

2.2.3 Post War reconstruction 1918-1929

The period after the First World War was not the most exciting as far as the output of the Factory is concerned. The economic landscape was marked firstly by high inflation, followed rapidly by deflation that then continued to linger on. The high demand of the post-war boom was followed quickly by a slump and then stagnation.³⁰⁷ Managerially, it should be remembered that A.H. was by then middle-aged. He celebrated his fiftieth birthday in 1922 and although still very dynamic, his functions had changed since pre-war times. Following the death of his father, he was now Chairman of the business with all the additional burdens that that entailed and responsible for managing an enlarged premises with a broader assortment of merchandise. To add to the problems there is evidence that the business was short of funds.³⁰⁸ As well as losing his eldest son during the war, his inspiring cousin and mentor, the architect Cecil Brewer, who might have challenged him to new creative thought, had also died. But, as Alan Powers has pointed out, this was a period in Britain that was generally lacking in originality and even in terms of architecture there was only dull work: *indicating that there were no opportunities in the years 1910 -25 to do much else.*³⁰⁹

However within the business A.H. was now supported by Hamilton Temple Smith and Prudence Maufe at a senior level and Arthur Greenwood had started work as a young draughtsman. It is perhaps an indication that A.H.'s priorities were elsewhere when one sees during this decade that amongst the most interesting designs for the factory were those by the cabinet furniture buyer, J.F. Johnson, whose name was duly publicly credited, and even, by the end of the decade, there is at least one design that can be identified as being by Greenwood.³¹⁰ Another measure of A.H.'s increased absence from the drawing board, and Johnson's growing importance as a designer, may be seen in the fact that although A.H. exhibited eight items at Arts & Crafts exhibitions during the twenties (of which a couple were old designs), Johnson

³⁰⁷ See A.C. Pigou, *Aspects of British Economic History 1918-1925*, Macmillan, 1947.

³⁰⁸ In 1916 the Directors had tried to persuade Minter the building company to accept debentures in payment of the building contract. In 1919 A.H. had personally lent the company £2000. See Board Minutes, 26.07.1916, 24.10.1919. AAD/1978/2/1

³⁰⁹ Alan Powers, *The Modern Movement in Britain*, Merrell, 2005, p 13.

³¹⁰ It seems that throughout this period A.H. was also getting more and more involved in historical research particularly with regard to 18th century trade cards.

effectively equalled this with six items selected for display. It becomes increasingly difficult to ascribe with certainty designs to A.H. and one concludes that it became much more of a team effort. However, it is certain that nothing would have come out of the Cabinet Factory without A.H.'s personal approval.

An additional distraction was the acquisition in 1920 of the ex-Coote/Page factory across the road with its facility for painting furniture, which, given Ambrose's penchant for decorating furniture, must also have tended to occupy his creative talents to the detriment of new ideas for the Cabinet Factory. Also at the start of the period much effort must have gone into the development of a nationally distributed, reasonably priced, mass-produced range of furniture which did not materialise – see John Dawson, *Key Suppliers*. (2.3.3.1)

At the beginning of the period the models available were essentially the pre-war designs, most of which, although maintained in the range for most of the decade, soon slowed right down as sellers. It was not until 1924 that a serious attempt was made to update the selection. However early efforts were made to combine the skills of the Cabinet Factory with those of 'Coote' (now owned by Heal's) and the Decorating Studio run by Miss Hindshaw with furniture being made in the first, painted in the second and decorated in the last, although such cross-fertilisation had already taken place before the War.

What seems clear is that during the twenties the major innovations for the Cabinet Factory were more to do with finish than with new forms. The most significant new finish introduction was the "Weathered Oak" finish which has already been examined and that appears from 1922. This became very closely identified with Heal furniture and was extensively imitated both in authorised form by Heal suppliers, such as Greenings and, in unauthorised form, by competitors. The other notable development in the second half of the decade was the addition to the flat, and sometimes bright colours of lacquered furniture, of the much more opulent French *Art Deco* look of gessoed finishes. What emerges clearly from the records is that, whilst "Weathered Oak" became a finish that sold regularly, the others were more for show and spectacular, and few were made.

Amongst those designs that are known to be by A.H., mahogany picked out in black and often featuring trelliswork is a typical feature of his work at this period. These show more delicacy and refinement than his pre-war work and were also inspired by his favourite period, the late eighteenth century. He is believed to have furnished his London flat in this more sophisticated style, although for his new country home A.H. revealed that fundamentally his taste was little changed by ordering furniture, also of his own design, that harked back to the Arts and Crafts traditions.

J.F. Johnson, rising to the challenge of designing for the factory in the mid-twenties, produced an expensive bedroom in the recently imported 'new' timber, Indian laurelwood. This captured more closely the design feeling of the times with delicate, tapering, slightly curved legs and ivory knobs.

One sideboard introduced in 1921 ('809') in mahogany with black inlaid lines in an X across the doors is of interest because it has a flush front giving a more modern look. The design is almost certainly also by J.F. Johnson although it has also been attributed to A.H.³¹¹ Pevsner called this sideboard, along with a Heal bedstead, *perhaps the most original designs produced in England during the quinquennium after the war*. He described it as a compound of Sheraton inspiration with the great originality of Heal's pioneer work about 1900, and suggested the doors were of veneered blockboard.³¹² Examination of the photograph shows the doors, although flush, still appear to have a mitred frame construction so they may not have been as technically modern as Pevsner thought even if the appearance was there.

A.H. designed another sideboard around the same time (Fig. 2-260) or even slightly earlier than the '809' which was manufactured by Mansfield (Model '726'). This definitely has flush veneered doors with a harlequin inlay as decoration within a severe black box carcase that could be seen as *moderne* or even *modernist*. However, given what has been demonstrated already about his sources of design inspiration this should probably be viewed more correctly as Neo-Sheraton rather than Proto-

³¹¹ In *The Queen*, 8.11.1923, *The Furniture Journal*, 17.03.1923, and the *DIA Yearbook* for 1922, it is illustrated and ascribed to J.F. Johnson. In the *Architectural Review* in 1926 it is said to be by A.H.

³¹² N. Pevsner, *Patient Progress Two: Gordon Russell*, *Architectural Review*, cxxxii, 1962, p 214.

Modernist.

A special design for which A.H. was personally responsible, and on which he lavished his delight in symbolic detailing, was the radio cabinet presented to King George V by the BBC in 1924. A.H.'s sketch design for this prestigious order is dated 24 December 1923 and it was delivered in March 1924. The technical elements had been designed by Capt. Peter Eckersley, first chief engineer of the BBC, included: *a multi-valve set and loudspeaker, two high frequency valves, three resistance capacity note magnifiers* and provision for up to four headphones to be used. The case that Ambrose designed to house these elements had its own stand and looked like a cupboard but the doors, whose panels were of royal purple silk, concealed the controls and speaker, and the narrow frieze along the top hid the aerial, whilst a small drawer opened to reveal the plugboard for the headphones. Inlaid images of a conch shell and a Venus shell symbolised transmitting and receiving sound respectively, as did masques, one with a large mouth shouting, the other with large ears listening. Inlaid wave lines represented long and short sound waves.³¹³ Sadly enquiries of the Royal Collection reveal that the whereabouts of this unique cabinet are no longer known.³¹⁴

A.H.'s designs for his own factory in this post-war decade, apart from a certain refinement and a lot more colour, do not evolve much. In addition, in the absence of many drawings from his pencil, one concludes that the input by others (Johnson, Hamilton Temple Smith and Greenwood) grew significantly at this time and one can be less certain about ascribing all the furniture produced at this time to him. The year-by-year summary of the Factory's output follows.

