probably made by Mansfield until this change) which remained in production right up to 1939 during which period at least 258 were sold. Among the special orders completed during 1912 was more English walnut panelling for Vickers; a boardroom and hall in Austrian oak, that included a 9ft x 3ft 6in boardroom table, for Merz & McClellan; and a 6ft painted white sideboard for Rothschild.

In **1913** the company was once more thrown into turmoil by the death of Ambrose Heal senior at the same time as ambitious new plans for redevelopment of the premises were being made. A.H. became Chairman as well as continuing to be joint Managing Director with his younger brother Ralph so it was a poor year for design development. No new bedroom suites nor any other ancillary items were added to the Factory's range in 1913. Among the special orders was another one specified in Austrian oak although this time it was evidently for a domestic customer, Ralle, and included a dresser, bookcase, play table, coal scuttle, circular mirror, dining table and a marble top table.

The growth of the selection of cabinet furniture within the retail business over the previous ten years had been such that it no longer comfortably fitted within one stockbook. In **1914** bedroom furniture suites were given their own separate 'Bedroom Suites' stockbook whilst everything else (including miscellaneous wardrobes, dressing tables etc. as well as dining tables etc.) continued to be recorded together in the 'Cabinet Stockbook'.



Fig. 2-134. Bookcase AH designed (circa 1910) to house his collection of Private Press books. It is illustrated in C.H.B. Quennell, *The Case for Modern Furniture*, in *Country Life* book called *The House & Its Equipment* (circa 1911). Described as being made in a new Australian wood called “black bean”. Displayed at the 1912 A&C exhibition. The bookcase was photographed in situ for *Country Life* article on Baylins Farm of 1921. AH bequeathed the cabinet (along with a second one and a writing table) to the V&A in his Will. It is preserved there under circulation no. 298-1960. (photograph is from H&S archive at AAD, neg no. 2113.)



Fig. 2-135. Second bookcase designed by AH (circa 1924) to house his collection of Private Press books as a companion piece to Fig. 134. It stood on the other side of the doorway in the “parlour” at Baylins Farm. The dimensions were based on the need to house the Doves Bible as well a big folios. On his sketch he has written *This bookcase was made in black bean inlaid with mother o’pearl*. On the back of the photograph (AAD, H&S archive neg. no. 1557) is written *Indian Laurel bookcase*, and the stock book records a *laurelwood bookcase* supplied to AH in 1924. Bequeathed to V&A but went to Geffrye Museum where it is still preserved.



Fig. 2-136. Bookcase model no. ‘391’ which is described in the stock books as “Indian Laurelwood 3ft bookcase with glazed top” and was first made in 1926, priced at £85. This was sold in 1933 and another was made for the showroom which remained unsold in 1939 and presumably found its way into the boardroom collection where it remained until 1980s. (photo January 1934, AAD, neg. no. 4807)



Fig. 2-137. Special order carried out in July 1921 for a pair of 2ft 9in cabinets in English walnut for Horniman for £72 10s 0d (each, ?). This photograph is captioned “Horniman bookcase walnut”. Present whereabouts of bookcases unknown to Horniman Museum and family. (AAD, H&S archive neg. no. 31)

No new bedroom suites were introduced in **1914-1915** apart from an expensive inlaid mahogany suite '627' at £110 which remained a one-off and the 'cabinet stockbook' also shows hardly any novelties in the products recorded there. One item however that appears to date from 1914 is the '674' 5ft unpolished oak dresser with curtain (Fig. 2-138). This was featured at the 1916 Arts & Crafts exhibition, again at Wembley in 1924, and remained in production until 1935, by which time 139 had been sold.

One special order carried out is perhaps symbolic of the immediate problems confronting not just Heal's but the entire country - it was *for two Italian walnut coffin trestles*.

In **1916-1917** there were two new tables, 'No.33', described as a 6ft6in x 2ft 6in, unpolished oak portable table of which 4 were sold over the next couple of years, and 'No.35' a 6ft x 2ft6in table very unusually made from English cedar that would appear not to have been repeated. Origination was not the order of the day and instead items that had previously been sub-contracted were made in-house, such as 'No. 24' draw leaf table (previously made by Gomme) (Fig. 2-141) which continued as a 'bread and butter' product throughout the twenties and 'No. 32', which was very similar but with square rather than turned legs (Fig. 2-139). The Factory made more than 400 of both of these designs before they were sub-contracted. 'No.'26', a 3ft x 6ft 6in pull out table in mahogany was not in the same league commercially but still some 79 were sold over a ten year period (Fig. 2-140).

One interesting new design by A.H. was a 5ft mahogany sideboard ('678') with contrasting ebonized trellis work back (Fig. 2-143). A total of 15 of these were made by the mid-twenties.

Amongst the special orders fifty sets of bedroom furniture for the Special Hospital for Officers were made but most of this was manufactured by Grieve with only some items being made by the Factory. However Swan Hunter were supplied with 13 tables in dark oak made in the Factory.

The Arts & Crafts “Hall of Heroes” exhibition opened in October 1916, for the first time within the walls of the Royal Academy. It attracted the visit on two occasions of Queen Mary and, by way of contrast, contained a display of tableware by the fledgling Design & Industries Association. A.H. submitted no fewer than seven items of furniture:

1. A ‘no. 14’ dining table (see 1912).
2. A chair in chestnut – this is assumed to be his lattice back chair. (see J. Cox – Key Suppliers 2.3.5.1)
3. An oak dresser in unpolished oak with curtains (model ‘674’ see 1914).
4. A mahogany china cabinet and stand. (‘954’ previously ‘221’ – see 1912)
5. A fourposter bed in chestnut.
6. & 7. Ebonised dining table and sideboard picked out with gilt and painted decoration. (possibly ‘No. 28’ – see 1918).

The ebonised and gilt table and sideboard were described as: *being a departure on somewhat daring lines.*<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> *The Queen*, 11.11.1916.



Fig. 2-138. '674' unpolished oak dresser with curtains, 1914. Shown at 1916 A&C exhibition. (AAD)

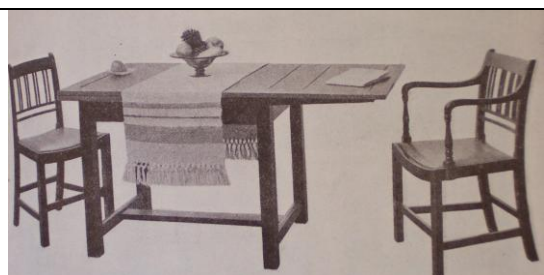


Fig. 2-139. 'No. 32' draw leaf table (H&S catalogue)



Fig. 2-140. 'No. 26' draw leaf table (AAD)



Fig. 2-141. 'No. 24' draw leaf table (H&S catalogue)

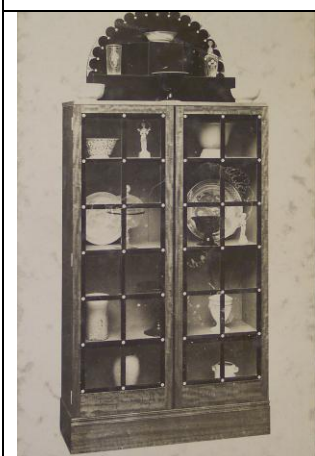


Fig. 2-142. '954' mahogany & black china cabinet. 1918. See blackbean version 1912. Display stand on top was sold separately and varied in form. (AAD)



Fig. 2-143. '678' mahogany & black sideboard with lattice work back. 1916. (AAD)