The Regency Period Metamorphic
Library Chair

This design history of the Library Step Chair was written by Clive Taylor as a final year submission for his Master of Arts degree in Antiques during 2009. The document charts the origins of mechanical furniture manufactured in London during the English Regency period (1811-1820) and it includes guidelines to help furniture historians, collectors and those working in the antiques trade to authenticate and attribute any examples they discover. The document is protected by copyright and must not be copied, distributed or referenced without the express permission of the author. Additional research on the subject of Regency period mechanical and metamorphic furniture is available from the author who would be pleased to assist future research and provide assistance with any attributions or insurance valuations.
Abstract

Tables, chairs and stools containing Library Steps were patented in Great Britain by Robert Campbell in 1774 but the chair-based design did not become popular until the second decade of the nineteenth century. It was during the first six months of the Regency that a neo-classical interpretation of Campbell’s idea, known as the Metamorphic Library Chair, first appeared in London. Despite the success of the chair, little has been written on the subject and attribution relies heavily on two nineteenth century sketches. The first illustration, by Rudolph Ackermann in 1811, shows a Morgan & Sanders chair and the second was drawn twenty-three years later for a Gillows estimate in 1834. The lack of detail in these sketches and the scarcity of information relating to Regency period metamorphic furniture, have led to many inaccurate claims.

The story of the Metamorphic Library Chair provides an interesting example of how discovery, design and fashion-driven demand led to Georgian furniture innovation. The dissertation identifies the origins of the chair and it examines the circumstances that led to a fascination with mechanical curiosities and dual-purpose furniture during the Regency. The dissertation also presents new insights into the reactions of the cabinet-makers as metamorphic furniture became popular and the competition intensified. This is the first thorough investigation into the Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair – a topic that has so far been neglected and one that is of interest to historians, collectors and those dealing in antique furniture. It is hoped that the dissertation will help to improve the identification and cataloguing of such an important and symbolic representation of the Regency Style.
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Acknowledgements

Few words have been written on the subject of the *Metamorphic Library Chair* and I am therefore extremely grateful to those people who have helped me with my research. Special thanks go to the following people as well as those who I may have inadvertently failed to acknowledge from the hundreds of curators, librarians, historians and antique dealers I have met over the past three years:

- David Beevers, Keeper of Fine Art at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton.
- Dr. Jim Birchall, Course Leader, University of Central Lancashire, Preston.
- Nicholas Brawer of Nicholas Brawer Antiques, New York.
- Antonia Brodie, V&A Department of Furniture, Textiles & Fashion, London.
- Ian Butchoff, James Butchoff & Peter Dodd of Butchoff Antiques, London.
- Sean & Simon Clarke of Christopher Clarke Antiques, Stow-on-the-Wold.
- Christopher Claxton Stevens of Norman Adams Antiques, London.
- Frances Collard, V&A Department of Furniture, Textiles & Fashion, London.
- Sharon Cure, Librarian at Trinity College, Oxford.
- Alison Felstead, Librarian at Trinity College, Oxford.
- Melissa Gallimore, Curator at Harewood House, Yorkshire.
- Peter Goodwin, Keeper & Curator of HMS Victory, Portsmouth.
- David Harvey, Managing Director at W.R. Harvey & Co. (Antiques) Ltd., Witney.
- Elizabeth Heyer, Graduate of Buckingham New University, Buckinghamshire.
- Katie Holyoak, Library Assistant of the Royal Collection, London.
- Clare Hopkins, Archivist at Trinity College, Oxford.
- Kathryn Jones, Assistant Curator of the Royal Collection, London.
- Sheila Markham, Librarian at The Travellers Club, London.
- Sandra Marques, Researcher in Retail & Licensing at the Museum of London.
- Stephen Sartin, Associate Curator of Art at the Judges Lodgings, Lancaster.
- Richard Schneidman, Proprietor of The Schneidman Collection, New York.
- Caroline Schofield, Mansion Manager at Tatton Park, Cheshire.
- Marie Stolberg, Researcher at Christie’s, London.
- Susan Stuart, Author & Furniture Historian, Lancaster.
- Dawn Webster, Curator of Kiplin Hall in Richmond, Yorkshire.
- Nicholas Wells of Mallett Antiques, London.
- The Librarians & Staff at the British Library, London.
- The Archivists & Staff at Westminster City Archives, London.
- The Librarians & Staff at the British Museum, London.
1. Introduction

The earliest evidence of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* appears in Rudolph Ackermann’s ‘The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashions and Politics’ (*The Repository*) in July 1811. The *Trafalgar Chair* form, with its sabre-shaped legs, curved-over knee and concave tablet top-rail (Figure 1) would have already been familiar to the chair-makers and cabinet-makers of the early nineteenth century but this mechanical adaptation, was new to the market.

![Figure 1 – Regency Period Metamorphic Library Chair](source: Butchoff Antiques)

Although the *Metamorphic Library Chair* had captured the attention of Ackermann’s monthly magazine, dual-purpose library furniture was not a nineteenth century invention. In 1774, Robert Campbell had registered a patent for *Library Steps* and a small number of metamorphic stools and tables had already been manufactured. But this was the first time that the English Empire Style had been combined with mechanical ingenuity in such a practical and visually appealing way. It was a design that remained popular for more than twenty years.

Today, outline sketches and workshop estimates provide the only evidence of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* designs being manufactured during the first half of the nineteenth century. By the time that photography had been perfected during the 1850s the fashion for mechanical furniture and the neo-classical motifs of
the Regency had been replaced by the Gothic forms and heavy ornamentation of the early Victorian era. There are only two known contemporary illustrations of the Metamorphic Library Chair. The first, published by Rudolph Ackermann in July 1811, was based on a chair made by Morgan & Sanders in Catherine Street (Figure 2a). The second was created to visualise and estimate the cost of a chair made by Gillows in November 1834 (Figure 2b). The antiques trade relies heavily on these two sketches to attribute most of the Regency period Metamorphic Library Chairs they handle. Unsurprisingly, this has resulted in many inaccurate and misleading claims and there is an urgent need for more information on the subject.

![Figure 2a – Morgan & Sanders Chair](image1)

![Figure 2b – Gillows Chair](image2)

**Figure 2 – Metamorphic Library Chair Illustrations**

**Sources:** British Library (c.119.f.1) and Westminster City Archives (344/102)

By comparing the designs of Morgan & Sanders chairs against those of Gillows, the dissertation sets out to identify a reliable set of criteria that can be used to differentiate the manufactured output of both firms. To ensure that this objective is achieved and that the results are of practical value, the dissertation expresses the outcome in the form of attribution guidelines. Feedback from the antiques trade based on the application of these guidelines would help to increase the accuracy of attribution and improve the quality of the related research.
Although the research has identified several articles covering Regency period metamorphic furniture design, there are no complete reference works on the subject. Previous publications include: magazine features by G. Bernard Hughes for *Country Life* in January 1958 and March 1967, Brian Austen’s contribution to *The Connoisseur* in 1974 and an article by Jerome Phillips for *Antique Collecting and Antique Finder* published in February 1979. A more recent feature written by Amy Gale entitled ‘Form Becomes Functional’ for the *Arts & Antiques* magazine was released in March 2003. Dr. Clive Edwards, Edward T. Joy and Viscount David Linley also discuss the subject in books they published between 1977 and 2005. Together, these sources offer an excellent overview of the mechanical furniture being manufactured during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These sources have also provided inspiration and valuable input for this examination of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair*.

The story of the *Metamorphic Library Chair* provides a interesting example of how discovery, design and fashion-driven demand led to a surge of innovation in the Georgian furniture trade. It shows how the rediscovery of classical architecture and the first ‘interior decorators’ had a significant impact on furniture design. As the facts unfold, it becomes clear how a combination of craft and mechanical skills helped to create new markets and how a simple idea captured the imagination of Regency London. The entrepreneurial firm of Morgan & Sanders and the traditional firm of Gillows offer an interesting contrast. Both firms left evidence of their *Metamorphic Library Chair* output but the details of their designs have remained open to speculation for more than a hundred years. Similarities in the chairs made by a number of Regency period cabinet-makers and the shortage of marked examples have resulted in false claims and widespread confusion. *Metamorphic Library Chairs* are frequently advertised as being based on a patent held by Morgan & Sanders but the research indicates that a patent never existed. Some vendors claim that Morgan & Sanders created the design or that Gillows chairs are slightly larger but there is no evidence to support either of these claims. This dissertation charts the development of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* and explains how cabinet-makers of the early nineteenth century differentiated their designs. It separates the facts from the assumptions and it offers attribution guidelines that should be of value to the trade.
The dissertation starts by examining the neo-classical design influences of the French courts and the contribution of London-based designers to the development of the Trafalgar Chair. This is followed by a review of how and why the Library Step version of the chair became so popular and whether it was 'fit for purpose' or purchased as a novelty. The thesis then examines the reaction of the cabinet-makers, paying particular attention to the patent and campaign furniture manufacturers based around Catherine Street and the Stand. Before the dissertation examines the differences between the Metamorphic Library Chairs of Morgan & Sanders and Gillows, the background of each firm is examined in detail to identify any factors that would have influenced their designs. To develop a reliable set of attribution criteria, previously published research has been combined and compared with the results of field studies carried out on twelve authentic Regency period examples. This approach has helped to develop new insights into the design and manufacturing attributes of the Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair and the firms that made them. The methodology used to identify and analyse the attributes of the chair could be applied to other items of antique furniture. The approach is particularly relevant for analysing several items based on a common design where the differences may be difficult to identify and manufacturing methods are important. The dissertation could also be expanded to cover a wider range of mechanical furniture designs including: tables, stools and desks.

The first few words of ‘The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer’s Guide’ (The Guide) provide a fitting preface to the dissertation. Probably penned by George Hepplewhite’s widow, Alice, she wrote, ‘To unite elegance and utility, and blend the useful with the agreeable, has ever been considered a difficult, but an honourable task’ (Hepplewhite, 1788). Perhaps Rudolph Ackermann had these words in mind, twenty-three years later, when he extolled the virtues of the Metamorphic Library Chair. In a regular feature entitled ‘Fashionable Furniture’, Ackermann presented the chair as, ‘the best and handsomest article ever yet invented’ (Ackermann, 1811a).

Chapter 2 examines the design history of the Metamorphic Library Chair to establish the origins of its neo-classical form and to understand how space-saving furniture designed for travel became fashionable in the home.
2. Design History of the Metamorphic Library Chair

The form and functionality of the Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair owes much to the eighteenth century discovery of classical artefacts in Italy and Greece, the mechanical furniture of the French courts and a growing military demand for ‘flat-pack’ furniture. This chapter examines these design influences and how the results were brought together by a small number of London-based specialist cabinet-makers between 1800 and 1820 to create a catalyst for innovation in the furniture trade.

2.1 The Origins of Neo-classical Design

The transition towards the neo-classical form in England had started during the reign of George III following the archaeological excavations of Herculaneum in 1738 and Pompeii ten years later. Before this, English furniture decoration had been dominated by the scrollwork and shell motifs of Rococo. The Palladian movement of the eighteenth century was already having an impact on architecture and the discovery of wall paintings in Pompeii was hastening the transition toward a new decorative style. Robert Adam, having returned from his Grand Tour of France and Italy in 1758, had already established himself as a Palladian architect when he decided to adapt and incorporate some of the lighter classical motifs into his designs. The honeysuckle swags and oval paterae worked well alongside the classic urns and delicate ribbons but his patterns failed to comply with the classical proportions dictated by Palladianism. Other architects objected to Adam’s departure from the strict Palladian rules but, together with his younger brother James, Robert Adam continued to develop the style. In 1773 the brothers published the first edition of ‘The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam’ (The Works) in which they claimed to have recaptured ‘the beautiful spirit of antiquity ... by means of a series of delicate ornaments and mouldings’.

By simplifying and combining Greek, Roman and Byzantine decorative elements the Adam brothers had created a new classical or neo-classical style and they became extremely popular. Soon they were employed to modify and build new homes for the British aristocracy and rising merchant classes. Robert Adam was a perfectionist, designing everything himself from the facade of a building to the plaster mouldings of the ceilings and the shape of the furniture. In 1759 he employed Thomas
Chippendale, ten years his senior, to help him furnish his first independent contract at Dumfries House in Scotland and, it was there that the trust between the two men was established. On subsequent commissions, including the work at Harewood House in Yorkshire, Adam could rely on the judgment of Chippendale. Adam’s neo-classical influence is abundantly clear in the contrast between the design publications of Chippendale and Hepplewhite. Chippendale’s, ‘The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker’s Director’ (*The Director*), had preceded his partnership with Adam, but *The Guide* first published by A. Hepplewhite and Co. in 1788, was packed with Adam’s neo-classical motifs and became instrumental in converting many of Adam’s designs (Figure 3a) into furniture patterns that could be copied by the chair-makers of London (Figure 3b). Hepplewhite’s adaptations of the ‘Adam Style’ are evident on most pages of *The Guide* from the vase-shaped pediments on the bookcases and chests of drawers to the ribbons and festoons on the shield-back chairs.

![Figure 3a – Adam Style Decoration](Adam's Works 1773)

![Figure 3b – Hepplewhite Chair Design](Hepplewhite's Guide 1788)

**Figure 3 – Interpretation of the Adam Style**

Sources: Adam’s *Works* and Hepplewhite’s *Guide* (pl. 2d)

Thomas Sheraton was also a great admirer of the Adam Style and many of the illustrations in ‘The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer’s Drawing-Book’ (*The Drawing-Book*) contain references to the stylised swags and floral-paterae made popular by Robert Adam and his brother almost twenty years earlier. The influence of the Adam
brothers extended way beyond architecture and furnishings. During the latter half of the eighteenth century Josiah Wedgwood, quick to recognise the opportunity, applied many of Adam’s motifs to his new range of Jasper Ware. Within a few years, the first wave of the neo-classical movement in Great Britain was well underway. But a second wave had already started to develop across the English Channel and within a few years the Adam Style would give way to the bold straight lines and symbolic ornamentation of the French Empire Style.

2.2 Design Influences of the French Courts

Following the deposition of Louis XVI in 1792, the newly formed French Republic under the control of the Directory shunned the opulent Rococo decoration of the aristocracy and adopted the revolutionary, classical motifs of earlier Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilisations. By the time Napoleon Bonaparte assumed the role of First Consul in 1799, Greco-Roman design was firmly established in the French court. Jacques-Louis David, an artist and leading revolutionary, directed the arts on behalf of the French Republic and was soon favoured by Napoleon. It was David who introduced the architects Charles Percier and Pierre François Léonard Fontaine (Percier & Fontaine) to Napoleon. As Napoleon’s personal architects, Percier & Fontaine designed everything from the layout of his buildings to his furniture and wallpaper. Together they wrote several books on architecture and design and they became the leading exponents of the French neo-classical style. It was their serialised ‘Recueil de Décorations Intérieures’ (Collection of Interior Decorations – The Recueil), which premiered in 1801 and was issued as a complete volume in 1812, that became a major influence on the French Empire Style.