In **1918** one new dark oak Jacobean suite ('685') was introduced that remained available until the mid-twenties by which time a dozen had been sold. A better

³¹³ See *Evening News*, 20.03.1924, *Daily News*, 22.03.1924, AH sketch book (author's collection). Heal's had also just furnished the new studio of "2LO" at the BBC's Savoy Hill headquarters where they had moved in 1923 from Marconi House which was set up and started broadcasting towards the end of 1922. see www.historyofpa.co.uk

³¹⁴ Jonathan Marsden, Deputy Surveyor of the Queen's Works of Art, letter to author, 21.03.2006. As early as 1951 A.H. himself was making enquiries as to the whereabouts of the cabinet with a view to preserving it. This attempt was abortive but it would appear it was still in existence at that point. (see correspondence with David Joel, author's collection).

indication of fashion trends at the time, although no more successful, was 'No. 28' a 3ft x 6ft table made in the Factory, painted across the road by Coote and then decorated by Miss Hindshaw, - these remained fairly scarce in common with most of the decorated pieces, only 12 being made. This seems to be the model shown at the 1916 Arts & Crafts exhibition along with its companion sideboard (Fig.s 2-144, 2-145).

It was evidently time to try to start creating special pieces of furniture again and two cabinets were designed to this purpose. The '953' 3ft walnut cabinet was Ambrose's take on the double dome cabinets of circa 1700 (Fig. 2-146).³¹⁵ Whilst the second ('954') featured one of his favourite design ploys at this period, the mixture of mahogany picked out with black lines. It was in effect just a revision of the blackbean china cabinet from 1912 ('221'). Both of these designs were displayed at the BIIA exhibition in 1920 and both remained available until 1930 but only two or three of each were made over the whole period. The '953' cabinet design was revised to incorporate two drawers around 1923. One of these remained in stock until the late thirties and this is probably the one that then stood in the Heal boardroom until the 1980s.

The immediate post-war scramble for furniture is difficult to assess. Although in Pounds sterling Cabinet Factory sales rose 41% and sales for the Heal business as a whole went up by 75% much of this is accounted for by inflation. Looking at the actual numbers of units made by the Factory it is not possible to distinguish any rise in quantity suggesting that they were working to capacity, limited presumably by the lack of skilled craftsmen.

One new introduction in **1919** was a 7ft x 3ft 4in walnut inlaid table (No. 54) of which one was sold in 1921 and another in 1927 (Fig. 2-142) however this appears to be a simplified version of A.H.'s own library table from 1909, with a planked rather than panelled top and no drawers.

Amongst the special orders made was furniture for the boardroom for Roe that

³¹⁵ See *Dictionary of English Furniture* pp 171, 180.

included a 10 ft x 5 ft boardroom table, whilst for Courtauld a special version of the '392' bedroom in chestnut was made.

The theme of mahogany picked out in black characterised **1920** as demonstrated by a new suite ('663'), although this was based on the '591' suite in spruce that was already being made by Cooper (Fig. 2-149). Some 13 sets of the '663' were made between 1920 and 1927 when it too was subcontracted to Cooper. '119' was a 5ft breakfront, glazed bookcase on a stand with sledge feet made in English walnut picked out in black, of which four were sold before 1927 when it was offered in laurel and a further eight were sold between then and 1933 (Fig. 2-150). A variation without the sledge feet but having stretchers instead was made for "Pick" (presumably Frank Pick of the London Underground) (Fig. 2-151). A notable special order was for A.H. himself who had two tables made in fumed chestnut for his new home; one was an 8ft long version of dining table 'No. 14' and the other was 'No. 32', a 2ft 6in x 3ft 6in draw table, both with unfinished 'scrubbed' tops.

An intriguing special order was carried out in **1921** which involved furnishing the offices for the All Russian Co-operative Society Ltd in Moorgate. Tables, bookcases as well as ten desks and a 14ft x 4ft 6in boardroom table were made in the Factory. A contract order was placed based on furnishing proposals for eight rooms on the first and second floors worth approximately £8000. Structural works were also involved which caused Dr Rabinovitch of the Russian Trade Delegation to complain in August of that year as he was unhappy about the delays in finishing the oak panelling. The Board of Directors were obviously somewhat wary of this order as it was decided not to give credit to the Trade Delegation but to allow them to open a deposit account with interest at 5% per annum.³¹⁶ Their caution may have been premonitory as these offices in Moorgate were later raided by the police in 1927 because it was suspected that they were a front for espionage. Over 150 officers searched for four days but were unable to find any evidence of spying but as a result diplomatic relations were broken off.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ Minutes of Board Meetings 11.03.21, 13.05.21, 03.06.21, 05.08.21. AAD/1978/2/1.

³¹⁷ Harriette Flory, *The Arcos Raid and the Rupture of Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1927*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 12, No. 4 (Oct 1977), pp 707-723.



Fig. 2-144. '28' table ebonized, picked out with gilt and decorated, 1918. displayed at A&C exhibition 1916.

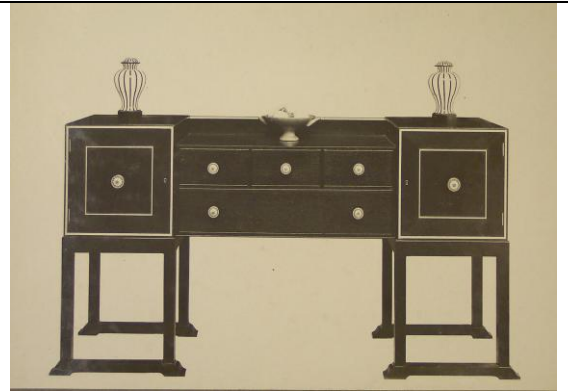


Fig. 2-145. '680' sideboard ebonized, picked out with gilt and decorated, 1918. displayed at A&C exhibition 1916.

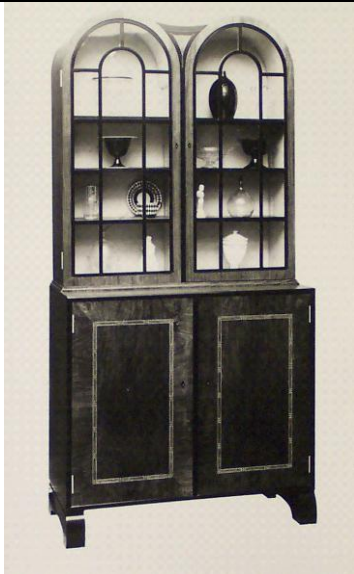


Fig. 2-146. '953' double-dome walnut cabinet, 1918 (AAD).



Fig. 2-147. revised '953' cabinet with two drawers, c. 1923. (AAD)



Fig. 2-148. 'No. 54' walnut dining table, 1919. simple plank top and no drawer version of 1909 library table. (AAD)



Fig. 2-149. '663' mahogany and black bedroom suite 1920. based on '591' spruce already in production. (AAD).

