

MACKINNON

FINE FURNITURE



A GEORGE IV THUYA CARD TABLE

England, *circa* 1820

James Newton of Wardour Street (1760 - 1829)

James Newton appears to have been apprenticed to Lawrence Fell and William Turton of Compton Street, Soho in London. He became free of his apprenticeship contract in 1781 when his name was recorded as one of the suppliers of items to Burghley House. By 1782 he was a partner in his firm and by the end of that decade he seems to have effectively taken control of the workshops and the firm's output. In 1789 Newton established his own firm trading from Wardour Street and it was here that he was to spend the rest of his career.

The firm's workshops were large and allowed Newton to produce most of his work in house, although he is known to have sub-contracted carving to specialists and to have had his metalwork made by contractors but then finished and assembled in Wardour Street. Newton's son followed his father in to the trade and had the honour of supplying pieces to the Royal family in 1824, the order coming to some £172.

Newton Snr's early output appears to have been relatively typical Sheraton period furniture but he was soon to capitalise on the Regency taste and develop a highly individual style which clearly appealed to wealthy connoisseurs of the time. Fortunately, several labelled pieces by Newton survive, allowing a convincing picture of his style to emerge. In addition, many other commissions by the firm are documented. Like so many firms of the time, Newton was an upholder-supplying everything from upholstery and carpets to fire grates, in addition to his stock in trade of fine furniture. The furniture he supplied ranged from carved to painted but he is perhaps best known for pieces featuring exotic woods

and highly original ormolu mounts. These mounts clearly draw their inspiration from the likes of Thomas Hope and Percier and Fontaine but retain an individual style of their own and are brilliantly chased and finished. It is tempting to believe that Newton's skill in working ormolu is what led Matthew Boulton to commission several pieces from the firm for Soho House in Birmingham between 1797 and 1799 but much of the order appears to have been for satinwood furniture so the shared interest in ormolu may simply have been coincidental.

Aside from Boulton, other great clients of the firm included the Earl of Exeter at Burghley, whose patronage seems to have effectively established Newton's career, Sir Gilbert Heathcote at Normanton Park (a house particularly famous for its once exceptional collection of regency period furniture, much of which is illustrated in the *Dictionary of English Furniture*), the 5th Earl of Jersey at Middleton Park (another legendary regency interior) and the 4th Earl of Breadalbane for both his Park Lane house in London and Taymouth Castle.

It has been suggested that Newton's great skill in assimilating French Empire motifs and making them his own may stem from a visit to Paris c.1802-1803 and it has also been suggested that he may have visited Thomas Hope's Duchess Street residence for further inspiration. Neither of these purported visits have been confirmed but clearly Newton had his finger on the pulse of contemporary taste and produced pieces with a very individual aesthetic. One of these pieces, a cabinet on stand in the Egyptian taste, is now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, having been donated by Horace "Woody" Brock. An armchair by Newton after a Thomas Hope design is in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Attributed to James Newton of Wardour Street

An exceptionally fine George IV card table in the French neo-classical taste. The top with wonderfully figured thuya wood, crossbanded and line inlaid with satinwood, box and ebony opening to reveal a green baize playing surface, the frieze similarly veneered and with very finely cast and chaste ormolu mounts. Standing on elegant line inlaid tapering round legs terminating in brass castors.

Literature:

Giles Ellwood, 'James Newton', *Furniture History*, 1995, vol. XXXI

Height: 2' 6¹/₂" in (76.5 cm)

Width: 3' 1" in (94 cm)

Depth: 1' 6³/₄" in (47.5 cm)

Stock Number

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