The designs of Percier & Fontaine were popularised and extended by Pierre Antoine Leboux de La Mésangère in the ‘Journal des Dames et des Modes’ (Magazine for Fashionable Ladies). Between 1802 and 1835 Pierre de La Mésangère published his own collection of furniture designs, ‘Collection des Meubles et Objets de Goût’ (Collection of Furniture and Objects of Taste) and the characteristics of the Empire Style started to emerge. Style vectors included: the importance of balance and proportion, geometric forms, linear decoration, pedestals, pillars and volutes - many of the design features that would later be expressed in the form of the Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair. Percier & Fontaine had already reintroduced the
sabre-shaped legs and curved tablet top-rail of the Greek klismos chair based on designs found on ancient vase paintings (Figure 4a) and, by 1804, Pierre de La Mésangère was illustrating voluted armed chairs capturing the spiral motifs of the ancient Greek and Roman capitals (Figure 4b). Together Percier, Fontaine and Mésangère produced almost 500 furniture illustrations and it was these images that became the templates for the French Empire Style.

French fashions, in common with the French language, had been adopted by the English aristocracy as a symbol of ambition and class since the fourteenth century. And so it was in the eighteenth century when Robert Campbell (1747, p.171) wrote, ‘He who first hits upon any new whim, is sure to make by the Invention before it becomes common in the Trade; but he must always wait for a new Fashion till it comes from Paris’. The Seven Years’ War with France had curtailed British enthusiasm for French fashion but by 1783, when the Prince of Wales had decided to rebuild Carlton House, it was the neo-classical architecture and furnishings of the French court that provided the inspiration. Henry Holland, the architect appointed by the Prince to oversee the project, was a staunch advocate of the emerging
continental neo-classical style and he employed several leading French craftsmen and cabinet-makers to help with the project. Following an early visit to the unfinished house Horace Walpole (1785) wrote, ‘There is an August simplicity that astonished me. You cannot call it magnificent; it is the taste and propriety that strike’ he continued by adding that the decoration was ‘rather classic than French’. Previously, Walpole (1775) had described Adam’s work as ‘all gingerbread, filigraine and fan-painting’ and it was clear that he preferred the new, ‘less ornate’ decoration. The furnishing of Carlton House was completed in 1796 and, although Holland had borrowed heavily from the French Empire Style, he had also established a more subdued English interpretation. This anglicised version of French neo-classical furniture design was soon categorised as the English Empire Style.

Several cabinet-makers’ guides were published in England during the eighteenth century. These guides contained advice on geometry and perspective while suggesting furniture designs based on the latest French fashions. One of the first, compiled by Thomas Chippendale in 1754, was ‘The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker’s Director’. The Director included many pieces that would have sat comfortably in Louis XVI’s court but, Chippendale’s neo-classical motifs were largely restricted to mouldings and pediments. Eight years later, in response to Chippendale’s Director, William Ince and John Mayhew (Ince & Mayhew) released ‘The Universal System of Household Furniture’ but, once again, there were few pictorial references to the classical revival taking place in France.

Despite a constant stream of engravings depicting ancient Greek architecture and ornamentation including ‘Antiquities of Athens’ by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, it was not until the publication of Sheraton’s Drawing-Book in 1791 that the neo-classical influence on English furniture design became apparent. As a caption to a frontispiece in the Drawing-Book Sheraton (1791) comments, ‘Time alters fashions and frequently obliterates the works of art and ingenuity; but that which is founded on Geometry & real Science, will remain unalterable’. The sentiment was amplified in Parts I and II of the Drawing-Book which are packed with carefully annotated sketches to ensure that the classical lines and proportions are correctly applied. In Part III the trend towards the clean straight lines and delicately tapered legs that we now recognise as the Regency Style, had been documented. Following the
publication of the *Drawing-Book* the cabinet-makers of London fully embraced the neo-classical form and a second wave of English Empire design started to eclipse the work of Adam.

Thomas Hope was twenty-seven in 1796 when the Prince of Wales reopened the doors of Carlton House. In the same year Hope had fled with his uncle and two brothers to London to escape the French revolutionary forces as they entered Amsterdam. Inspired by his Grand Tour of Europe at the age of eighteen, Hope had already started to collect Grecian artefacts. In 1801 he had purchased a large number of Greek vases from Sir William Hamilton. Hope’s interest in classical architecture and design had led to a friendship with Charles Percier and he was deeply impressed with the work of the French designer. French neo-classical decoration had drawn heavily on the Greek form during the Directory, but the Napoleonic court of the nineteenth century favoured bold designs more relevant to its imperial ambitions. The designs of Percier & Fontaine had therefore emphasised the Roman forms and motifs with heavy symbolic ornamentation. In France, the simplicity of the Grecian form was gradually being eroded by the neo-Roman influence and this presented Hope with an opportunity to build on Percier & Fontaine’s earlier work by taking a fresh look at their interior decorations. Unlike the delicate, neo-classical motifs introduced in the 1760s by the Adam brothers, the work of Percier & Fontaine had suggested the majestic, straight lines of a new order.

In 1804, following five years of painstaking research, design and experimentation, Hope had transformed his house in Duchess Street into a ‘showcase’ of the evolving English Empire Style. To celebrate he invited sixty members of the Royal Academy and their friends to view the house and its contents. Initial reactions to Hope’s work varied; some felt that it resembled a museum, others including John Flaxman, the neo-classical artist, reported that Hope had ‘produced a system of furniture ... whose parts are consistent with each other, and the whole suited to domestic ease and comfort’. Regardless of the mixed reviews, three years later Hope published a monograph on his Duchess Street mansion and contents entitled ‘Household Furniture and Interior Decoration’ (*Household Furniture*). The book included the measurements of major pieces and was printed in black and white to keep the price within the range of the craftsmen that Hope was keen to influence.
From his comments in *Household Furniture* it also appears that Hope was motivated by the view that some early nineteenth century neo-classical interpretations had failed to capture the beauty or the spirit of the antique.

According to David Watkin and Philip Hewat-Joboor (2008, p.13), Hope was on a mission having embarked on ‘a lifelong battle to impose his taste and style on England’. Despite Hope’s self-confidence, many of his pieces were bulky and ostentatious and not necessarily suitable for domestic use. George Smith, a cabinet-maker operating in London at the turn of the century, writing for the Edinburgh Review, described Hope’s work as, ‘a chaos of symbols and effigies which no man can interpret who has not the whole Pantheon at his finger ends’ (Collard, 2000, p. 97). Within twelve months Smith had taken the works of Hope, Sheraton and the French designers and condensed their designs and classical motifs into a single volume entitled, ‘A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture’. According to Ralph Edwards (1964, p. 680), Smith had ‘standardised the Regency Style’. Following the publication of Smith’s book in 1808 the neo-classical designs that had originated in the French courts and been modified by Holland and Hope were being manufactured by cabinet-makers of London.

It was also during the second half of the eighteenth century that a succession of talented, German-born cabinet-makers arrived at the French courts. Jean-François Oeben, Jean-Henri Riesener and David Roentgen had successively introduced the households of Louis XV and Louis XVI to a wide range of finely made and exquisitely finished mechanical furniture. The ingenuity of these cabinet-makers, especially David Roentgen, who became master cabinet-maker to Marie Antoinette, created a fascination for spring and lever-operated drawers and secret compartments. One of Roentgen’s desks was even referred to by Goethe when he wrote, ‘At one pull all kinds of springs and latches come into play and ... compartments spring forward simultaneously or in rapid succession’ (Huth, 1974, p. 43). Examples of mechanical furniture produced for the French courts during this period include the ‘Table à la Bourgogne’, a mechanical chest of drawers that transforms into a writing desk and bookcase. This theatrical multi-purpose ‘meubles à surprises’ (furniture of surprises) was made by Oeben ca. 1760 for the Duc de Bourgogne who was the eldest son of Louis XV (Linley, 1996, pp. 118-119).
The Seven Years' War between France and England ended in 1763, sixteen years before Roentgen arrived in Paris, and French furniture designs were, once again, highly fashionable in London. Several cabinet-makers working in the city at this time modelled their designs on those of their French counterparts and a number of interesting mechanical furniture combinations started to emerge. Arnold Frederick Beck, who described himself as a ‘Musical Instrument Maker and Cabinet Maker’, was producing commodes in the French style around 1772 and, a few years later, he was even advertising dual-purpose ‘piano fortes in commodes’ (Streeter, 1971, p. 422). Immigrant French cabinet-makers such as John Meschain and François Hervé were also making mechanical furniture in London at this time. Although it was Robert Campbell who patented the Library Step Table in 1774, several Meschain & Hervé marked examples are known to exist including one held in storage at the V&A in London (Ref. W.7-1932)\(^{15}\). There is also a reference to a marked Library Step Table containing the inscription ‘Hervé Fecit. No 32, John Street. Tottenham Court Road’ in Christopher Gilbert’s ‘Pictorial Dictionary of Marked London Furniture 1700-1840’ (Gilbert, 1996, p. 265). The Latin word ‘Fecit’ in this context has been used in place of the term ‘he made’.

2.3 Military Campaigns, Grand Tours and Patent Furniture

According to Nicholas Brawer (2001, p.19), British officers with a high social position during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century ‘took it for granted that when they set out on a military campaign in Africa or India they could enjoy the same standard of living as they did at home’. The furniture that accompanied them while they were ‘away on campaign’ included chairs, sofas, dining tables and even four-poster beds. By necessity, these items were designed to be portable and, while they reflected the style of the period, they could also be ‘flat-packed’ for ease of transportation. This ‘flat-pack’ or ‘knock-down’ furniture, as it was then known, was also popular for anyone travelling by sea and some items were designed to be multi-purpose to save space. Campaign furniture was also available in France and several designs first appeared in ‘L'Art du Menuisier Ebéniste’ (The Art of the Cabinet-Maker) by André Jacob Roubo published between 1769 and 1775 (Rieder, 1995, pp. 101-106). In Thomas Sheraton’s, ‘The Cabinet Dictionary’ (The Dictionary) published in 1803, the requirements of camp furniture were described as, ‘each of them [is] required to be
folded in the most compact manner that can be devised; yet this is to be done in such a way as, that when they are opened out, they will answer their intended purpose’ (Sheraton, 1970, p. 123). Chair and sofa-beds had been around since the middle of the eighteenth century and were still being advertised by Morgan & Sanders ca. 1805 (Figure 5a). The quality of the campaign furniture (Figure 5b) made by firms such as Morgan & Sanders was sufficiently high that Sheraton even recommended certain pieces for the home.16

![Figure 5a – Trade Card Advertising Morgan & Sanders ca. 1805](image1)

![Figure 5b – Campaign Furniture Examples Unmarked ca. 1790 – ca. 1810](image2)

Figure 5 – Georgian Campaign Furniture
Sources: British Museum, Nicholas Brawer and Christopher Clarke Antiques

In addition to the introduction of knock-down furniture, the military campaigns of the eighteenth century were also responsible for other innovations in furniture design. Between 1750 and 1820 several wheeled invalid chairs were invented. In November 1810, Rudolph Ackermann featured the ‘Royal Patent Invalid Chair’ in The Repository and ‘Merlin’s Mechanical Chair’, better known as the ‘Gouty Chair’ appeared in the same publication one year later (Ackermann, 1811b, p. 225). It is clear from the design of the Gouty Chair that the combination of furniture and mechanics had reached a new high. Ackermann’s description of the chair gives some indication of the way in which Georgian London reacted to the mechanisation
of household furnishings; Ackermann notes, ‘The curious evolutions which may thus easily be performed in this chair, render it the means of very considerable amusement’. Ackermann then added, ‘it would not be difficult to contrive an arrangement for moving these wheels, or winch handles, by the action of a very small and portable steam-engine, to render it a most curious mode of quick conveyance, without the agency of animal labour’. It would be another fifty years before this became a reality and the day of the horse-drawn carriage was under threat but the combination of fine cabinet-work, pulleys, springs and catches no longer presented an obstacle to the imagination.

The poor quality of furniture in many inns prompted some travellers to take their campaign beds with them when they were away on business (Phillips, 1979). Following the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, The Duke of Wellington deemed his camp-bed so comfortable that he refused to sleep on anything else for the rest of his life. The connection between campaign and domestic furniture was aptly illustrated by William Pocock, a patent furniture manufacturer based in Southampton Street when, in an advertisement ca. 1810, he suggested that his knock-down furniture was, ‘so astonishingly simple, and the scale so variable as to suit either the Cottage Ornéé [a small-scale villa] … or the extensive Entertainments of the Nobility and Men of Fashion’. This blend of form and mechanically-assisted functionality had captured the interest of the wealthy traveller and was fast becoming fashionable. But it was Ackermann, a pioneer of lithography and publisher of some of the best early colour printing in Britain, who produced the first monthly interior design magazine and popularised many of the new designs.

2.4 Fashion Magazines and the Trafalgar Chair

The early years of the nineteenth century were a period of immense change. Between 1801 and 1821 the population of London increased by forty-four percent to become the world’s largest city. Despite the American War of Independence and the continuing conflicts with Napoleonic France, the United Kingdom mechanised its factories and extended trade in Asia. The combination of increased supply and demand underpinned by a strong political, financial and commercial infrastructure created new wealth and a new market for architecture and interior decoration. The emerging mercantile elite shared the aspirations of the English aristocracy
embarking on grand tours, building collections of antiquities and stocking their libraries with the latest reference works. Well acquainted with classical architecture and keen to display their new found knowledge, the stately homes of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland created a new and exciting market for the early nineteenth century cabinet-makers. It was Ackermann, an immigrant lithographer from Germany, who published one of the first interior design and fashion periodicals in response to this demand. Ackermann’s *Repository* was published from 1809 to 1828 and it soon reached a circulation of two thousand. In addition to the publishing business, Ackermann sold decorative prints, stationery and watercolour paints from his shop in the Strand (Figure 6).