1921 saw the introduction of a 5ft cabinet '128' with glazed doors to the top, unusually made in waxed cherry with contrasting walnut details (Fig. 2-152). One was sold in 1922 and another in 1926. The first appears from the stock book to have been intended for the Arts & Crafts Exhibition but does not seem to have been exhibited there.

A new mahogany inlaid bedroom suite ('778') was introduced, in **1922**, at £84 of which only three were made. Four new dining tables appeared ('101' walnut, '107' mahogany, '112' dark oak, '115' limed oak) of which only 'No. 115' was commercially successful selling 59 examples before production was subcontracted to Cooper in 1927. This 3ft6in x 3ft table that extended to 6ft6in long, is interesting as it would appear to be the first table finished in limed oak and at that stage the term 'weathered oak' had not been introduced. It appears to be a slightly larger variation of 'No. 32' but both continued to sell. However the '333' octagonal book and magazine table also introduced that year was described as being in weathered oak so one is left wondering if perhaps there was some technical difference between the two finishes or does this represent the introduction of the term?



Fig. 2-150. '119' 5ft breakfront bookcase, walnut and black.1920. (AAD)



Fig. 2-151. special order without sledge feet and wider wings for Pick. (AAD)



Fig. 2-152. '128' waxed cherry and walnut bookcase. 1921. (AAD)



Fig. 2-153. '809' mahogany sideboard with black inlay. JFJ design.1921/23. (AAD).



Fig. 2-154. '825' sideboard oak and black, canted ends. 1923. (AAD)



Fig. 2-155. '826' sideboard in limed oak. 1923. (AAD)

There appear to have been few new introductions in **1923** apart from a little 2ft diameter table in unpolished oak of which a dozen were sold that year and a further 16 over the following three years (919). However the '809' sideboard designed by J.F. Johnson in 1921 and initially manufactured by Reeves and Webber for the first couple of years was henceforth made in the Cabinet Factory (Fig. 2-153). A total of 29 of these would be made before the last one was finally sold in 1936. It was a model that attracted attention from the beginning – long before Pevsner commented on it (see above) – as it was illustrated in the 1922 DIA year book, exhibited at the 1923 Arts & Crafts exhibition and featured in the report of that show published in *The Queen*. Two other sideboards from that year were '825' in oak picked out in black which had canted ends (ascribed to JFJ, *Architectural Review* February 1927) and '826' in limed oak (in the *Reasonable Furniture* catalogue it is described as "weathered" oak) both of which were illustrated in the *Studio Year Book*. 21 of the first were sold but only 3 of the second. (Figs 2-154, 2-155).

One design, by J.F. Johnson, that dates from 1923 was a 3ft 3in circular book table, priced at £33. 10s 0d, made in English walnut and inlaid (344) (Fig. 2-156). This was displayed at the 1925 Paris Exhibition and again at the 1926 Arts & Crafts exhibition, but only three seem to have been sold.

In **1924** a serious attempt was made to inject new products into the Factory's range with six new bedroom suites – '786' and '860' both mahogany and black, '788' and '824' both mahogany inlaid, '857' in the unusual combination of weathered oak with black and white margins, and '842' which must have generated considerable attention in English walnut, black and gold retailing for £425. This last was sold in 1926 and not repeated so was a one-off, as was effectively '786' of which a couple of extra wash stands and a toilet table were made before the suite was sold in 1927. '788' showed some initial promise with two wardrobes and seven toilet tables being sold in the first year but thereafter it faded rapidly. '857' sold ten wardrobes whereas, although '860' lingered on to the mid-thirties, only two were sold. The only model that was fairly successful was '824' with twenty-one wardrobes and seventeen toilet tables along with other items from the suite by 1934; the total suite price was £78 (Fig. 2-157). In view of the similarity of design detailing to sideboard '809' this is probably a JFJ design.



Fig. 2-156. '344' booktable walnut inlaid, with plate glass top. JFJ design. 1923. shown at 1925 Paris exhibition. (AAD)



Fig. 2-157. '824' bedroom suite, mahogany and black. Probably JFJ design (AAD)



Fig. 2-158. 'No. 49' bow ended dining table. 1919 but made by Cabt.Fact. from 1924 (AAD)



Fig. 2-159. 'No. 50.' Dining table. 1919 but made by Cabt.Fact. from 1924 (AAD).



Fig. 2-160. unidentified walnut bedroom suite. Cupboard chest and combination wardrobe shown here but there exist also pictures of double washstand, towel horse, toilet table with octagonal mirror and chair. Design details are developed from 1912 sideboard '670' but this suite was probably manufactured in early 1920s so could possibly be suite '842' of 1924. (AAD)



Fig. 2-161. '857' weathered oak bedroom suite with black details. AH design. (AAD)

This was evidently a year of reorganisation as production of a couple of tables that had previously been made by Sadgrove (no.s '49' & '50' from the so-called 'John Dawson' range – see Key Suppliers) was transferred in-house. Of 'no. 49' (Fig. 2-158), with its slightly bowed ends to the 5ft x 3ft top, only eleven were sold over the next five years but 'no. 50', a small refectory-type table, also in unpolished oak proved much more popular with 144 being sold before the end of the decade (Fig. 2-159). Amongst new introductions was 'no.32a', a mahogany and black version of pull-out dining table 'no.32' (first introduced in 1916 in oak but of which plain mahogany versions had also been made since 1922) of which 21 were made in the following four years. Another slightly longer and wider pull out table was introduced in both unpolished oak and mahogany with black (6ft 6in x 3ft 3in, 'no.85' in oak, 'no.86' in mahogany) which, although not as popular as 'no.32', was a useful addition selling 83 in oak and 31 in mahogany and black by 1930. There was also a 2ft 6in x 6ft table in dark oak on two columns with chamfers ('no.135') that was shown at the Ideal Home Exhibition. The Heal Factory made 35 over three years before these were subcontracted to Greenings in 1927. A one off table that does not seem to have been repeated was 'no.74' in English walnut that measured 8ft x 4ft and sold for £29 10s 0d. However a dresser in unpolished oak with glazed doors at the top ('881') was introduced and remained available right through the thirties by which time some 34 had been sold.

Amongst the special orders were two 6ft x 3ft weathered oak tables (£16 15s 0d) and one circular table (£22) *as sketch* for Churchill. Sadly no sketch survives as it was presumably done by the architect Philip Tilden for his client Winston Churchill's house, Chartwell. As is well-known, a 6ft 6in x 3ft version of the rectangular table with its one-and-a-half-inch-thick top and four inset pillar legs became one of Heal's standard tables ('no.148', £14) and some 128 had been made (some of them by Cooper) by 1939 (Fig. 2-162). One was made for Heal's own boardroom in 1929. The other prestigious special order was the wireless cabinet designed by A.H. and made in the Factory, at the request of the BBC, for presentation to King George V, that has already been described above (Fig. 2-164). This 'listening-in cabinet' in inlaid mahogany appears to have been supplied to the BBC at the ex-factory cost price of £96 as there is no entry for a selling price. Subsequently a carrier for it, made

of ash, was also supplied.