![Figure 6 – Ackermann’s Room by C.A. Pugin ca. 1809](Source: V&A (Museum No. E.3027-1903))

According to Pauline Agius and Stephen Jones (1984) *The Repository* ‘devoted space to all things fashionable and every month for almost twenty years the magazine included hand-coloured plates of furniture, drapery and interiors’. Although many features of the *Trafalgar Chair* had already appeared in *The Recueil* before 1805 and in the publications of Thomas Hope and George Smith soon after, it would be on the pages of *The Repository* that the wealthy middle and upper class readers of London, Manchester and Liverpool would catch their first glimpse of the
sabre-legged chair. A sabre-legged parlour chair appeared in the March 1809 edition of Ackermann’s *Repository* where it was described as a ‘pattern of Grecian form’. This same style of chair was highly fashionable and eventually became known as the *Trafalgar Chair*. According to Clifford Musgrave (1961, p. 92) ‘the first published design approaching that of the *Trafalgar Chair*’ was in Sheraton’s ‘Cabinet-Maker, Upholsterer and General Artists’ Encyclopaedia’ (*Encyclopaedia*) which was published posthumously in 1812. But Sheraton’s nautically-inspired designs (Figure 7a) were too elaborate and it is more likely that the first *Trafalgar Chair* design (Figure 7b) was illustrated by Thomas Shearer for a supplement to ‘The London Chair Maker’s and Carver’s Book of Prices for Workmanship’ published in 1808.

![Figure 7a – Nelson Chair Designs 1806 – ca. 1810](image1)

![Figure 7b – Trafalgar Chair Designs 1811 – ca. 1814](image2)

**Figure 7 – Development of the Trafalgar Chair**

*Sources: V&A (Museum No. W.27:1, 2-1958) and Trinity College Oxford*

The twisted rope design of the back-rail, the central shell motif and the black painted finish of the chair in Figure 7a are all in honour of Lord Nelson. Nevertheless, the clean neo-classical features of the chair’s sabre-shaped legs and curved-over knee are suggestive of the new form based on Shearer’s illustrations (Figure 7b). Ackermann first used the term *Trafalgar Chair* in December 1811 when he described the chair as ‘fashionable’ but within a few years Richard Brown, who was running an architect’s practice in London at the time, remarked that ‘many cabinet-makers, for
sake of notoriety, ridiculously give names to furniture’ and he cited the *Trafalgar Chair* as an example (Brown, 1822, p. xii). Regardless of the name, its origins or its relevance, it was the *Trafalgar Chair* design that was in demand and it was the *Trafalgar Arm-chair* that provided the inspiration for the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* (Figure 7b) in 1811.

It was also during this period that mahogany had become the most common cabinet and chair-making material. Severe winters during the first few years of the eighteenth century followed by French trade embargoes and tree disease had led to a shortage of local and continental walnut. In 1733 Sir Robert Walpole and the Whigs abolished the duty on all imported timber from the colonies and larger consignments of mahogany started to arrive from the West Indies. Cabinet-makers were quick to recognise the benefits. Not only was the new timber resistant to woodworm but, according to Robert Wemyss Symonds (1929, p. 135), the strength of the wood also allowed firms to make the legs, rails and backs of their chairs in a more slender form with accentuated curves. These neo-classical motifs had been difficult to achieve in walnut. By the turn of the century mahogany was so popular that, materials such as rosewood or satinwood were handled as special orders.

**Summary**

The Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* first appeared in London around 1811, the year in which Jane Austen published her first novel and four years after gas lights were installed along Pall Mall. Design features such as the sabre-shaped legs, the concave top-rail and the voluted open arms originated in Paris at the end of the eighteenth century but furniture designers including Sheraton, Hope and Smith simplified and standardised the form to create an English neo-classical style chair that was then adopted by the furniture trade. The familiar profile of the Grecian-inspired chair became known as the *Trafalgar Chair* in memory of Lord Nelson who died on board HMS Victory at The Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. During the first ten years of the nineteenth century a combination of Grecian design motifs, military inspired furniture innovation and intense competition between the cabinet-makers led to several new mechanical and metamorphic furniture designs. At the same time cabinet-makers started to take full advantage of the new timbers. Mahogany, with its close interlocking grain meant that thinner structures could be used and chair
stretcher could be abandoned to suit the emerging neo-classical style. Based on the work of the furniture designers and an improved understanding of stresses and strains, the flush-sided chair was developed. Timbers were cut ‘scientifically’ across the grain so that the chair legs and side frames could be made from a single piece of timber and this also became a common feature of the Trafalgar Chair. It was this style of chair that was to be used as the basis for a new interpretation of the Library Step Chair patented by Robert Campbell thirty seven years earlier in 1774.

In Ackermann’s description of the Metamorphic Library Chair in the July 1811 edition of The Repository he makes no reference to the origins of the design, choosing instead to point out that ‘This ingenious piece of furniture is manufactured at Messrs. Morgan and Saunders’s [sic], Catherine-st. Strand’ (Ackermann, 1811a, p. 40). Morgan & Sanders advertised regularly in The Repository appearing in almost every issue since its inception in 1809 (Hughes, 1958). But, despite their high levels of advertising expenditure, Ackermann still manages to misspell the surname of Joseph Sanders. Unperturbed Morgan & Sanders continued to advertise and the Metamorphic Library Chair continued to be a best seller.

Having established the design influences of the Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair, Chapter 3 explores the factors impacting demand and whether the chair was considered a novelty or an essential piece of library equipment.
3. Georgian Demand for Dual-Purpose Furniture

During the fifty years between 1780 and 1830 London experienced a surge of innovation. It was during this period that the first ‘museums of curiosity’ opened their doors to an eager public who paid to see the latest novelty items including mechanical orchestras and clockwork spiders that scuttled across table tops. Educated merchant families, funded by their trading successes, intrigued by the mechanical devices and classically informed by their grand tours, were keen to purchase objects that combined gadgetry with neo-classical design.

3.1 Mechanical Curiosities and Early English Museums

In 1772 Sir William Hamilton’s collection of Greek vases was acquired by the British Museum and it was in the same year that James Cox invited visitors to attend an exhibition of automata at his own museum in Spring Gardens. As a jeweller, watch and toy-maker, Cox had probably been inspired by the work of Pierre Jaquet-Droz, the Swiss-born mathematician who had designed and manufactured a number of fascinating humanoid automata including ‘The Writer’ and ‘The Draftsman’. These novelty mechanical devices were made from several thousand moving components to perform complex combinations of life-like movements. Cox’s museum contained twenty three mechanical objects. According to his catalogue, these included: a large clockwork silver swan and a perpetual motion time piece. The museum was extremely popular and visitors continued to pay the admission fee until 1774 when it became necessary for Cox to sell the exhibited items to pay off his debts.

During the 1770s Cox had collaborated with John Joseph Merlin, a Belgian eccentric who made mathematical instruments from his workshop in London. Merlin, who invented the roller skates in 1760, would later be known for his design of the Gouty Chair. It was Merlin who kept the idea of a permanent exhibition of automata alive and in 1783 he opened ‘Merlin’s Mechanical Museum’ in Hanover Square just over one mile away from Cox’s previous location. A contemporary reference of 1786 notes, ‘if in search of lighter pleasure, we may look in at Cox’s Museum or Merlin von Lüttich, inventor of mechanical curios and adaptable furniture’ (Von La Roche, 1933). Sophie Von La Roche was a German aristocrat who visited London during 1786 and recorded her travels in a diary. Cox’s museum would already have closed
at the time of Von La Roche’s planned visit but it is interesting to note that she expected to see ‘adaptable furniture’ when she visited the museum. It is this coexistence of clockwork automata and mechanical furniture in Merlin’s museum that creates an interesting observation. By implication, it appears that Sophie Von La Roche perceived Merlin’s adaptable furniture in the same way that we view the items in a modern-day gadget shop.

Merlin died in 1803 and most of his stock was sold to Thomas Weeks who had recently opened a rival business in Tichborne Street close to Piccadilly Circus. Weeks employed James Wyatt to design his Tichborne Street emporium which he named ‘The Royal Mechanical Museum’. The museum opened in 1797 and, in ‘The Picture of London for 1802’, the grand room was described as ‘107 feet long, and 30 feet high’ (Feltham, 1829). Weeks’ attractions included automated models of birds, a mechanical spider, chamber horses and gouty chairs (Figure 8a).

Several pieces of mechanical furniture marked ‘Weeks’s Museum’ were identified during the twentieth century including a Metamorphic Library Chair that was attributed to Morgan & Sanders by Christopher Claxton Stevens, Managing Director of Norman Adams Antiques in London (Claxton Stevens & Wittington, 1999, p. 459).
The chair is made of fine mahogany with a figured veneered top-rail and reeded arms and legs. A brass spring-loaded catch on one side of the chair is inscribed ‘Weeks’s Pattern at his Museum Tichborne St. Hay Market’ (Figure 8b). Thomas Weeks commissioned mechanical furniture from several London firms for a shop next to the museum and sold copies of the items on display\textsuperscript{23}.

Recently discovered examples of other marked Weeks' items include a set of human weighing scales where, according to Mallett Antiques of London, a paper label applied to the underside of the device, states ‘Where are also made the Merlin’s ... curious library chairs with steps imperceptible invented by Weeks well calculated for exercise, as they will produce perspiration from the nod of the neck to the toe in the course of a few seconds far superior to Dumb Bells used for that purpose – these chairs also answer for high beds.’ The ‘curious library chairs’ are clearly a reference to the Metamorphic Library Chair and the evidence from the Norman Adams Collection confirms that such chairs were being sold by Weeks as a curiosity alongside a vast array of other mechanical objects including the weighing scales, silver toasting forks and a variety of cabinet-mounted self-playing organs. Following the death of Thomas Weeks in 1834 his stock was sold at auction and Charles Babbage, the inventor of the first programmable computer, attended the sale. It is thought that the automata exhibited by John Joseph Merlin and Thomas Weeks provided the inspiration for Babbage’s first computer. Since the eighteenth century English audiences had marvelled at the skills of the magician who frequently combined cabinet work and mechanics to create an illusion. In many ways novelty museums were an extension of this popular form of entertainment and there is little doubt that the transformation of the Library Step Chair into Library Steps would often be accompanied by the words ‘hey presto’!

3.2 The Development of Specialised Library Furniture

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing. Referring to the preceding fifty years Dr. Samuel Johnson, author of 'A Dictionary of the English Language' had already observed that the age was ‘running mad after innovation’. Before his death in 1784, Dr. Johnson had witnessed the inventions of Arkwright, Hargreaves, Watt and Wedgwood and there was more to come. Handmade iron and brass fittings such as nails and screws were soon replaced by
machine-made fastenings and centres of specialisation started to emerge outside of London. The demand for nails, screws, locks and bolts grew exponentially as the furniture trade expanded and thousands of wooden houses were built in the American Colonies. The owners of the new factories, along with the engineers and the investors that backed them, accumulated significant wealth and they, in turn, created more demand. The resulting ‘mercantile elite’ adopted the lifestyles of the English aristocracy, purchasing property and land before modifying, extending and furnishing their new homes according to the latest fashion. Equipped with the pattern books of Sheraton, Hope and Smith and guided by Ackermann’s monthly fashion magazine, it was clear that the rooms of their Palladian manor houses should be well planned and co-ordinated. According to Steven Parissien (1992, p. 132) in his book on ‘Regency Style’, the theory of ‘en-suite’ decoration did not mean that the whole house was decorated in a uniform manner. Colours were allocated to particular rooms; a bold red may be appropriate for the dining room but, a subtle green was preferred in the library. Architects supported by upholsters and furniture makers used colour charts to ensure that nothing was left to chance.

Of particular importance to the ‘new gentleman’ was his library. Not only did the library represent his wealth, but it also ‘informed’ his visitors that he was a man of learning and exploration. The books on the library shelves covered natural history and travel - many relating to the places visited by members of the family during their grand tours of Europe. Following Earl Stanhope’s invention of the cast iron printing press towards the end of the eighteenth century there had been a marked increase in the number of books available. Between 1792 and 1802 an average of four hundred books per year had been published; a four-fold increase over the preceding decade. It was the library that also created a new market for the cabinet-makers. In Sheraton’s Dictionary under the heading of ‘Book-Case’ he states that, ‘If a multiplicity of books be a sure indication of an increase in useful knowledge, we have the pleasure of seeing that in our times’. He continues by observing that ‘Cabinet-makers have doubtless felt an interest in the increase of books, detached from their wish of the spread of real knowledge, in the multiplied demands that have been for bookcases of late years’ (Sheraton, 1970, p. 65). The design publications of Ince & Mayhew, Hepplewhite and Sheraton all contain examples of specialised library furniture. With each publication the designs became more fanciful and, by the time
Ackermann started to publish *The Repository* in 1809, many new designs started to appear alongside some of the ‘old favourites’. These included library tables and stands with adjustable slopes that could hold a book at the right angle. Reading chairs\(^{26}\) (Figure 9a), absent from Sheraton’s *Dictionary* published in 1803, graced the pages of *The Repository* in 1810. By 1811 the table-based *Library Step* designs (Figure 9b) described by Sheraton in detail in the second edition of his *Drawing-Book* eighteen years earlier, had been joined by the *Metamorphic Library Chair*.

**Figure 9a – Reading Chairs**  
*Ackermann’s Repository* 1810

**Figure 9b – Library Steps & Table**  
*Sheraton’s Drawing-Book* 1793

**Figure 9 – Specialised Library Furniture**

*Sources: Rudolph Ackermann’s Repository* (September 1810, pl. 15, p. 182) and *Sheraton’s Drawing-Book* (Appendix pl. 5, pp. 9-11 and pl. 22, pp. 42-43)

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Robert Campbell (1774) had patented several designs for *Library Steps* including concealed-step variations of most tables, chests of drawers, chairs and stools. There is evidence that Thomas Chippendale also made a stool containing *Library Steps* for Harewood House in Yorkshire about this time\(^{27}\). It is interesting to note how the designs of *Library Steps* had captured the imagination of the Georgian cabinet-makers. By 1788 Campbell’s patent had expired and this seemed to prompt a new wave of metamorphic furniture innovation. During the twenty years that followed, library ladders and steps in a plethora of new shapes and sizes started to appear. Thomas Jefferson recorded
seeing ‘a folding ladder’ in a letter he sent from Bergen, Germany in 1788 (Jefferson’s Ladder, 2009). From collapsible, hinged cylindrical poles\(^{28}\) to intricately articulated table variations there seemed to be no end to the cabinet-makers’ ingenuity. But how practical were these designs and, did the pursuit of something new eventually lead to a compromise of design that rendered the *Metamorphic Library Chair* a ‘conversation piece’ rather than a serious piece of library equipment?

### 3.3 The Compromises of Dual-Purpose Design

Multi-functional furniture rarely satisfied all of the customer’s needs with equal panache. Sofa-beds had been around since the middle of the eighteenth century but, just as today, they failed to replace the sofa or the bed for sitting or sleeping. Early advertisements for *Library Steps* hinted at these compromises by describing their designs as ‘firm, safe and solid as a rock’ (Agius & Jones, 1984, p. 60). The safety of the *Library Step* designs being offered was clearly an issue and Campbell makes sure to point out the advantages of a handrail in his table-based design on a paper label he attached to his *Library Steps*. On the label, he clearly states that the steps with handrails can be made ‘…of any height, which for use, ease, elegance, & safety, exceed anything of the kind’ (Gilbert, 1996, p. 134). For *Library Steps* to be useful they must be easy to move around but, despite the addition of castors, many metamorphic tables remained clumsy and difficult to manoeuvre. The Regency period variation of the *Metamorphic Library Chair* appeared delicate, but it was still a substantial piece of furniture weighing upwards of twenty-six pounds (12 kg). The addition of brass castors, an option that appears to have been offered by most cabinet-makers, made it easier to reposition the chair but wheeled steps would be totally unsafe on the wooden floor of a library.

The chair-based *Library Step* design also limits the number of steps that can be concealed. All of the *Metamorphic Library Chairs* inspected during the preparation of the dissertation contained four steps – three at and below the seat level and an additional step sitting precariously a few inches above the seat height in the open position. During the early 1800s the height of an average male was five feet and nine inches (1.7m). The *Metamorphic Library Chair* would therefore provide access to books stored at an elevation of no more than ten feet (2.5m), possibly lower due to the absence of a handrail. With bookcases rising to ten feet or more, titles on the
upper shelves would have remained inaccessible. The first step of the *Metamorphic Library Chair* also has an inherent design weakness. The concave, tapered legs of the neo-classical design weaken the frame of the first two steps. Given that the full weight of the user is applied at a single point the sub-structure of the chair is inclined to break. Of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chairs* inspected all showed evidence of uneven wear and two examples, at Tatton Park and Trinity College Oxford, had a breakage under the first step.

The new multi-purpose designs were clearly encountering structural difficulties and, in 1803, Sheraton had something to say regarding novelty furniture. Within his *Dictionary* definition for ‘Drawing-Room Chairs’ he writes, ‘If those who would expect the purest novelty in such compositions, would but sit down and make a trial themselves, it would teach them better how to exercise candour when they see designs of this kind’ (Sheraton, 1970, p. 201). Ten years later, in 1813, Thomas Martin a Civil Engineer and author of ‘The Circle of Mechanical Arts’ also expressed his opinion on the compromises of design. He suggested that those practicing the trade should ‘be acquainted with the principles of mechanics’ to save ‘his customers disappointment, in case of failure, arising from a want of due proportion of strength, in places where it is required, or from a redundancy where less would have better answered the purpose’ (Martin, 1813, p. 111).

With respect to the usefulness of multi-purpose and metamorphic furniture an article in *The Architectural Magazine* during 1834 suggested that the trend ‘corrupts the taste of the cabinet-maker, by creating an incessant demand for novelty, which no designer, unless he possesses a highly cultivated mind, and an almost unlimited stock of ideas, can long supply without degenerating into absurdity’ (Loudon, 1834, pp. 8-9 cited in Collard, 2000, p. 24). Later the same year, John Claudius Loudon was still questioning the sanity of multi-purpose furniture when he wrote that ‘this incessant desire for novelty has been the cause of great departures from propriety of design’ (Loudon, 1892, p. 1120). The evidence may be inconclusive but the impracticality of most metamorphic library furniture designs suggests that, while these pieces may have been purchased as functional items, the compromises in the designs that were necessary to accommodate the *Library Steps* probably meant that they were seldom used as intended. Even so, the variety of designs available
together with an early nineteenth century fascination for mechanical ‘wizardry’ and proof that Thomas Weeks was featuring the Metamorphic Library Chair at his mechanical museum also indicates that these items had a novelty value. It is therefore most likely that metamorphic Library Step based furniture was viewed more as a ‘conversation piece’ than a serious substitute for a sturdy library staircase or ladder and this probably explains why most libraries had both.

3.4 The First Metamorphic Library Chair

Folding chairs had been known from the end of the sixteenth century when simple X-framed variations could be found in the chancels of country churches (Gloag, 1967, pp. 66-67). During the early seventeenth century a dual-purpose chair-table appeared where the back rest of the chair could be rotated forward to rest on the arms of the chair to form a small table. Other forms of mechanical chairs were mentioned in the diaries of John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys during the middle of the seventeenth century. In November 1644, Evelyn writes of a ‘whimsical chair, which folded into so many varieties, as to turn into a bed, a bolster, a table or a couch’ (Evelyn, 1862, p. 140). Viscount Linley (1996, pp. 116-117) has also described a pair of ‘sleeping chairs’ that were made for the Duchess of Lauderdale at Ham House in south-west London around 1670. The first library ladder recorded in England also appears in the library at Ham House in 1679. An inventory list of the estate includes ‘one folding ladder of cedar’. Prior to this, the volume of books hardly warranted bookshelves. In Samuel Pepys diary of 1666 he notes that his books were ‘lying one upon another on my chairs’ until he asked ‘Simpson the joiner’ to make him his first book press. The book press together with Pepys’ collection of books is currently located at Magdalene College, Cambridge.

But, according to an article in ‘The Sunday Business Post Online’ entitled ‘A whiter shade of pale wood’ published in January 2007, it was Jean-François Oeben ‘who came up with the novel idea of a library chair whose seat concealed steps for one of his best customers, Madame de Pompadour’ (Anon, 2007). Viscount Linley may be referring to the same chair when he mentions a prie-dieu that converted into Library Steps. According to Lindley the chair was made by the ébéniste Pierre Migeon II which suggests that the chair was produced before 1758 (Linley, 1996, p. 121). There is also documentary evidence that Chippendale made Library Step
stools for Nostell Priory in 1767 and Harewood House in 1772. But it was another thirty nine years, in 1811, before the *Metamorphic Library Chair* appeared and it is this chair, in the neo-classical form, that defines the Regency period interpretation.

Regardless of its design faults, the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* was hugely popular. In addition to the chairs made in London by Morgan & Sanders, Gillows and others, provincial makers soon started to copy the design. Many private libraries acquired these chairs and good Regency period examples can be found in several stately homes, private clubs, universities and Royal residences. Based on the volume of chairs passing through the trade and the number known to exist in public and private collections in the United Kingdom and North America it is estimated that there are more than four hundred Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chairs* in circulation.

**Summary**

In many ways, the design of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* became a metaphor for Georgian England during the early years of the nineteenth century. The combination of neo-classical elegance and mechanical ingenuity reflected the partnership of man and machine brought about by the Industrial Revolution. The chair’s dual purpose, to reach and read, symbolised the acquisition of knowledge that led to economic growth. But most of all, it was the fun and functional elegance of the chair that reflected the showmanship of Cox, Merlin and Weeks and the extravagance of the newly appointed Prince Regent that probably appealed most to the burgeoning middle-classes.

The Regency library was one of the most important rooms in the house and the designers, architects and upholsterers left nothing to chance. In his *Dictionary Sheraton* (1970, p. 216) advises that, ‘The library should be furnished in the imitation of the antiques; and such prints as are hung [on] the walls ought to be memorials of learning and portraits of men of science and erudition’. Sheraton also suggests that, ‘Libraries [should] be on the east side under the bedrooms; for everyone will allow that to rise with the sun is the best season to commence our studies’. With so much attention focused on the architecture and decoration of the library, early nineteenth century cabinet-makers jostled for position to attract the attention of prospective
clients. The intense competition between the firms led to a series of innovative ideas and there was a renewed interest in the Library Step designs of Robert Campbell. According to Frances Collard (2000, p. 18), ‘the desire for novelty, a prominent feature of the Regency, necessitated the constant production of new types of furniture. Collard cites Robert Southey, the nineteenth century English poet, when, in his 1802 ‘Letters on England’, he observed, ‘fashions change so often in these things as well as in everything else, that it is easy to know how long it is since a house has been fitted up, by the shape of the furniture’. These changing fashions and the growing demand for ‘novelty’ items helped Regency cabinet-makers to maintain a continuous flow of business and they were constantly searching for new ideas to entice customers into their establishments. Original designs were jealously guarded and some firms patented their inventions for added protection.

Nevertheless, similarities in the designs and dimensions of the Metamorphic Library Chairs of this period suggest that a ‘universal’ pattern was adopted by the chair and cabinet-makers of London. Chapter 4 examines the structure of the furniture trade and discovers how early nineteenth century manufacturers responded to the demand for novelty items. In Chapters 5 and 6, equipped with a good understanding of the design history, demand and competitive environment, the dissertation then focuses on two of these manufacturers to undertake a detailed comparison of the metamorphic library furniture that they produced.
4. Specialisation in the Furniture Trade

The Industrial Revolution was undermining traditional craft skills as small-scale local production methods were replaced by large-scale, factory-based manufacturing techniques. Blacksmiths and engineers that once produced nails and screws by hand were now being priced out of the market and being encouraged to relocate their families to the new industrial centres. The furniture trade, unable to take advantage of the high-volume facilities, remained largely unaffected but market demands soon exceeded capacity and specialisation appeared to provide a solution.

4.1 The Georgian English Furniture Trade

According to Pat Kirkham (1988, p. 4) in her book entitled ‘The London Furniture Trade 1700-1870’, the number of furniture makers in London during the eighteenth century is unknown. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were estimated to be in excess of three thousand. Two hundred and fifty-three of these are listed as master cabinet-makers, upholsterers, and chair-makers by Thomas Sheraton in his Dictionary of 1803 including the businesses of Gillows and Morgan & Sanders. Interestingly, while Gillows are listed as cabinet-makers, Morgan & Sanders are classified as upholsterers – a more ‘up-market’ occupation and one that included firms such as Ince & Mayhew and Thomas Chippendale. Sheraton’s reference to ‘masters’ of the furniture trade denotes that these are at the top-end of the chair and cabinet-making hierarchy. In the craft or mystery system, apprentices learned their trade before becoming journeymen and the journeymen in turn would become masters before handing their skills down to the next generation of apprentices. The master cabinet-makers, upholsterers and chair-makers were likely to be the largest employers in the industry. Gillows, who opened their London branch in the 1760s, continued to manufacture furniture from their base in Lancaster. Their Oxford Street location was used primarily to attract the attention of wealthy patrons who lived and worked in the capital. Others such as George Seddon were employing ‘four hundred apprentices’ as early as 1786 (Von La Roche, 1933). From an article in Ackermann’s Repository (1809, pp. 122-123), Morgan & Sanders are also known to have employed ‘nearly one hundred mechanics’ and that the total exceeded one thousand if their contract labour and ancillary staff were included.
Those working with timber were also classified according to their skills. At the bottom end of the trade were the carpenters and joiners who worked on roofing, flooring and window shutters. For some, the making of chairs was considered a less skilful occupation and, for most of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, chair-making, as Sheraton’s Dictionary points out, was ‘a branch generally confined to itself’\textsuperscript{34}. Sheraton (1970, pp. 145-146) then qualifies his observation by adding ‘A good cabinet maker is distinguishable by the neatness of his lines, cross banding, and drawer work’. But, at the top of the furniture making hierarchy, was the carver. Sheraton himself had trained as a carver and he had an intimate knowledge of the skills required including: architecture, perspective, botany and anatomy. The role of upholsterer was considered more refined than others. Until the middle of the eighteenth century an ‘upholder’ would be employed to advise a client on all aspects of interior decoration. As Robert Campbell (1747, pp. 169-172) explained to his readers, ‘I have just finished my house and must now think of furnishing it with fashionable furniture. The Upholder is the chief agent in this case. He is the man upon whose judgement I rely in the choice of goods’.

Despite the impact of the Industrial Revolution on other trades, furniture manufacturing remained largely unaffected\textsuperscript{35}. Some of the larger workshops assigned simple, repetitive tasks to their apprentices but, for the most part, a small piece of furniture such as a library chair would be crafted by one person. The chair-maker would dress the timber, cut out the individual parts, join them together and apply most of the decoration but the intricate carving, seat caning and French polishing would be undertaken by others. Gillows Estimate Sketch Books (Sketch Books) show that the manufacture of their Library Step Chairs was contracted out to journeymen but the caning and French polishing are shown as separate entries on the cost sheets and these tasks were probably carried out by small internal teams.

Few chair-makers or cabinet-makers applied a maker’s mark to their output, especially when the item was being made for a specific customer. After all, the customer already knew the identity of the maker and there was little risk of confusion. Nevertheless, although much of Gillows’ production was made to order, they did stamp some of their pieces and the size and style of the lettering can often be used to approximate the date of an item. It would be logical to assume that these
Gillows pieces were marked to maintain a rudimentary form of audit trail. The initials of their journeymen were often added to pieces so that the quality of their work could be monitored (Stuart, 2008, p. 96, vol. I). A chair containing the Gillows mark may therefore signify that the item was to be sold through a third-party; the marks are rarely visible and had no advertising value. In contrast Morgan & Sanders preferred to add a brass nameplate to identify their pieces. Few Metamorphic Library Chairs carry the Morgan & Sanders nameplate but they are clearly visible on many larger pieces including imperial dining tables and patent bedsteads. Based on the evidence presented in Chapter 3, Morgan & Sanders could also have sold their furniture through third-parties such as Thomas Weeks and in such a situation the use of a nameplate could have helped to promote their goods. Many of the nameplates used by Morgan & Sanders indicate that they were the ‘inventors’ or ‘patentees’ of a design but there is no record of a patent application in the name of either partner.