1925 the year of the Paris Exhibition of *Arts Decoratifs* (at which Heal's displayed painted bedroom furniture) when J.F. Johnson designed his 'C853' bedroom suite in laurelwood with ivory knobs inspired by French models. This too had international exposure as, in addition to the showroom model for Tottenham Court Road, a toilet table, chair, stool and 2ft 6in cupboard chest were sent on loan to Richards of New York. Despite its £265 price tag this range was evidently right for the moment and a certain clientele as at least seven sets were sold, the last finally going in 1936 (Figs 2-166, 2-167).

The only new dining table appears to have been 'no.160' in weathered oak with a 3ft 9in circular top on a central leg (Fig. 2-163). Only six were made over three years. It is curious, and probably incorrect, that this table which uses an identical leg design to A.H.'s pre-war 'no.14' has been ascribed to JFJ (see caption *Architectural Review*, August 1926, John C Rogers *Furniture for the Modern Dining Room*). A couple of inlaid book tables were introduced – '379' in mahogany and '380' in English walnut of which two of the former were made before these were subcontracted to Mansfield (who made at least eight more) whilst production of the latter was limited to four. A mahogany inlaid wireless cabinet with a Primax loudspeaker was also made, (Fig. 2-165) as a smaller version of that produced for King George, but it remained unsold until 1935 when it was converted to a cocktail cabinet. However even this does not seem to have improved its saleability as it was still unsold at the end of 1939.

Amongst special orders a further weathered oak table for Churchill was made, this time 7ft 6in long. Other tables made included eight in fumed oak for the Royal Masonic Institute for Girls and four for the Royal Masonic Institute for Boys.



Fig. 2-162. '148' weathered oak table first made at request of architect Philip Tilden for Winston Churchill's house Chartwell in 1924 (AAD).



Fig. 2-163. '160' circular oak table, 1925. A development of AH's No. 14 table of 1912 this was ascribed in the press to JFJ.(AAD)



Fig. 2-164. 'Listening-In' cabinet presented to King George V by the BBC in 1924. Case designed by AH. (AAD)



Fig. 2-165. equally unique smaller wireless cabinet offered for sale from 1925 but never sold. (AAD)



Fig. 2-166. '853' cupboard chest in laurelwood with ivory knobs. JFJ design. (AAD)



Fig. 2-167. '853' dressing table in Indian laurelwood. JFJ design. (Gloag, Ed. Design in Everyday Things).

A bedroom suite in English walnut with black margins ('868') was introduced in **1926** but only a couple were sold before it was discontinued in 1934. A 3ft Indian laurelwood bookcase with glazed top ('391') was made but not sold until 1933, by which time it had become part of the Signed Edition series (Fig. 2-136). A replacement was made but this had not been sold before the end of 1939. This design was a variation of the bookcase designed by AH for his own use c.1925, with glazed doors top and bottom (now in the Geffrye Museum, fig. 2-135) to complement another made in blackbean made c.1910 (exhibited at the 1912 Arts & Crafts exhibition. Now in the V&A Museum, fig. 2-134) made to house his collection of Private Press books. An A.H. designed drawing table in weathered oak ('499') was made for stock which was perhaps based on the one he had made for his own use at this time which had a top that folds shut so that work papers can be left spread out and undisturbed (his own was made by Cooper). A couple of this model were made in the early thirties.

Among the special orders for customers one notes the good Quaker names Rowntree and Fry (work for a Cadbury had been carried out in 1902). Rowntree ordered two large special weathered oak dining tables of the Churchill model ('148') as well as four bookshelves. The dining table for Fry was a version of one of the painted ones in black with green and blue detailing and so was not made by the Cabinet Factory but went through the Page workshop (see Coote, Key Suppliers 2.3.1) and this is perhaps indicative of major changes taking place within the business at this time. C.V. Adams, who had set up and run the Cabinet Factory from the beginning, retired in 1926.

No new bedroom suites were introduced into the Factory range in **1927**, nor were there any new dining tables. A little 2ft diameter occasional table in mahogany and black ('774') was introduced of which more than fifty were sold in a couple of years. A.H. however designed a dining table in weathered oak that had a 4ft 6in diameter top on an octagonal frame '185' but it was manufactured by Cooper.

Amongst the special orders carried out was a weathered oak screen for Miss Smith – no doubt Dodie Smith the playwright at that time working at Heal's.

The bedroom furniture stockbook covering the years **1928/29** is missing so we do not

know what happened in those years in that department. The general cabinet furniture stockbooks survive however where a new dining table in unpolished oak with twin legs each end makes its appearance. This model 'no. 212', that measured 6ft x 2ft 6in, is described as similar to 'no.190' and was reasonably priced at £8 5s 0d, selling twenty-eight examples in the first couple of years (Fig. 2-168). Curiously two English walnut dining tables were made in 1928 (with matching sideboards added in 1929) that seem to have been one-offs but it would be interesting to know what caused them to be made. The first, '426', measured 7ft x 3ft 6in, priced at £48.10s .0d, was described as "AH design", whilst the second, '427', measured 6ft x 3ft 3in, priced at £33. 10. 0d, and was described as "AG design". Was this some sort of competition between A.H. and his chief designer Arthur Greenwood? Both were sold in the year of production and repeated once later. A.H.'s design was elevated to the 'Signed Edition' series the second time round but there is no indication that this distinction was accorded to the AG design! The matching sideboards ('1014' AH design and '1015', AG design) were less successful. One '1014' (Fig. 2-172) was sold in 1929 and although another was made for stock (and is thought to have been exhibited at the 1931 A&C exhibition) it remained unsold in 1939 and is believed to be the one that formed part of the firm's collection in the boardroom until the 1980s. '1015' (Fig. 2-171) remained in stock until 1934 when it was sold and not repeated. AG had produced a smaller variant on this design (4ft 6in as opposed to 5ft 3in) in 1928, '986', (Fig. 2-170) with a different arrangement of drawers and cupboards but otherwise very similar having canted ends and a general appearance that is somehow more reminiscent of the work of Gordon Russell than of A.H.. If these two sideboards are typical of his own style at that period then it is not evident that his influence is reflected in the firm's designs at that epoch to any great extent.

A very special-sounding writing table '551' was also made in 1928 in walnut with macassar bandings, inlaid with ebony, box, mother of pearl, having eight drawers and special knobs. This was priced at £70 and sold in 1929 having been shown at the 1928 A&C exhibition, but it turns out to be a revival of the table AH designed for himself in 1909 (Fig. 2-124). Some unusual bookshelves ('429' in inlaid mahogany with glazed doors at ends and '447' in weathered oak with 3 glazed doors above) were introduced but even more exotic was the silver gesso and decorated double bedside bookcase and bed fitment made in the factory but gessoed by Rowley. These

were made in 1928 and sold in 1929 when, perhaps encouraged by this success, a 10ft gold gesso book fitment with lantern (480) and a silver and gold gesso bed book fitment was made (484). More down-to-earth was a little (2ft) weathered oak chest of 6 drawers for £11 15s. 0d, and 12 of these were sold in the two years.

Amongst the specials made in 1929 an unusual order was for a waxed chestnut filing cabinet costing £82 for Kings College Cambridge. Possibly linked with this is the chestnut writing table shown in Fig. 2-177.