4.2 Furniture Patents, Plagiarism and Protection

The first English patent was granted by Henry VI in 1449 but it was not until 1617 that a formal process was established and Patent No. 1 was granted to Aron Rathburne and Roger Burges protecting their process for engraving maps. The earliest item of metamorphic furniture to be patented in Great Britain combined a painted work of art with a bed tester (Woodcroft, 1969, p. 101). This rather unusual, elaborate and expensive means of concealing a daybed was developed by Isaac de la Chaumette (1721). Chaumette’s patent marks the beginning of a trend in British furniture design that would test the ingenuity of cabinet-makers and satisfy a market demand for multi-purpose furniture that lasted for more than a hundred years. During this period chairs and sofas would be transformed into beds, fire screens opened to reveal writing desks and some stools, and chairs could be hinged open or tipped forward to reveal a small set of Library Steps. Although the term ‘patent’ was used to describe mechanically assisted furniture during the eighteenth century, few of the designs were officially patented. As Kirkham points out in her book on the London furniture trade ‘only one invention was patented in each of the first five decades of the eighteenth century’ (Kirkham, 1988, p. 124). There was a steady increase in the number of furniture patents registered towards the end of the eighteenth century, but
it appears that chair-makers and cabinet-makers placed little value on the protection that a patent offered. During the closing years of the eighteenth century, the cost of obtaining a patent, the widespread misuse of the term ‘patent furniture’, false claims of originality and the difficulty of enforcing the patent laws had undermined the system. Robert Campbell failed to renew his patent for Library Steps when it expired in 1788 even though he was still trading with his son from their premises in Little Mary-le-bone Street. Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States of America, also claimed to have invented the Library Step Chair and his original prototype still exists as part of a collection at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. Whether Franklin developed the idea in London where he spent most of his time between 1757 and 1775 or in France where he was US Ambassador from 1776 to 1785, we will never know, but there are distinct similarities between the mechanical design of Franklin’s folding library chair (Figure 10a) and that illustrated in Campbell’s 1774 patent (Figure 10b).

Figure 10 – Franklin’s Chair and Campbell’s Patent
Sources: American Philosophical Society and British Library (Patent No. 1086)

Regardless of eighteenth century patent system concerns, the innovative energy of the Industrial Revolution and the profit to be made from progress, soon led to renewed fears of plagiarism and the industrialists and opportunists turned once
again to patent legislation for protection. A letter from Robert Gillow (1782) to one of the firm’s customers expressed their concerns, ‘We must beg leave to request that the enclosed drawings be not copied by any person or shewn [sic] to any in our trade but returned as soon as convenient’. Perhaps in response to the failure of earlier patent protection, most of the early nineteenth century patent applications focused on the mechanics of an invention. Thus, of the eleven patents registered by furniture makers between 1800 and 1810, eight related to the mechanical design of extending tables including a specification registered by Richard Gillow (1800). Gillows’ solution was based on the addition of extra legs that could be slotted into metal or wooden grooves on the underside of the table. Other designs relied on telescopic arms and, in one instance, a system of hydrostatic bellows. In 1816 the trend had continued with a total of five patents registered for different designs of furniture castors.

4.3 The Patent Furniture Specialists of Catherine Street

The term ‘metamorphic’ when applied to furniture appears to have been coined by Ackermann in The Repository when he described an open armed library chair concealing a set of Library Steps as a Metamorphic Library Chair (Ackermann, 1811a, pp. 40-41). In view of the dominant neo-classical influences on furniture design, Ackermann’s use of the term ‘metamorphic’ to describe the chair was probably inspired by the ‘Metamorphoses’ myths written by the Roman poet Ovid in the eighth century (Phillips, 1979). Multi-purpose furniture at the beginning of the nineteenth century was nothing new; chamber pots had been hidden behind the fake drawers of bedside cabinets and English night tables for over fifty years. The ‘monk’s table’ or ‘monk’s bench’, where the back of a box-settle could be rotated forward to create a table, is thought to have originated in the Low Countries during the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the appetite for mechanical novelties, fuelled by the newly opened ‘museums of curiosities’ and a desire to keep pace with the latest interior designs, continued to drive demand and the early nineteenth century marked a high-point in the popularity of transformational, multi-function furniture.

Over a period of fifty years, between 1780 and 1830, at least forty patent furniture manufacturers were trading in London (Appendix 10.7). From the trade cards and advertisements of these firms it appears that most produced a combination of domestic and military furniture. Patent furniture manufacturers had developed their
mechanical skills producing campaign furniture and they were now applying the same skills to the metamorphic designs. Many of these novel designs were made by a small number of patent furniture manufacturers centred on Catherine Street and the Strand (Figure 11).

Figure 11 – The Strand by C.R. Stanley ca. 1824
Source: Museum of London

Thomas Gale, of the Strand, patented a folding bedstead in 1772 which closed up to resemble a bookcase or wardrobe (Patent No. 1002). In 1805, William Pocock of nearby Southampton Street registered a design for an extending dining table (Patent No. 2895) and, five years later, in 1810, Charles Stewart, a few hundred yards away in St. Martins Lane, also patented an extending table design (Patent No. 3339). Pocock in addition to manufacturing his patent extending table was also known to have made chamber horses (Figure 8a, p. 20)\(^43\). These chairs were sometimes referred to as ‘exercise chairs’ and were particularly suitable for the over-indulgent upper and middle-classes that would spend hours bouncing up and down on the chair to ‘work off’ the effects of their rich diets. Gale, Pocock and Stewart together with other patent furniture specialists including: Thomas Butler, George Pryer and Morgan & Sanders were extremely active in the field of patent furniture
manufacturing and the competition created a catalyst for innovation. It is interesting to note that at least one third of these specialist furniture manufacturers listed patent bedsteads on their trade-cards. This was probably due to the high demand for beds that could be assembled without the use of screws and nails which provided convenient cavities for bed bugs. Regency homes were alive with these insects and the furniture trade was preoccupied with finding a solution to the problem. As Edward T. Joy (1977, p. 210) points out, ‘as late as 1814 Tiffin and Son held a royal appointment as ‘Bug-Destroyers to His Majesty’.

These specialist furniture manufacturers registered a total of fifty-five patents between 1771 and 1845. Less than fifty percent of these patents related to furniture demonstrating that the proprietors of these firms approached their business from a different perspective than the traditional cabinet-makers. Competition was most intense between Thomas Butler and Morgan & Sanders who were both based in Catherine Street. From the press coverage it would be reasonable to assume that Morgan & Sanders were the most active of the patent furniture manufacturing firms. Ackermann’s Repository was heaping praise on Morgan & Sanders at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it is worth noting that the firm was also a major source of Ackermann’s advertising revenue. There is some evidence that the high-end cabinet-makers, like their customers, considered much of the metamorphic furniture fanciful and unnecessary. Thomas Martin (1813, p. 111) wrote, probably with a hint of sarcasm, that it was ‘the fashion of the present day, to resort to a number of contrivances, for making one piece of furniture serve many purposes’. As Brain Austen (1974) pointed out in an article for The Connoisseur, ‘Morgan & Sanders clearly favoured furniture with ingenious features’; something they had in common with their neighbours. But, outside of Catherine Street and the Strand, the ability to convert a chair, stool, cupboard or table into a small set of Library Steps was probably dismissed as a technique for marketing inferior cabinet-work.

4.4 Product and Service Differentiation

With more than forty patent furniture traders in London, the fashion-conscious consumers of the early nineteenth century could afford to be choosey. For those seeking a Metamorphic Library Chair it is unlikely that price would be a major factor in the purchasing decision. But Library Steps without a library would be foolish and,
at a time when excess was associated with greed and revolutionary sentiments, unnecessary extravagances were to be avoided. Even so, the public’s fascination with gadgetry and the availability of the *Metamorphic Library Chair* from Weeks’ museum would have created interest. The added publicity provided by Ackermann’s monthly magazine, would also have stimulated demand. With Morgan & Sanders offering to customise their basic design it is likely that they took the lion-share of the market, but other manufacturers would also have included the *Metamorphic Library Chair* in their range of library furniture to avoid the potential loss of business. Morgan & Sanders, as patent furniture specialists with one hundred mechanics, would have made chairs for stock to cope with the predicted demand. But others, especially Gillows who were seldom at the sharp end of the fashion scene, would continue to rely on making the chairs to order. In the same year that Ackermann featured the *Metamorphic Library Chair* in *The Repository*, Wilbraham Egerton was putting the final touches to his library at Tatton Park in Cheshire (Figure 12).

![Figure 12 – Tatton Park Library by J.C. Buckler ca. 1820](image)

*Source: National Trust Photo Library (Ref. 133822)*

Before his death in 1807, Samuel Wyatt had been commissioned by the Egerton’s to build the neo-classical mansion. Wyatt had been a close friend of Robert Gillow, and it was natural that Gillows should be chosen as the cabinet-makers. It is believed that around 1811 a *Metamorphic Library Chair* of a similar design to that described by Ackermann was added to the finished library but the chair does not appear in the
Buckler’s painting ca. 1820. Whether the chair was made by Gillows, Morgan & Sanders or another manufacturer will be examined in Chapters 6 and 8, but the example illustrates the way in which Gillows relied on their affiliations and relationships to develop their business. As Catholics, many of Gillow’s contracts came through the church including commissions for Sir Thomas Hesketh of Rufford, Lord Arundell and Lady Clifford⁴⁶. Samuel and James Wyatt introduced Gillows to several major projects including the refurnishing of Heaton House and a number of Royal residences such as Frogmore House and Windsor Castle. Unlike Morgan & Sanders who courted publicity, Gillows never placed an advertisement relying instead on their contacts and their reputation. It was this reputation for dependable quality that was eventually immortalised in Gilbert & Sullivan’s HMS Pinafore when Josephine sings, ‘On the one hand, papa’s luxurious home, Hung with ancestral armour and old brasses, Carved oak and tapestry from distant Rome, Rare “blue and white” Venetian finger-glasses, Rich oriental rugs, luxurious sofa pillows, And everything that isn't old, from Gillows.’

Morgan & Sanders relied on products and publicity. Their lack of tenure in the trade put them at a significant disadvantage relative to the established firms such as Seddon, Chippendale and Gillow. While the quality of their cabinet-work met the demands of discerning customers such as Lord Nelson and some members of the Royal family, Morgan & Sanders would still find it difficult to shake off their reputation as a purveyor of patent bedsteads and camp equipage. While the sales associated with the Metamorphic Library Chair would have been welcomed, close ties with Thomas Weeks and the provision of novelty furniture may have curtailed any ambitions they had to be accepted in the same circles as the traditional firms. This could explain the absence of the Metamorphic Library Chair from their advertisements or, indeed, their use of a third-party sales channel for the product. The pieces of Morgan & Sanders furniture featured in The Repository following the launch of the Metamorphic Library Chair are altogether more serious – a Sofa Writing Table in 1811, a Library Bookcase in 1812, a State Bed in 1813 and a Carlton House Table and Chair in 1814. Gone were the mechanical patent designs they had used to generate market interest and attract new customers during the early years. They were now promoting themselves as high-end cabinet-makers and their advertisements focused increasingly on the prestige of their customers.
Summary

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the English furniture trade was highly structured, employing over three thousand people and supporting a continuous flow of apprentices to cope with the growing demands. Some firms specialised in patent furniture for travellers and others in chairs or carriages but the largest furniture manufacturers offered a full cabinet-making service to their customers. These ‘general purpose’ cabinet-makers would work with architects and upholsterers on major building projects to ensure that the interior decoration blended perfectly with the newly fashioned living spaces. Many provincial cabinet-makers relocated to London to take advantage of the growing market and even the largest regional furniture traders such as Gillows were forced to open up branches in the metropolis. Early furniture patents offered little protection to their originators due to the wide availability of pattern books and the prevailing attitude that small variations in design rendered a patent unenforceable (Sheraton 1972, pp. 186-187).

As metamorphic furniture became popular, attention was directed towards the fittings including: springs, catches and the other moving components. This prompted a new wave of patent registrations. Despite the focus on innovation, the cabinet-makers reputation for quality and service determined their success and on-going viability. Newly formed companies such as Morgan & Sanders with their patent furniture manufacturing experience still had an opportunity to gain market share by concentrating on product innovation, advertising and selling from stock. In the meantime, well established firms such as Gillows continued to avoid risk by relying on the loyalty of their customers, the lower cost of production in the north of England and their reputation for ‘affordable quality’. For Gillows, the new mechanical and metamorphic designs could be copied and made to order quickly and inexpensively in Lancaster while their shop in Oxford Street helped to maintain an important network of influential clients.

But did the different business models of Morgan & Sanders and Gillows create noticeable differences in their manufactured output and would it be possible to differentiate between the Metamorphic Library Chairs of the two firms? Chapters 5 and 6 look at the evidence available for both firms and try to identify the design features that can be attributed to each maker.
5. Morgan & Sanders Metamorphic Library Chairs

Thomas Morgan and Joseph Sanders established their cabinet-making business in Catherine Street, ‘three doors from the Strand’, in 1801 (Figure 13). Both partners had previously been employed by Thomas Butler, a patent bedstead manufacturer who was also based in Catherine Street. It is perhaps beyond coincidence that, during the year that Morgan & Sanders started trading, Butler decided to sell his business. Butler’s business was eventually sold to Thomas Oxenham\textsuperscript{48}, a mangle-maker and acquaintance of Butler. Morgan & Sanders felt usurped by the transaction, claiming that they should have been given the opportunity to purchase Butler’s business. The resulting feud between Morgan & Sanders and Butler lasted for more than twelve years with claims and counter-claims relating to the competence of the proprietors and the origins of their designs.

Throughout this period, despite two separate attempts to withdraw gracefully from the business, Butler returned to Catherine Street to continue the battle. The arguments between the two firms were often played out in public through newspaper articles and advertisements. Morgan & Sanders seemed to thrive on the competition by expanding their range and increasing their advertising expenditure. Within eight
years Morgan & Sanders’ clientele included several branches of the Royal family. Ever the publicists, in 1809, they renamed their Catherine Street manufactory ‘Trafalgar-House’ as a tribute to the late Lord Nelson. Catherine Street was alight with innovative ideas and *The Repository* was never slow to recognise Morgan & Sanders’ contribution. As Ackermann (1809, pp. 122-123) comments, ‘their example has stimulated others in the same line: and this competition has contributed to the superiority for beauty of design, and exquisite workmanship’. Two years later, following the continued growth and success of Morgan & Sanders, their version of a *Metamorphic Library Chair* was to appear in the same publication. But in 1814 Butler retired, and five years later, following the death of Joseph Sanders, Thomas Morgan sold out and Morgan & Sanders ceased to trade. The firm had been in business for less than eighteen years. Ackermann may have inadvertently encouraged today’s antique trade to credit Morgan & Sanders with the design of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair*, but do they deserve the honour? In this chapter, we examine the evidence and attempt to identify the origins of the chair design. What did Ackermann really say, could his opinion have been influenced by the advertising revenue and what do we really know about the *Metamorphic Library Chair* output from Morgan & Sanders during the last seven years of their trading partnership?

### 5.1 Morgan & Sanders Design Evidence

Morgan & Sanders claimed to have invented several metamorphic furniture designs including the Imperial Dining Table (Anon, 1801) but they registered no patents and it is more likely that they adopted the designs of others. According to G. Bernard Hughes (1967, pp. 452-453), Morgan & Sanders acquired sole manufacturing rights for John Elswick’s patent for constructing collapsible chairs and sofas in 1807. In the same year they also secured a license to produce the Globe Writing Table patented by George Remington. The table was marketed by Morgan & Sanders as the ‘Pitt’s Cabinet Globe Writing-Table’ in memory of William Pitt the Younger. The Globe Table used an ingenious system of springs and pulleys to open up segments of the globe to reveal the writing surface with a backdrop of small drawers and pigeon holes. According to an article in Ackermann’s *Repository* (1810), ‘Her Royal Highness the Princess Augusta’ ordered one in 1810. Viscount Linley (1996, p.135) suggests that the idea for the globe desks probably originated in Vienna.
Any investigation into the origins of the Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair has to include a study of the two sketches provided by Ackermann in July 1811. In a regular feature entitled, ‘Fashionable Furniture’, Ackermann’s Repository provides the reader with a brief description of ‘this truly novel and useful article’ together with a full-page, hand-tinted engraving of the chair in its closed (Figure 14a) and open (Figure 14b) positions.

In the text there is no mention of a patent or manufacturing license and, although Morgan & Sanders are named as the manufacturers of the illustrated example, there is no suggestion that they created the design. From the short description provided by Ackermann it appears that Morgan & Sanders offered some flexibility in the timber, shape and size of the chair. Ackermann also points out that the chair could be supplied with a caned back and sides. In the accompanying illustration, the chair is shown with partially reeded arms, a panel-reeded front-rail and plain sabre-shaped legs. The seat, which was probably caned, is topped with a French stuffed cushion in Morocco leather51 edged with a neo-classical motif. The concave top-rail of the chair is plain and there are no castors. The hand-tinted original copy of The Repository held in the British Library indicates that the Morocco leather cushion used as the
subject for the illustration was pale blue but this may have been a decision taken by the colourist. Two years earlier, in the August 1809 edition of *The Repository*, an article entitled, 'Messrs. Morgan and Sander's Ware-Room, Catherine-Street, Strand' offers additional information on the Morgan & Sanders business. The ware-room in Catherine Street is described as 'spacious and well-furnished'. Ackermann provides a list of the items being offered for sale including: ‘patent sofa-beds, chair-beds, brass screw four-post and tent bedsteads, newly invented imperial dining-tables, portable chairs, a Trafalgar sideboard and dining tables, Pitt's cabinet globe writing-table, and numberless [sic] other articles'. At this stage there is no mention of *Library Steps* in any configuration. The progressive nature of Morgan & Sanders' business is mentioned at length and the proprietors are credited with 'infusing new life into every department'; their products described as being based on 'improved plans'. Furthermore, Ackermann recognises Morgan & Sanders contribution to the trade in general commenting that, through competition they had 'stimulated others in the same line' (Ackermann, 1809, pp. 122-123). Ackermann's comments are probably a reference to their on-going battle with Thomas Butler. The article supports the claim that, by this time, Morgan & Sanders had enjoyed the patronage of George III and other prominent figures. As for the scale of the business, Ackermann reports that it covered 'six houses united' and that 'nearly one hundred mechanics' were employed in the manufacture of their furniture. It was also claimed that Morgan & Sanders' workforce increased to one thousand when journeymen and the other freelance associates were taken into account.

5.2 Morgan & Sanders Marked Chairs

Although Morgan & Sanders are known to have attached brass nameplates and paper labels to many of their products, marked *Metamorphic Library Chairs* are rare. According to G. Bernard Hughes (1967, p. 453), a chair at Trinity College Oxford bore a brass nameplate upon which Morgan & Sanders described themselves as 'carpenters and manufacturers'. Despite Hughes' claim, an earlier article written by Gerald Metcalf (1930) contained no reference to the maker's mark. The Trinity College chair is presently located in the Old Library at the university and close examinations of the chair on two separate occasions have failed to find any evidence of the missing plate. Two examples of Morgan & Sanders nameplates are given
below. On the first nameplate (Figure 15a) Morgan & Sanders describe themselves as ‘(Patent) Manufacturers’. A few years later, on the handle of an imperial dining table, Morgan & Sanders described themselves as ‘Inventors & Manufacturers’ (Figure 15b). But the word ‘carpenter’ does not appear on either of the plates and it is unlikely that the word would have been used to describe their activities.

Figure 15a – Morgan & Sanders Brass Nameplate ca. 1805

Figure 15b – Morgan & Sanders Brass Nameplate ca. 1810

According to Thomas Sheraton’s *Dictionary* (1970, p. 131) a carpenter is ‘one who uses timber to make cars or carriages’. Sheraton also explains that in London, the term was used to describe those who ‘frame roofs and floors’. In 1813, Thomas Martin (1813, p. 122) describes ‘carpentry’ as ‘the art of cutting out, framing and joining large pieces of wood, to be used in building’. By 1809, two years before the first *Metamorphic Library Chair* appeared in *The Repository*, Morgan & Sanders were already producing high-quality cabinet-work and the term ‘carpenter’ would have undermined their credibility. It appears that Mr. Hughes made a mistake and perhaps due to bad lighting or worn lettering on the nameplate, the word ‘Inventors’ has been mistaken for ‘Carpenters’. In the 1967 article Hughes also suggests that Morgan & Sanders furniture was inferior to that being produced by other cabinet-
makers. He comments that ‘Inspection of authenticated examples and illustrations in The Repository and on their trade cards shows that [Morgan & Sanders] furniture was in the main constructed from sawn planks and turned members’ (Hughes, 1967, p. 453). But the use of mechanical saws and lathes was not unusual during the second decade of the nineteenth century and field research for the dissertation has failed to find any evidence that Morgan & Sanders were producing inferior quality furniture. Despite the inconsistency between Hughes’ comments and the field research, the Metamorphic Library Chair at Trinity College Oxford is certainly of a similar design to that illustrated in The Repository (Figure 16a) and there is no reason to doubt Hughes’ 1967 attribution.

Figure 16a – Morgan & Sanders Chair
Ackermann & Trinity College Oxford

Figure 16b – Morgan & Sanders Chair
Trinity College Oxford

Ackermann’s Sketch 1811
Trinity College Chair ca. 1811

Figure 16 – Morgan & Sanders Marked Chair
Sources: Ackermann’s Repository (July 1811, pl. 3, p. 40) and Trinity College Oxford

During physical examinations of the Trinity College chair in April 2007 and again in April 2009, detailed photographs of the hinges, catches and applied decoration (Figure 16b) were taken together with a full set of dimensions to assist in the comparative analysis. These details are presented in Chapters 7 and 8. Unlike the sketch in The Repository, the Trinity College example has heavy reeding covering most edges of the front elevation including the tops of the arms, the side-rails, the
front-rail and the sabre-shaped legs. Furthermore, the voluted arms of the Trinity College chair are centred with applied circular paterae (Figure 16b) and they rest on small concave-sided pedestals. Despite these variations in design, the construction and condition are consistent with the age of the chair and the Trinity College example could easily be a variation of the Morgan & Sanders chair design illustrated in the July 1811 edition of Ackermann’s Repository.

5.3 Morgan & Sanders Design Assumptions

Based on the evidence in The Repository and that collected at Trinity College Oxford several design features can be attributed to Morgan & Sanders’ manufacturing output during the second decade of the nineteenth century. These include: the location, depth and quality of the reeding, the circular paterae applied to the voluted arms, the brass butt-hinges and the design of the lever-operated latch that secures the two halves of the chair together in the closed position. By combining the information from Ackermann’s description and illustrations with the physical and photographic evidence collected at Trinity College Oxford, the following Morgan & Sanders Metamorphic Library Chair design characteristics can be used as a foundation for the next stage of the analysis:

- Morgan & Sanders Metamorphic Library Chairs were made of mahogany but other timbers could be specified.
- Morgan & Sanders chairs were flat-sided with sabre-shaped legs and voluted arms and they had a concave tablet top-rail.
- The voluted arms of the chair were centred with circular paterae based on a turned boss design containing two concentric circles.
- The voluted arms were separated from the side-rails of the chair by small, concave-sided pedestals.
- The proportions of the chair were largely dictated by the Trafalgar Chair profile but Morgan & Sanders were willing to modify the overall size and shape of the chair for their customers.
- Partial reeding was applied to the arms and front-rail of the chair but this could be extended to most of the forward-facing edges if required.
- A caned seat topped with a French stuffed cushion made of Morocco leather was offered as an option.
The caning could be extended to the back and sides of the chair if requested.

The steps were deployed by rotating the back and seat of the chair forward so that the top-rail rested on the floor to provide stability.

A French stuffed cushion was available in blue with an embossed edge pattern.

Brass butt-hinges fixed with hand-made screws were used to join the two halves of the chair together.54

Despite the weight of the chair no castors were supplied as standard.

A small lever-operated latch was used to release the top half of the chair from its sub-structure before the steps could be revealed. The latch was located under the first step and was operated by pushing the handle of the mechanism to the left to disengage the lock from the catch plate (Figure 17).

![Figure 17 – Lever-Operated Latch Mechanism](image)

Source: Trinity College Oxford

This is a definitive list of Morgan & Sanders Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair design features based on reliable evidence. Nevertheless, due to the lack of detail in Ackermann’s illustrations and the willingness of Morgan & Sanders to customise the design for their customers, additional field research was necessary to narrow down the options and provide a more useful set of attribution guidelines.
Section 5.4 outlines the additional research that was carried out to tighten up the specification and develop a more reliable list of attribution criteria.

### 5.4 Morgan & Sanders Field Research Results

Since the Morgan & Sanders design assumptions were based on a relatively small sample of research data, the initial design assumptions were tested by applying the criteria to an extended sample of unmarked chairs. Figure 18 shows the three chairs that were selected for the analysis from a larger sample itemised in Appendix 10.5. Each chair is shown in the closed (chair) and open (steps) positions. The previously marked Morgan & Sanders chair, which is a fixed reference point for the analysis, is shown in the first column (Figure 18a). The chair shown in the second column (Figure 18b) belongs to Richard Schneidman, a metamorphic furniture collector based in New York, and the third chair was recently retailed by Butchoff Antiques in London who had attributed the piece to Morgan & Sanders (Figure 18c).

**Figure 18 – Morgan & Sanders Inspected Chairs**

*Sources: Trinity College Oxford, Schneidman Collection and Butchoff Antiques*
The field research was used to answer the following questions:

1. Did the overall dimensions of any chair match those of the chair at Trinity College Oxford? Identical sizes and proportions may suggest that the same drawings and templates were used to manufacture the chair.

2. Did any of the chairs use the same brass fittings? The chairs could have been produced at any time between 1811 (Ackermann’s *Repository* article) and 1819 (Morgan & Sanders no longer trading). It is possible that design improvements were made or that Morgan & Sanders changed their suppliers during this period. Even so, the discovery of identical hinges or catches would increase the possibility that a chair originated from the same workshop.

3. Although Morgan & Sanders offered a custom service, most changes to the basic design would conform to a restricted set of finishing options. These options could include: reduced or extended reeding, carved decoration to the top-rail and the addition of castors. This would have allowed the chairs to be manufactured to a standard pattern while accommodating individual preferences. Could any of the chairs have been modified from the same basic design?

The tabulated results of research relating to all three chairs are included as Appendix 10.8. These results can be summarised as follows:

**Dimensions** – The overall dimensions of the three chairs in both the closed and the open positions are virtually identical and certainly within hand-crafted manufacturing tolerances during the Regency period (±5%). The dimensions are so close that it suggests the use of cutting and shaping templates to create the side profiles and curved sections of the voluted arms.

**Decoration** – The style and application of the double-reeded design on the Trinity College chair and the example in the Schneidman Collection are identical. The reeding on the Butchoff chair is slightly different but the depth and quality of the carving is consistent across all three chairs. Features such as the plain panel on the front-rail of the Butchoff chair could easily have been substituted for the fully reeded version to meet the requirements of a customer.
Timber – All three chairs appear to be made of Honduran mahogany but comparison is difficult due to restoration and sun damage on the Trinity College chair. Nevertheless, the Trinity College chair does have a figured veneer panel set into the top-rail of the chair.

Fittings – All three chairs make use of different catches. The Trinity College chair uses a lever-operated latch design (Figure 17, p. 46), whereas the chair in the Schneidman Collection has a push-button, spring catch mechanism. There is no locking mechanism on the Butchoff chair. There are also differences in the design and orientation of the butt-hinges. Since these are recessed into the frame, the differences are a feature of the original construction and could be a reliable indicator that the chairs are from different workshops. Note that the hinges on the chair at Trinity College have been replaced but the positions and sizes of the original hinge plates remain visible. The castors fitted to the Butchoff chair would have been a factory-fitted option. The castors had to be fitted at the time of manufacture since the additional height of the chair relative to the top-rail would have created a design problem. In the open position the top of the crest-rail must be parallel with the lowest point of the chair for the steps to remain parallel.

Maker’s Marks – There are no marks on the Trinity College chair despite the observations of G. Bernard Hughes (1967, p. 453). But there are marks on the chair in the Schneidman Collection indicating that the chair was part of the Royal Collection between 1830 and 1837. A photograph and more details relating to the mark are included in Chapter 7. The Butchoff chair is unmarked.

Despite the field research, the results remain inconclusive. The differences identified in the fittings and the applied decoration may well have been the result of customer specific requests, on-going improvements in the design or the availability of locally sourced components. Since Morgan & Sanders, like many of their competitors, made use of sub-contract labour it is also possible that the differences in construction were due to the preferences of an individual craftsman rather than the intention of the firm to create a differentiated product for the market. Even so, the similarities between the known Morgan & Sanders chair at Trinity College Oxford and the chair belonging to the Schneidman Collection in New York, do suggest a common source of supply and this will be explored further as we broaden the comparison group and start to
discuss the possibilities in more depth in Chapters 7 and 8. For the time being there is nothing to suggest that the initial hypotheses are flawed and, given that all three chairs have the same overall dimensions and that the differences are largely ‘cosmetic’, it is possible that the three chairs are variations of the same basic design.