A.H.'s own weathered oak bureau (Fig. 2-174) which he designed to complete the library extension to his own home in 1928 does not appear in the stockbooks. Neither does the rest of the furniture for this extension (which included a bedroom suite and a special drawing table) that was made a few years earlier when the extension was built in 1925 and was subsequently illustrated in *The Queen*.³¹⁸

³¹⁸ *The Queen*, 28.07.1926, p 15-16.

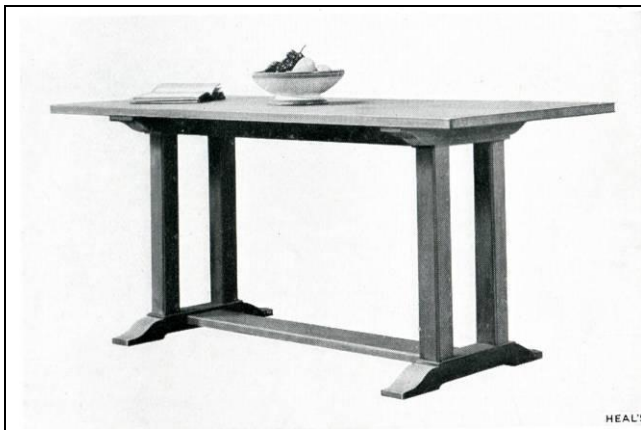


Fig. 2-168. '212' unpolished oak table 6ft x2ft 6in. (H&S catalogue)

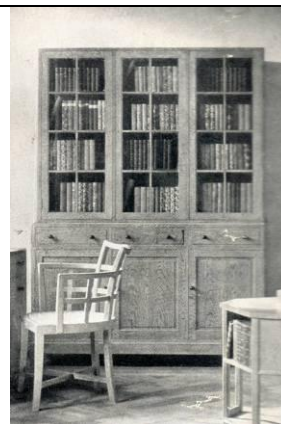


Fig. 2-169. '447' weathered oak glazed bookcase with drawers and cupboards below, 4ft 6in wide by 6ft 3in high 1928. (note JFJ designed chair in foreground)(H&S catalogue).



Fig. 2-170. '986' walnut sideboard canted front 4ft 6in, 4 cupboards, 3 drawers. AG design 1928 (AAD)



Fig. 2-171. '1015' walnut sideboard canted front 5ft 3in, 2 cupboards, 4 drawers. AG design 1929 (AAD)



Fig. 2-172. Probably '1014' walnut sideboard, 6ft, 8 drawers, 2 cupboards, cellarette in sycamore. Top folds down to conceal glasses. AH design 'Signed Edition' 1929. (AAD).

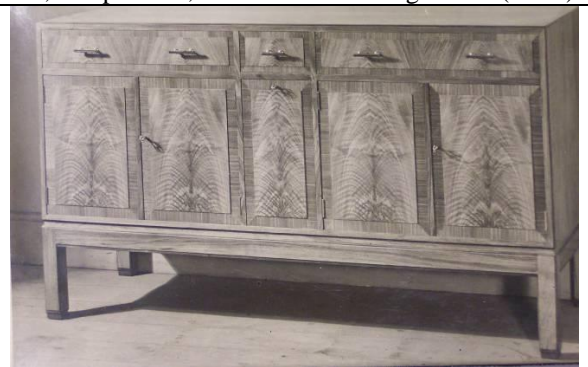


Fig. 2-173. '1057' walnut sideboard 5ft 3in with chromium plated handles. Fitted cellarette to centre. 1930. unidentified designer. (AAD)

2.2.4 Bad Times – Better Times 1930-1939

In the late 1920s a number of things happened that were to impact on the Heal Cabinet Factory and change the way it operated so much that in the 1930s it is hardly recognisable as that small Arts & Crafts factory whose operations have been traced thus far. The first change was the retirement of C.V. Adams in 1926, the man who had set up the Factory and operated it right from the start. This event seems likely to have provoked some reorganisation but evidence of change in the products made is not visible until 1930 (the stockbook for 1928/9 is missing so the exact timing is unclear). No doubt the economic crisis of 1929 also played a part in pushing the firm to restructure at this period. Since 1920 Heal's had operated a second factory (see Key Suppliers, Frederick Coote) specialising in painted furniture but by 1930 these two operations had been merged and the 'Coote' ranges are no longer identified separately. For the purposes of consistency in this study only the wood finish furniture is traced here but some comment on the painted finishes will be found under Frederick Coote. The scale of the change can be measured from the fact that out of the 35 bedroom suite designs on offer as Factory products in 1930, only 9 had timber finishes; all the rest were painted and decorated in some way. All the bedroom furniture model numbers had been given a 'C' prefix.

It is interesting to note that the trend to decorative finishes was such that on dining and living room furniture, for example, weathered oak was sometimes highlighted with silver or cellulosid finishes were employed. The Factory often called on a specialist called Scuffell for these, whereas for silver gesso finishes they turned to Rowley.

A.H.'s contribution to furniture designs in this decade becomes even more difficult to discern. This is no doubt in part because more and more furniture was being made by outside suppliers, such as Greenings who had their own drawing office that interpreted the needs of the Heal business as transmitted to them via Johnson and Greenwood, and therefore AH was distanced from the day-to-day detail. But the

situation is complicated still further as there is evidence that designs that have been credited to AH were in reality done by others so one is left guessing at what his real contribution was even when things appeared under his name.³¹⁹ However it is this decade that demonstrates that, even if his first personal preference was for furniture in the Arts and Crafts tradition, he was open to the newest developments in design. He was prepared to put his name to furniture made with chromium-plated tube or anodised aluminium, with curvaceous ‘Art Deco’ outlines. At the same time he was still keen to promote the highest standards of traditional cabinet-making skills by designing ‘Signed Edition’ products to ‘showcase’ these abilities and often it was these designs that were made by the Factory and are recorded as being A.H. designs.

However as the decade advanced he must have been increasingly conscious of operating in a changed, and economically hostile environment and have been relieved to hand over some of his design burden to his son Christopher who joined the business in 1934. Otherwise it seems likely that Johnson and Greenwood continued to contribute designs, but none are specifically attributed to them and one is left with the impression that through the thirties the Factory’s purpose became increasingly to fulfil customers’ special orders. Noel Carrington reveals a telling conversation he had with A.H. in the early thirties. In writing of the change of attitudes at the period he records:

In one particular respect the younger generation differed from its elders – in its attitude to materials. The generation that had been grounded in craftsmanship made a point of respecting the traditional material of a craft...Synthetic substitutes were regarded with something like horror...The earlier members of the D.I.A. took a moral stand on this issue and I think none of them would have been seen with a briefcase of plastic pigskin. By the thirties, this attitude was passing rapidly. ...

I don’t think I malign them when I say that some of the elders of the Association found it difficult to accept the pace of these innovations. I recall

³¹⁹ After the publication of *Up and Down at Heal’s* by Tim Benton, in which the design of the ‘Roman’ chair and table in oval section chromium-plated steel tube shown at Heal’s 1933 *White and Off-White* exhibition, and again at the 1935 *Art in Industry* exhibition at the Royal Academy was recorded as being by A.H., Leonard Thoday (retired manager of the Metalware department) wrote to record that in fact the table was designed by Leonard J. Thoday and the chair by J.H. Wilson. See AAD/1994/16/1293, short Histories of Heal’s, letter from LJT to Peter R. Lane 24.02.1978.