Summary

Design evidence relating to the Metamorphic Library Chairs manufactured by Morgan & Sanders at the beginning of the nineteenth century is difficult to find. Original copies of Ackermann’s July 1811 Repository held in the British Library and a previously marked Metamorphic Library Chair located at Trinity College Oxford are the only reliable sources of information to have been identified. Nevertheless, by combining the information from The Repository with the physical evidence collected during a series of on-site studies, it has been possible to capture and collate some of the design features used by Morgan & Sanders between 1811 and 1818. Whether these criteria prove to be reliable is tested further in Chapter 7 when chairs from several sources are ‘put to the test’. In the meantime Chapter 6 will focus on the evidence of Gillows to determine if there are any obvious differences in the designs.
6. Gillows Metamorphic Library Chairs

The Lancaster based firm of Gillow had been in business for more than seventy years when Morgan & Sanders started trading in 1801. During the latter half of the eighteenth century Robert Gillow and his son Richard had already established an international trading company importing timber from the West Indies and exporting furniture to continental Europe and the American Colonies. The firm had also been credited with perfecting the design and construction of Billiard and Troumadame tables. In 1765 Gillows opened up a branch of their business in London where they widened their contact base and continued to develop a reputation for good quality furniture. By the end of the eighteenth century Robert Gillow was dead and his first son Richard was considering retirement, but the firm had already been handed over to the next generation. Gillows continued to manufacture most of their furniture in Lancaster to take advantage of their existing infrastructure and the skills they had already established. The northern manufacturing base enabled them to benefit from the lower costs of production and this gave them a competitive edge in the metropolis. In May 1800, Richard Gillow II patented a design for ‘Improvements in Methods of Constructing Dining or Other Tables’. The design was based on a system of ‘sliders constructed of wood or metal’ that allowed additional leaves or flaps to be added to the table. The idea proved to be a huge success and it established Richard’s reputation as an innovative and inspirational leader. But during the nineteenth century trade with the West Indies was in decline and the regional business suffered. In 1813 Richard Gillow II and his two brothers retired and the firm entered a period of considerable change involving several new partners. Gillows continued to produce high quality furniture well into the nineteenth century and, in 1897, they merged with Waring of Liverpool to become Waring & Gillow.

Gillows had been making multi-purpose furniture since the middle of the eighteenth century. In a Sketch Book dated 1788, Gillows recorded the design for a ‘Buro Bedstead’. From the outside the bureau looks like any other, complete with writing slope, drawers and handles, but the sham fittings hide a fold-out bed frame. It was customary, during the eighteenth century for reception rooms to be occasionally used as lodging rooms (Stuart, 2008, p. 346, vol. I). Concealed beds were known as ‘shut-up’ or ‘turn-up’ beds. But, despite the bureau-bed example, a wider analysis of
the Sketch Books suggests that Gillows made few metamorphic pieces. Between 1789 and 1834 the Sketch Books contain estimates for only seven Library Steps including: four Library Step Stools, one Pembroke Table with Library Ladder and two Library Step Chairs. Making allowances for the unrecorded items, this would still represent a fraction of Morgan & Sanders’ output. Unlike Morgan & Sanders, who relied heavily on product innovation and advertising to generate business Gillows worked through a network of business contacts and loyal customers and this approach developed an order book for custom-made furniture.

Library Steps, like other pieces, would be made to order from pattern book designs supported by letter exchanges containing sketches and notes. Gillows subscribed to several design publications including Chippendale’s Director and Sheraton’s Drawing-Book and these catalogues are often referenced in the correspondence with their customers. With such a bespoke business model, the concept of a standard Metamorphic Library Chair would have been inappropriate. Even so, as a firm with a history, Gillows had developed their own distinctive style, and it is this style that can be used to identify some of the common characteristics of the furniture they made. Many architects, upholders and customers remained loyal to Gillows because their output was predictable. Despite the rapidly changing fashions for simple, slender structures, Gillows understood that a poor design could put their business at risk and they often held back on a new design until they had confidence in its integrity. This cautious approach had a significant impact on the design characteristics of Gillows furniture and this provides an important line of research as we try to identify the features of a Gillows Metamorphic Library Chair.

By examining the work of furniture historians and Gillows specialists such as Lindsay Boynton, Susan Stuart and others it has been possible to identify the design preferences of Gillows during the first few years of the nineteenth century. Gillows had a reputation for quality and never compromised on the construction of their furniture. From the firm’s early days, most of their furniture was ‘robust and simple in style’ (Stuart, 2008, p. 22, vol. I). Regardless of the fashion for delicate tapering legs with no stretchers or cross-rails, Gillows ‘refused to go to extremes that equated with flimsiness’ (Boynton, 1995, p. 28). Based on these design principles, Gillows Metamorphic Library Chair would have been solidly constructed and well-
engineered. Boynton (1995, p.20) also draws attention to Gillows’ preference for a plain finish. Boynton goes on to explain that, by the end of the eighteenth century Gillows had already ‘toned down what they evidently regarded as the excessive application of inlaid motifs’. They had started to emphasise the lines of their furniture ‘by a judicious use of contrasting woods’ (Boynton, 1995, p.28). This use of a material’s natural beauty to decorate the furniture became a distinctive feature of Gillows’ output and the surface decoration of a *Metamorphic Library Chair*, may have been considered unnecessary. Throughout the eighteenth century ‘decoration was used sparingly, the emphasis being on the shape and form of the piece and the quality of the wood’ (Stuart, 2008, p. 22, vol. I).

Gillows certainly had a preference for the use of fine woods and natural veneers over marquetry panels, heavy carving and applied motifs. As a major importer of fine timber, they would have had access to the very best material and they would often apply veined or figured mahogany veneers to their furniture to improve the overall appearance. With respect to the design of Gillows chairs, Boynton (1995, p. 29) notes that the firm was also fond of the tablet top-rail and the rectangular rail at shoulder height that was typical of the *Trafalgar Chair* form. While this design of the top-rail is a common feature of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair*, there are some examples where the rail has been ‘softened’ by rounding off the corners and by introducing an over-scrolled edge to the upper surface. Given Boynton’s observations this design feature would have been untypical of Gillows. According to R. S. Clouston in an article for *The Burlington Magazine* and interestingly entitled ‘Minor English Furniture Makers of the Eighteenth Century’ he comments that, neither Robert nor Richard Gillow ‘ever posed as a great designer’ but ‘prided themselves, and with justice, on the finish and excellence of their workmanship’ (Clouston, 1905, p. 41). As such, their furniture appealed to the new ‘champions of industry’ in Manchester and Liverpool who, despite their new-found wealth, still appreciated good value and were suspicious of the fancy London ware-rooms.

To summarise, and in the words of Richard Gillow II (1782), ‘Our wood & our workmen we flatter ourselves are as good if not superior to any in the kingdom and presumes you will think it reasonable that a comparison should be made of the quality as well as price’.
6.1 Gillows Design Evidence

The firm of Gillows is unique in that it is the only business in the furniture industry to have left an illustrated history of its output. There are two hundred volumes in the Gillows archive owned by Westminster City Council containing information on more than twenty thousand items (Goodison & Hardy, 1970, p. 1). Between 1811 and 1840 the archives contain references to only two Library Step Chairs. The first, dated July 1815, refers to a chair made for John Upton by Edward Pye. Although the badly faded Sketch Book entry provides an itemised list of the materials and labour there is no accompanying illustration (Figure 19).

![Image of Gillows 1815 Estimate for Library Chair Steps](Figure 19 – Gillows 1815 Estimate for Library Chair Steps
Source: Westminster City Archives, Gillows Sketch Book (344/99)

The estimate details for the chair are: ‘15½ ft of 1 inch reduced mahogany frame, 5 ft of ¾ inch baywood steps, 1 pair of 1¼ inch brass clock hinges, 1 spring catch and glue screws etc.’ The estimate also includes two additional lines suggesting that the chair was to be sub-contracted to Edward Pye for ‘making’ and that the chair would be fitted with a caned seat before it was delivered to John Upton. The reference to the use of clock hinges and a spring catch are of particular interest. The clock hinges
were most probably those used to hang the doors on longcase clocks. Although Gillows had stopped making clock cases ca. 1800, Robert Gillow had been extremely active in this market since the 1750s when the firm had supplied cases to a number of clock-makers in the north of England (Stuart, 2008, pp. 388-410, vol. I). Reference to a ‘spring catch’ probably relates to the use of a push-button catch similar to that illustrated in Figure 8b on page 20.

The second record, for a ‘Mahogany Library Step Chair’, appears nineteen years later in November 1834 (Figure 20a). This time the estimate has been clarified by a fully dimensioned sketch (Figure 20b). The sketch shows a Trafalgar Chair with the familiar sabre-shaped legs, voluted open arms and a tablet top-rail and it was to be made for Ferguson & Co. by R. Lowthian.

![Figure 20a – Gillows Chair Estimate](Image)

![Figure 20b – Gillows Chair Illustration](Image)

**Figure 20 – Gillows 1834 Estimate for Library Step Chair**
*Source: Westminster City Archives, Gillows Estimate Sketch Book (344/102)*

The reference to Ferguson & Co. probably relates to William James Ferguson who was a cabinet-maker based in Oxford Street, London. From the volume of orders Ferguson placed with Gillows during the nineteenth century it seems as though he was a reseller. R. Lowthian was probably Richard Lowthian, a journeyman working
for Gillows in Lancaster at this time (Stuart, 2008, p. 260, vol. II). The small note under Lowthian’s name indicates that he has been paid for his work proving that the chair was manufactured. From the sketch of the chair it appears as though it was to be supplied with a plain finish since there are no marks or notes on the illustration to represent reeding, carving or paterae and, although French polishing is mentioned specifically, there is no line item for applied decoration. The illustration also suggests that the voluted arms of the chair were supported by square pedestals with concave sides. The overall dimensions of the chair were also specified: height 36¼ inches, width 23¼ inches and depth 21¾ inches. The depth of the front-rail at 2¾ inches indicates that the profile of the curved-knee was to be continued under the front edge of the seat, but once again, the feature was to be left plain.

By comparing the estimate from 1815 with the later estimate of 1834 it appears that there are only minor differences between the two chairs. The cutting list of 1834 is more generous but the cost of external labour has reduced by eight percent. The identical prices of the hinges and catches suggest that the same designs were used and that Gillows therefore favoured a spring catch locking mechanism. French polishing, which was omitted in 1815 has been added in 1834 at a cost of thirteen shillings. French polishing came into vogue around 1810 and provided a much smoother finish. It is interesting to note that Gillows had not used the technique on the earlier chair and perhaps this is another indication of the firm’s resistance to change. Given that the cutting list is virtually identical it is reasonable to assume that the design of the chair had remained the same and that the earlier estimate also referred to a Trafalgar Chair variation.

### 6.2 Gillows Marked Chairs

Extensive research has uncovered only one marked Gillows Library Step Chair. The chair is featured in Susan Stuart’s book entitled ‘Gillows of Lancaster and London 1730-1840’ (Stuart, 2008, pp. 106-107, vol. II). Recent enquiries have revealed that the chair was purchased in the United States of America during 1990 and offered for sale by Anthony James Antiques in London and David Love Antiques in Harrogate between 1991 and 1997 (Millard, 2009). The chair was eventually sold at auction by Christie’s in January 1998 but the present owner can no longer be traced. James
Millard of Anthony James Antiques notes that the chair was stamped with the ‘GILLOWS·LANCASTER’ mark (Millard, 2009). According to Jonathan Meyer in ‘British Furniture 1600-2000’ the Gillows stamp had acquired a ‘mullet’ or central stop by 1800 and appeared as ‘GILLOWS·LANCASTER’ on some pieces for over eighty years (Barrington, et al., 2005, p.141). The marked Gillows chair is remarkably similar to the chair illustrated in the November 1834 Sketch Book with a plain finish and voluted arms supported by small concave-sided pedestals (Figures 21a and 21b). From the photographs it appears that the chair has been made from a high grade, figured Spanish mahogany. During this period there were ample supplies of the material and, according to Adam Bowett (1998, p. 41), ‘By the mid-1770s Gillows had developed a decided preference for Spanish plank’.

The dimensions of the marked chair are different from those included with the 1834 sketch. According to Stuart (2008, p. 106, vol. II), the dimensions of the marked chair are: height 35½ inches, width 21½ inches and depth 25 inches. This represents a difference in the depth of more than three inches and it makes the chair one of the largest in the sample group. Given that the physical dimensions are different from
the 1834 sketch, it seems likely that Gillows allowed variations to their documented Library Step Chair design or that they offered their journeymen some discretion during manufacture so that they could modify the design to take account of the available timber.

6.3 Gillows Design Assumptions

By combining the information from the Gillows Sketch Books with details extracted from the photographs of a marked chair it has been possible to develop a list of the most likely Gillows Metamorphic Library Chair design features. The following list describes a set of features that are known to have been adopted by Gillows during the early years of the nineteenth century:

- Gillows Metamorphic Library Chairs were often made of Spanish mahogany.
- The Gillows chair design was based on a straightforward Trafalgar pattern with flat-sides, sabre-shaped legs, voluted open arms and a tablet top-rail.
- The voluted arms were plain and rested on concave-sided pedestals.
- Overall dimensions were likely to be 36¼ inches high, 23⅛ inches wide and 21⅞ inches deep, but there was some flexibility in the depth of the chair.
- Gillows Metamorphic Library Chairs normally had a plain finish.
- Most of the chairs were provided with a fixed caned seat.
- The seat cushion was added later to match the colour scheme of the library.
- Gillows favoured a ‘spring catch’ locking mechanism.
- The steps were deployed by rotating the back and seat of the chair forward so that the top-rail rested on the floor to provide stability.
- 1¼ inch brass clock hinges fixed the two halves of the chair together.
- Despite the weight of the chair no castors were supplied as standard.

This is a definitive list of Gillows Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair design features based on reliable evidence. Nevertheless, due to the lack of detail in the 1834 Sketch Book illustration, the dimensional differences between the sketch and the marked chair and the willingness of Gillows to modify and adapt their designs for each situation, additional field research was necessary. This would help to narrow down the options and provide a more reliable set of attribution guidelines. The objectives and results of the field research are provided in the following section.
6.4 Gillows Field Research Results

Since the Gillows design assumptions were based on a relatively small sample of data, the initial design assumptions have been tested by applying the criteria to an extended sample of unmarked chairs. Two chairs, recently attributed to Gillows, were selected from those listed in Appendix 10.5. Information collected from physical inspections of these chairs was then used to test the preliminary assumptions. Figure 22 shows the three chairs including the marked chair. Each chair is shown in the closed (chair) and open (steps) position. The marked chair, which is a fixed reference point for the analysis, is shown in the first column (Figure 22a). The chair shown in the second column (Figure 22b) had previously been attributed to Gillows by several well-respected furniture historians and is presently located in the library at Tatton Park in Cheshire. The third chair, attributed to Gillows by the retailer, was recently for sale at Mallett Antiques in London (Figure 22c).