*an exhibition of some new furniture at Heal's where a dining room set was in steel and glass. As Ambrose Heal was present I asked him how he felt about steel furniture. He took me aside. 'You know, of course, that I was brought up on the bench. But the young men must have their head.'*³²⁰

Of the nine timber finish bedroom suite designs on offer from the Factory in **1930**, only two had not been in production in 1927. The seven earlier models were made up of three pre-war designs and four from the 1924 to 1926 period. One of the 'new' designs was 'C691' in a mixture of weathered oak and mahogany and having a small 3ft 6in wardrobe. This suite sold for £52 10s 0d. in the year but was not repeated. The other suite 'C969', also with a 3ft 6in wardrobe, was in cross-banded mahogany and was more difficult to sell, some of it hanging around until 1939, so that was not repeated either.

In the dining and living room department a couple of new bookcases appeared. '517' in walnut and maccassar veneers had glazed side doors, whilst '518', an A.H. design in weathered oak had open ends. Of the former 4 were sold before the end of the decade but only 2 of the latter.

Amongst special wardrobes made in the year were one made by the Factory but finished in silver gesso by Rowley for Rose, and one stippled yellow for Alexander and another stippled pink for Dabo.

No new introductions were made in **1931** to the bedroom furniture range. In Dining Furniture an interesting departure was an ebonized dining table '460' (Fig. 2-178) with the top and pedestals clad in Monel metal (this was a patented, corrosion resistant, nickel-copper alloy).³²¹ The price of £32 10s 0d had to include an allowance for 8 hours work by Scuffell spraying the top, however twelve tables were sold over six years. A 7ft 6in x 3ft table in weathered oak '472' was also introduced of which 19 were sold before 1939 at £25. Less successful introductions were '470'

³²⁰ Noel Carrington, *Industrial Design in Britain*, George Allen & Unwin, 1976, p.119.

³²¹ See L.E. Shoemaker & G.D. Smith, *A Century of Monel Metal: 1906-2006*, J.O.M. Minerals, Metals & Materials Society, vol. 58, No. 9, September 2006, pp 22-26. www.ingentaconnect.com

in black and gold with a plate glass top (Fig. 2-179)(that involved 12 hours' work by Scuffell) and '471' an octagonal walnut and ebony table with a glass top. The showroom samples of both were still in stock unsold at the end of 1939.

Curiously, in as much as A.H.'s stance in earlier years had been as anti-Victorian design as anyone, this was the year that saw the shop organize a major selling exhibition of genuine Victorian furniture. The Cabinet Factory was called upon to produce an unpolished deal, kidney-shaped, dressing table for this display which must mark the beginning of the revival of interest in Victorian design.

Again there were no new introductions to the bedroom furniture range in **1932** but a variety of pieces appeared in the living and dining room department. Three new bookcases ('535', '570', '571') were tried. '535' was a 4ft x 4ft 3in high open bookcase in walnut with adjustable shelves on Tonks racks – this was sold in 1933 and not repeated. '570' measured 3ft wide and '571' was 4ft 3in wide. Both were made in weathered oak with walnut details and fitted with sliding glass doors. Fourteen of the smaller one and five of the larger were sold before the end of 1939. '483' was a 7ft 6in x 3ft 6in dining table in weathered oak with cluster legs at £21 but only a couple were sold and '487', a 6ft x 3ft 8in dining table in dark oak at £39 15s 0d remained a one-off. An occasional table in weathered oak and silver '1364', measuring 4ft x 2ft 6in was also a one-off, as was '1400' a low square table finished in the mysteriously named "Swastika" cellulose. Scuffell was involved in the finishing of both of these.

Added to the 'Signed Edition' series of pieces of furniture was a writing table in stripey walnut with a green Swedish marble top '581' (Fig. 2-180) but it remained a one off, unlike the more expensive (£67 10s 0d compared to £42 10s 0d) but fascinating corner desk in weathered oak. The top of this model ('596') was lined with vellum, the central cupboard contained an extending arm for the telephone which could therefore be discreetly shut away out of sight, the cupboards at each end were designed to accommodate copies of the London telephone directories and the size of the open cubby-holes was adjustable through the provision of ingeniously sprung-loaded partitions. In addition it contained a concealed cupboard and drawer



Fig. 2-174. bureau designed by AH for own use. Weathered oak, maccassar ebony fall, interior light, spring loaded adjustable divisions, key in carcase. 1928 (AAD).

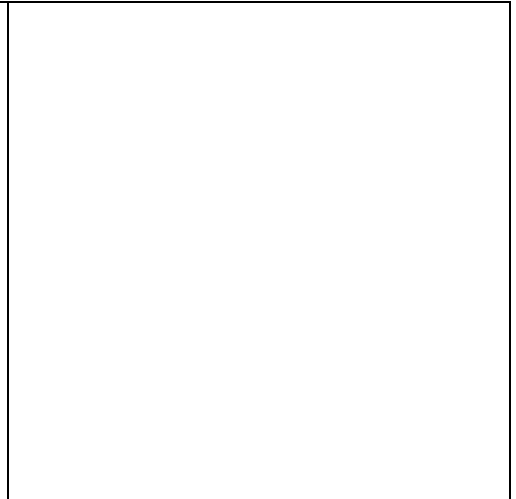


Fig. 2-175. blank



Fig. 2-176. '517' cantilevered pedestal desk, maccassar ebony, 'shagreen' leather top, 4ft 6in wide. JFJ design 1930/32 (AAD)



Fig. 2-177. Special writing table for Kings College in chestnut, 1929 (AAD).



Fig. 2-178. '460' 6ft x 3ft table, top and plinth ebonised and clad in Monel Metal. 1931 AH design. (AAD)

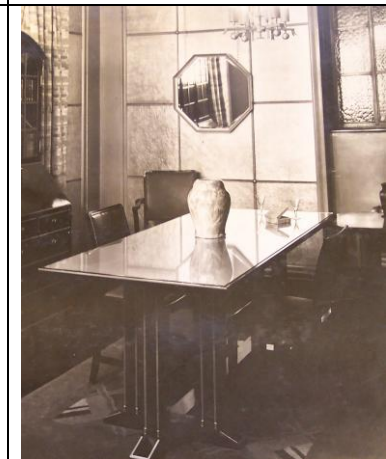


Fig. 2-179. probably '470' 6ft x2ft 9in black and gold table with plate glass top 1931. (AAD).

so it was a cabinet maker's as well as a designer's *tour de force* (Fig. 2-181). Of these a total of five seem to have been made. Another writing table ('611') in weathered oak and fitted with an electric light was far simpler and cheaper (£16 10s 0d) of which nine were sold before the end of the period. A.H. designed a 6ft sideboard in Queensland walnut and sycamore with chromium plated "mountings" ('1127') that remained a unique piece.

Amongst special orders made during the year one notes three 8ft x 3ft dark oak tables for Edinburgh University – an order which seems to have been repeated the following year. For Behrens a 6ft 6in sideboard, ebonized and clad in Monel metal, was made for £60, no doubt to go with one of the dining tables introduced the previous year, and the following year Behrens completed the set with a 3ft x 2ft side table to match.

1933 saw the introduction of a bedroom suite in Australian walnut ('C1019') with a 5ft wardrobe, a 3ft fitted wardrobe and a 5ft cheval mirror. This suite was priced at £140 and one set per year was sold for four years. In the dining and living room department a 2ft 6in weathered oak bureau bookcase ('592') was introduced which did not sell for the first couple of years but thereafter 10 were sold in five years. A single leg, 4ft 6in, octagonal dining table '492' in weathered oak managed to sell 4 over the period. More up-to-date was a 4ft sideboard in black cellulose and chromium plate at £19 10s 0d of which 16 were sold. Also a 4ft 6in x 2ft 6in pedestal writing table ('630') in walnut with chromium plated handles priced at £42 10s 0d appeared, of which half a dozen were sold in four years.

Special orders included four tables, 7ft x 3ft, in fumed oak for the Inner Temple made to the old 'No.7' design along with two bookshelves 7ft 3in high. Richmond College had 6 tables made in weathered oak complete with wiring.

A weathered oak bedroom ('C1044') was introduced in **1934** for £65 which continued to sell until the war by which time 16 wardrobes and 13 cheval toilet tables had been sold. A bedroom suite in Australian maple ('C1049') said to be by A.H. was also produced for the Dorland Hall exhibition that year and this appears to have

remained a one-off example (Figs 2-182, 2-183).³²² In the dining and living room department a new weathered oak dining table 5ft x 2ft 9in (model no. '494') proved popular and 34 were sold before the end of the decade, but the two other, more exotic, dining tables, both cellulosed cream, one with a plate glass top ('504') the other ('504a') with a silvered glass top did not sell and remained in stock. A 5ft 3in sideboard ('1149') in Australian walnut on a chromium plated stand for £65 was a one off that finally sold in 1939 (Fig. 2-184), and was presumably that shown at the 1935 British Art in Industry exhibition staged jointly by the R.A. and the R.S.A.

No new introductions were made to the bedroom furniture ranges in **1935** and there was only one new dining table, '516' which measured 7ft x 3ft, made in walnut of which 6 were sold over the next three years. There were also two new sideboards '1176' (5ft 3in - £42 10s 0d) and '1177' smaller yet more expensive (4ft 6in - £48) and a sidetable '1178' (3ft 6in - £17 10s 0d) all made in walnut, of which the first was the most successful, selling eight. An interesting design credited to A.H. was a 5ft 3in secretaire-bookcase made in Sussex oak ('662') decorated with panels of oak veneers running alternately horizontally and vertically. Glass-fronted book-cases at either end enclosed the drop flap of the centre, the key to which remained in the carcase (a known A.H. design ploy). It remained an unsold unique piece in 1939 (Fig. 2-185).

One special order that is indicative of the interior furnishing requirements of the time was the manufacture of a weathered oak gramophone cabinet costing £13 10s 0d for a Mr Myers. Three very large tables were ordered by 'Cambridge' (for the Council?) in the year and, probably because of their size, the making was shared out between the closest of Heal's suppliers. Cooper made an 18ft x 12ft Council table in English oak (£195), whilst Mansfield made another Council table, 18ft x 13ft in British African mahogany (£240) and the Factory made a twelve-sided, 7ft diameter, table in English walnut, in two pieces (£70). Another notable table was a 10ft 3in x 3ft 6in

³²² The Dorland Hall exhibition was organized by the architect Oliver Hill whom AH knew well. According to Noel Carrington the exhibition was criticized at the time by *twelve leading architects and designers* who felt it was regressive and too expensive. N. Carrington, *Industrial Design in Britain*, Allen & Unwin, 1976, p 145.

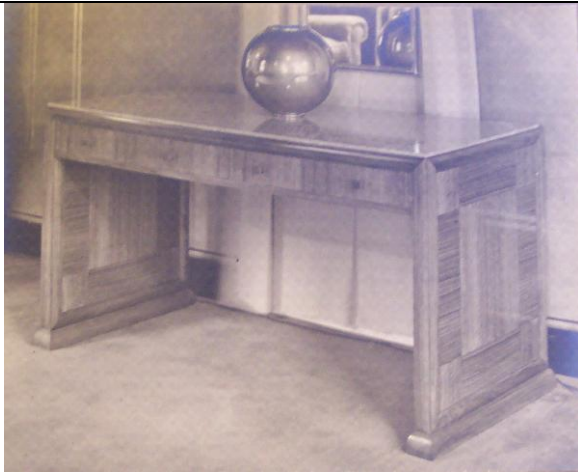


Fig. 2-180. '581' stripey walnut writing table with green Swedish marble top. 1932. (AAD)

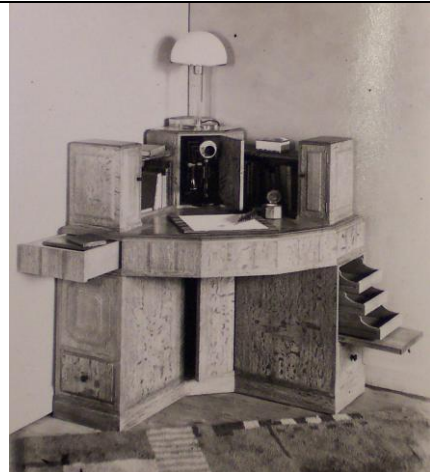


Fig. 2-181. '596' weathered oak corner desk, with secret cupboard, 1932. (AAD)



Fig. 2-182. Writing table in Queensland maple for 1934 Dorland Hall exhibition. (C1049) (Gooden)

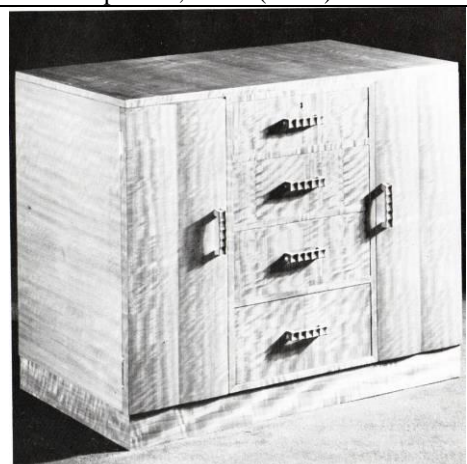


Fig. 2-183. Chest in Queensland maple for 1934 Dorland hall exhibition. (C1049) (Gooden)



Fig. 2-184. Australian walnut sideboard on chromium plated frame probably '1149' 1934 (Gooden)



Fig. 2-185. D662 bureau bookcase with S422 chair, 1935 (AAD).

walnut extending table made for Ferguson (£48) and special bookcases were made for Wylie (8ft 5in in dark oak, £78) and Gossage (10ft in bird's eye maple, £45 10s 0d).

Once again in **1936** no new bedroom ranges but two new dining tables were added. '521' was a 3ft 6in circular table in weathered oak and a lino top that remained a one-off whilst six of model no. '556' (6ft 6in x 2ft 9in in weathered oak) were sold. This was the year of the Modernist 'Seven Architects Exhibition' organised by Maxwell Fry on the top floor of the Heal shop and the Cabinet Factory were called upon to contribute by making up the cabinets in Indian laurel designed by Max Fry and Jack Howe. Both of these ('1208' and '1209') remained as one-offs as did '1643' a 2ft diameter table in birch and '1425' a 4ft hall table in rosewood. Only the 3ft rosewood hall table '1424' repeated once. There were also wall cabinets in Indian laurel 3ft wide ('160'), 2ft 9in wide ('161') and 4ft 3in wide ('162') and these, with one exception, seem to have remained hanging on the wall until war came and did not sell at all. An inexpensive 'bachelor's' weathered oak bookcase ('597') for £6 was introduced of which a dozen had been sold by the end of 1939.

Special dining tables were made for Trinity College, Cambridge, Fitzroy House, London, Manchester University and Harrow School. The order for Manchester University totaled 89 tables in different sizes in waxed English oak and were manufactured by Cooper and Wake & Dean, not by the Factory.

In **1937** a 'Wavy Ash with blue margins' bedroom suite ('C1079') was designed by JCH (Christopher Heal) for the Paris Exhibition that incorporated a "Vitroflex" mirror glass tambour top (Fig. 2-186). The suite was still in stock unsold in 1939. The same fate befell '1255', an Indian laurel cocktail sideboard, which was annotated in the stock-book with the initials E.F.C., perhaps to indicate the designer. Another non-seller was the 4ft x 2ft writing table in quilted ash '693' made for that year's Paris Exhibition, although a 4ft roll-top desk in unpolished oak did sell the year after.

As an indication of the variety of special orders fulfilled, examples extended from a 5ft bookcase in unpolished oak for the Bishop of Croydon (£32 15s 0d) to a painted open bookcase for Cheadle Mental Hospital (£2 7s 6d). Amongst special writing tables one notes with curiosity a 4ft x 2ft weathered oak table made for Watson for £30 that is specified as “handmade” whilst a 4ft table in unpolished oak for Donat was more expensive at £41 15s 0d. Both of these were overshadowed by the one made in mahogany for Aubyn but as this was based on model ‘596’, the corner desk (see 1932), the price of £73 is perhaps not surprising. A twelve sided clock in waxed oak was made for Cambridge University (perhaps the 24 hour clock designed by Anthony Heal recorded in an album) and the cross and candlesticks for Guildford Cathedral were made for decorating in gold by Scuffell.³²³

The ‘C1121’ bedroom in Australian walnut was introduced in **1938**, priced at £176. Out of this, one toilet table was sold in 1938 and replaced so that in 1939 there was still a complete suite unsold on the shop floor. ‘C1123’ bedroom in curl walnut was also introduced priced at £252. This was sold in 1939.

Four new dining tables appeared in weathered oak, three of which were circular. ‘584’ was 3ft 6in diameter and sold one, ‘585’ was 4ft diameter and sold three but the most popular was ‘586’, also 4ft diameter but with four cluster legs of which 6 were sold. The rectangular model ‘604’ did not sell at all. Neither did a 5ft 6in walnut sideboard ‘1290’ or a 5ft x 2ft 6in writing table ‘728’ that was made up in both waxed chestnut and laurel. A 3ft 9in secretaire bookcase in weathered oak (‘696’) seemed to hit the right note however as, in two years, nine of these were sold.

No new introductions were made in **1939** but special orders included tables for St John’s College Cambridge, the 10th Church of Christ Scientists and the Institute of

³²³ Although Guildford Cathedral (by the architect Edward Maufe, husband of Prudence Maufe of Heal’s) was not officially consecrated until 1961 and not completed until five years after that, building work had commenced in 1936 and it appears that the Crypt was used for worship before War intervened. See: Fleur Crew, *The Career of Sir Edward Maufe*, Dissertation (unpublished), University of St Andrews, 2003.

Civil Engineers. This was the year that, according to his own notes, A.H. gave up designing furniture professionally. The onset of war saw the conversion of most of the Heal premises to parachute production and other war time work. Although A.H. remained Chairman, he was able to delegate much of the day-to-day operation to his sons Anthony and Christopher. Christopher had studied architecture and economics at Cambridge and had started designing furniture in the mid-thirties and of course he was in turn supported by the experience of Johnson and Greenwood.

However A.H. did design a dresser in oak as a wedding present for his son Anthony when he got married in **1941** which is worth examining as it may be considered to demonstrate a number of things about A.H.'s real character as a designer (Fig. 2-187). Although the design, his last piece of domestic furniture, has softened rounded edges which reflect the 1940s rather than earlier periods and show he had moved with the times, it also has octagonal raised panels to the doors, within mitred frames, and carved details on the handles which are very "Arts & Crafts" features that he could have used in designs some twenty or even thirty years before. This dresser was not made to impress a fashionable clientele but as an expression of what he wished to give to a young couple setting up home in a small cottage. Made of solid natural oak, not long before the use of solid timber was banned by the Government, in an era when most manufacturers were turning increasingly to plywood or at least veneered blockboard, it demonstrates what he believed proper, well-made furniture should look like. Although constructed to the highest standards with handcut dovetails throughout, it is a simple, sober, almost austere functional piece of furniture in the best Arts & Crafts tradition with nothing flashy about it at all. A.H. was still an Arts & Crafts cabinet maker at heart.

The very last piece of furniture designed by A.H. was a cabinet made in **1953** to house the book inscribed, by Rosemary Ratcliffe, with the names of the men of Penn killed in war. It still stands in Holy Trinity Church, Penn, Buckinghamshire, (A.H. is buried in the graveyard and his grave takes the form of a stone bench that he had designed for his wife, Edith, who died in 1946 – one of the few non-furniture items he is known to have designed). The cabinet is suitably timeless in style and certainly

not related to the changes in design taking shape in that post-war era. Made in “weathered oak”, it could have been designed at any time from the early Twenties onwards and incorporates a coloured hexagon, decorated with a triangle and three circles that, in his continuing fascination for symbols, he incorporated to represent the holy trinity.

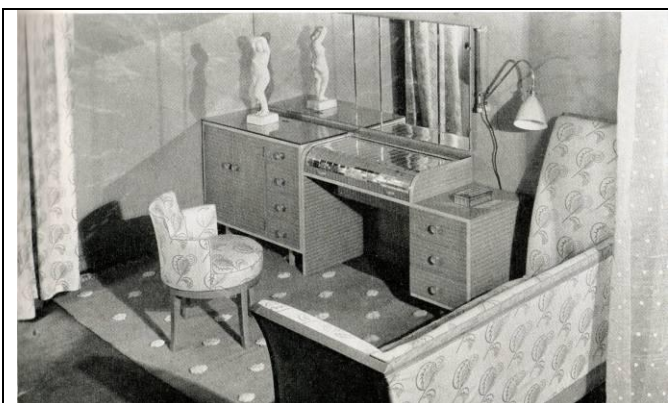


Fig. 2-186. 1937 Paris Exhibition, JCH design, Wavy-cut ash, "Vitroflex" mirror glass tambour top. (C1079) stockbook says blue margins. (Joel)



Fig. 2-187. AH designed oak dresser for ASH 1941 (AAD).

N.B. Figure no.s 2-188 to 2-192 not used.