Figure 22 – Gillows Inspected Chairs
Sources: Anthony James Antiques, Tatton Park and Mallett Antiques
Although it has not been possible to locate the reference chair, interviews with James Millard (2009) and David Love (2009), who handled and photographed the chair between 1991 and 1997, have helped to provide details of the timber used and the construction of the chair.

The extended Gillows research was used to clarify the following:

1. Did any of the chairs have the same overall dimensions as those shown in the 1834 sketch or the marked Gillows chair? Identical sizes and proportions may suggest that the same design drawings and templates were used in the manufacture of the chair.

2. Both Gillows estimates contain no references to applied decoration such as reeding, carving or paterae. Did all of the sample chairs have a plain finish? The use of reeding would be uncharacteristic of Gillows and may indicate a mistake in the original attribution.

3. Did any of the chairs use the same fittings? The chairs were probably manufactured between 1811 (Ackermann’s Repository article) and 1834 (Final Sketch Book entry) and it is possible that several catch designs were used over this period. Nevertheless, the same design of hinge or catch would increase the possibility of the chairs being from the same workshop.

4. Gillows had a reputation for using the best grade mahogany. Were any of the chairs made of a high grade timber and did any of the examples make use of finely figured veneers?

5. Although the chairs are unlikely to carry the Gillows stamp there may be other identifying marks. It was customary for Gillows’ journeymen to stamp pieces with their initials and some of these marks can be traced back to the cabinet-makers working for firm at that time. Were any of the chairs stamped with a journeyman’s mark and can the initials be traced?

Tabulated results, based on the desk research and physical inspections of the two chairs, are included in Appendix 10.8. These results of the preliminary analysis can be summarised as follows:
Dimensions – The dimensions of the marked chair in the open position are unknown but in the closed position the Tatton Park chair is two inches smaller between the front and rear legs. The marked chair and that retailed by Mallett Antiques are both of a more substantial construction. The size of the chair at Tatton Park does however meet the guidelines suggested by Gillows in the 1834 Sketch Book entry and sits comfortably among the marked Gillows chairs at Tatton Hall62.

Decoration – The Metamorphic Library Chairs at Tatton Park and Mallett Antiques are both heavily reeded. The chair at Tatton Park carries a double reeded decoration to all forward facing surfaces including: the voluted arms, the side-rails and both front legs. The front-rail is also reeded in keeping with the overall design. The Mallett chair goes one stage further with four tapered reeds to the outer edges of the side-rails and uprights. According to Stephen Sartin (2009), a leading authority on the work of Gillows, heavy reeding would have been uncharacteristic of Gillows at this time and the accompanying Sketch Book records would have specified the additional carving. Given that the marked chair and both Sketch Book entries suggest plain surfaces, the chairs at Tatton Park and Mallet Antiques could have originated elsewhere.

Timber – Gillows had access to the finest cuts of timber and it was common practice for the firm to reserve the very best for their own workshops. From the photograph of the marked Gillows chair it appears as though it has been heavily restored and much of the original patina has been lost. Nevertheless, there is evidence that a strongly figured, close-grained mahogany has been used. In contrast to the marked chair, the Tatton Park example has developed a rich, nutty-brown glow over the last two hundred years. Once again the timber is close-grained but it has been made from Honduran rather than Spanish mahogany63. Nevertheless, the chair-maker has inset a flame mahogany veneer into a double-reeded panel on the top-rail to lighten the appearance of the rail and to provide a contrast with the plain Honduran timber. Despite the use of Honduran mahogany the Tatton Park chair was clearly made by a firm with access to good quality timber and the use of the veneered panel to enhance the chair provides further evidence that this is a good quality piece. The ornate chair being offered by Mallett Antiques is also made of Honduran mahogany. Recent refinishing has taken away some of the patina but the skill of the restorer has retained much of the original wood tone.
Fittings – Details of the brass fittings on the marked Gillows chair are unknown. The Tatton Park chair uses a lever-operated latch, but the Mallett chair relies on gravity to keep the two halves of the closed chair together. There are also differences in the style of the hinges used on the Tatton Park chair and those used on the chair retailed by Mallett Antiques. The hinges on the Tatton Park chair are of a traditional flat-plate, knuckle and hinge pin design. Those used on the Mallett chair are more elaborate in keeping with the overall design and construction of the chair.

Maker’s Marks – The stamped initials ‘T.G’ were discovered on the back-rail of the Mallett Antiques’ chair. Journeymen working for Gillows often stamped their finished pieces to provide an audit trail of their work and to ensure that they were rewarded for their output. In her latest book on Gillows, Susan Stuart has included the names and marks of several known journeymen who worked for Gillows at this time (Stuart, 2008, pp. 204-302, vol. II). A match between the stamped initials and the cipher of a known journeyman working for Gillows during the second decade of the nineteenth century could help to verify Mallett’s claims that the chair was manufactured by Gillows. The identity of the journeyman is covered in Chapter 7.

Summary

The only **Metamorphic Library Chair** known to be marked ‘GILLOWS-LANCAS TER’ that has been identified for the dissertation was sold by Christies’ in 1998. Nevertheless, by combining the evidence contained in the Gillows Sketch Books with known Gillows preferences and details collected during a series of on-site studies, it has been possible to identify the design characteristics that would be typical of a Gillows Library Step Chair at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Based on the initial comparisons it appears that the chairs at Tatton Park and Mallett Antiques have little in common with the Gillows Sketch Book entries, the marked example or the typical output of the firm during the second decade of the nineteenth century.

The results of the Gillows research will now be combined with those of Morgan & Sanders to undertake a full comparative analysis of the chairs made by both firms. Using all of the data collected, together with the additional insight gained through a broader comparison of the design features it should be possible to develop a more robust method for the attribution of Regency period Metamorphic Library Chairs.
7. Comparison of Morgan & Sanders and Gillows Designs

Having established and tested the design assumptions for Morgan & Sanders and Gillows Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chairs*, it is now possible to build a more robust set of attribution criteria. This Chapter reassesses the results of the field research by comparing the features of all six chairs and suggests new guidelines that will help to improve the accuracy of attributions and catalogue descriptions.

7.1 Metamorphic Library Chair Design Differences

Chapters 5 and 6 identified a number of differences between the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chairs* of Morgan & Sanders and Gillows. This section combines the knowledge gained so far and expresses these differences within the context of the following key attributes:

- Dimensions – height, width and depth in the open and closed positions
- Design – front-rail, sides, top-rail and pedestals
- Decoration – reeding, paterae and carving
- Quality – timber, construction and proportions
- Fittings – catches, hinges and castors
- Finish – caning, makers’ marks and condition

7.1.1 Dimensions

Standardised sizes were unusual during the first half of the eighteenth century when a knot in a plank of wood often dictated the size of a finished product. All this changed in the nineteenth century when neo-classical styles demanded strict adherence to the principles of perspective. As the English Empire designs evolved, Thomas Sheraton, George Smith and others continued to stress the relationship between good draughtsmanship and good craftsmanship. Chair-makers, keen to comply with the documented rules, used one or more of the manufacturers’ guides and this, resulted in some degree of dimensional uniformity across the industry. Hepplewhite’s *Guide*, first published in 1788, even provided a ‘standard’ chair size; ‘width in front 20 inches, depth of the seat 17 inches, height of the seat frame 17 inches, total height 3 feet 1 inch’ (Hepplewhite, 1969, p. 1). Based on the research it
is clear that most Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chairs* were also constructed according to a common set of rules. Of the six chairs examined in the study the overall dimensions vary by less than five percent. Those with a tablet top-rail all share the same closed height of 36 inches (±2%), they are all 22 inches wide (±5%) and, although there are variations in the depth of the chairs, these are within acceptable tolerances for hand-made furniture of the period. The overall height and width of the *Metamorphic Library Chairs* examined are close to Hepplewhite’s suggestions. The extra depth, of between three and four inches, was necessary to accommodate the steps. The chair at Mallett Antiques, with its extravagant side contouring, is a bulkier piece of furniture and the additional depth of four inches is justified by the solid stance of the sabre-legs and the over-scrolled top-rail. The dimensions of a *Metamorphic Library Chair* would therefore have been well known to Regency period chair-makers and they probably worked from outline specifications that were similar to the field research averages (Figures 23a and 23b).

![Figure 23a – Dimensions (Closed) Field Research Results](image1)

![Figure 23b – Dimensions (Open) Field Research Results](image2)

**Figure 23 – Field Research Results – Dimensions**  
*Source: Field Research*

A heavier frame and a robust construction may suggest a Gillows piece since the firm was renowned for ‘solid and reliable’ workmanship. Even so, it is clear from the similarities of the chair dimensions across the sample, that size cannot be used as a
reliable means of identification. Despite the availability of a fully dimensioned illustration in a Gillows *Sketch Book* from 1834, it has been shown the *Trafalgar Chair* based design dictated most of the primary dimensions and the size of the chair has no connection with the maker’s identity.

### 7.1.2 Design

The sabre-shaped legs, curved-over knee and concave top-rail were all features of the standard *Trafalgar Chair* design and variations could indicate differences in the sources of manufacture. Areas of particular interest are: the design of the front-rail, the ‘profile of the sides’, the shape of the top-rail and the contours of the small pedestals that separate the downward sweep of the voluted arms from the side-rails. In most cases the front-rail follows the curve of the knee, starting at the hinge and extending across the front of the chair (Figure 24a). In contrast, the front-rail of the Mallett chair is rather plain and certainly less-substantial. The *Trafalgar Chair* was constructed using flat sides so that the sections could be clamped together and made in pairs to speed up production and ensure symmetry. All of the sampled chairs have flat sides with the exception of the Mallett chair. Viewed from the top, the voluted arms of the Mallett chair have been elaborately contoured (Figure 24a).

![Figure 24a – Front-Rails and Side Profiles
Field Research Results](image1)

![Figure 24b – Top-Rails and Pedestals
Field Research Results](image2)

*Figure 24 – Field Research Results – Design
Source: Field Research*
The three-dimensional contouring of the Mallett chair arms and uprights was a difficult, time consuming and therefore expensive feature involving the creation of the ‘S’-shaped profile from a much larger, solid block of mahogany. In common with the ancient Greek klismos chairs the top-rail of the Trafalgar Chair was made to extend over the uprights. The Regency design was also sometimes embellished with a small rear facing scrolled edge to the top of the rail. Although the depth of the curve varies slightly, most of the top-rails in the sample share the same basic design (Figure 24b). Once again the Mallett chair breaks from the standard pattern to present a more ‘regal’ interpretation of the design. In this instance the chair-maker has replaced the tablet top-rail with an out-scrolled stuffed leather bolster. All of the designs make use of a small pedestal to separate the voluted arms of the chair from the side-rails. Most designs are based on a cube with two concave sides to lighten the appearance of the support when the chair is viewed from the side. In keeping with the quality of the Mallett chair, these pedestals are in the form of spheres (Figure 24b). The design of most chairs in the sample follow the standard Trafalgar Chair form with sabre-shaped legs, a curved-over knee and a concave top-rail. There appears to be little significance in the design of the front-rail and this most probably reflected the choice of the customer. The introduction of an over-scrolled top-rail and other labour-intensive and therefore expensive features, could indicate that the chair was destined for a more grand location although the tendency to over-ornament a chair may also indicate a later period.64

7.1.3 Decoration

The neo-classical motifs of the Regency also extended to the surface decoration. Fluting, which represented the surface finish of ancient Greek columns, was gradually replaced by reeding as the preferred surface decoration and by 1803, Sheraton was advocating reeding as ‘preferable to fluting or cabling in point of strength; and in look, much superior to the latter; and almost equal to the former’ (Sheraton, 1970, p. 296). In the same section of The Dictionary Sheraton went even further by specifying the need for an odd number of reeds with the ‘odd one in the centre’ of the pattern. Four of the six chairs have a reeded front-rail. The Butchhoff chair has a plain panelled front-rail but this could be a simple adaptation of a standard design. Unlike the other examples, the marked Gillows chair has no reeded
decoration on the front-rail or any other surface. Gillows preferred to feature the grain of the wood and often considered the decoration unnecessary on a chair made of fine mahogany. With the exception of the marked Gillows chair the reeding has been applied generously to most of the front-facing edges of the chairs including: the front edges of the legs, the tops of the arms and the front-rails (Figure 25a). In the case of the Mallett chair reeding has also been applied to the side-rails and uprights and most plain flat surfaces have been adorned with foliate paterae (Figure 25b).²⁶

There are also variations in the design of the reeding and close examination reveals that the number of reeds applied to each chair surface varies. A three-reeded design has been used on the upper surface of the arms on the Mallett chair whereas, despite Sheraton’s advice, the chairs in Oxford and New York both use a double-reeded design. The Butchoff chair adopts a different variation on the theme with one central, deeply reeded section, bordered by two smaller reeded patterns. Once again the Mallett chair excels by offering four reeds to the side members that gradually turn and narrow as they reach the scrolled top-rail. This design was only possible at the hands of a patient and skilled carver. The paterae applied to the Mallett chair have already been mentioned but three other chairs also made use of surface-mounted
decorations to finish the plain surfaces at the centres of the voluted arms. The chairs at Tatton Park and Trinity College Oxford together with the one held in the Schneidman Collection all use circular paterae in this context. The paterae are all of the same design; a simple lathe-tuned disk with two raised concentric circles (Figure 25b). The use of a different routing tool and the application of modified paterae would be a simple and effective way of differentiating the design. Nevertheless, it is also the case that these drilled and glued bosses are frequently lost or damaged and they are often the first features to have been replaced on a restored chair. The similarity in the design of the paterae may therefore be the result of restoration rather than an original design feature. Taking all of these factors into account, any attribution based on these decorative elements would be risky. Regency chair-makers would have had a range of routing tools at their disposal and could easily have replicated any of the reeded patterns. The paterae could also have been copied although it is more likely that the similarities are due to subsequent restoration. The only decoration that truly differentiates a piece is the tapered side reeding on the Mallet chair - the sign of a quality maker working for a wealthy client.

**7.1.4 Quality**

The materials and construction of a chair provide the most reliable evidence of authenticity. While many of the fittings can be replaced with modern-day reproductions, the original timber and the skill used to cut the joints and carve the wood are difficult to fake. Although the quality of camp furniture was close to its domestic equivalent, the priority of firms such as Morgan & Sanders was to develop and manufacture cleverly-designed furniture that was compact, light and easy to assemble. In contrast, cabinet-making firms such as Gillows were more concerned with quality and customer service. At this end of the market the priority was to offer a reliable, bespoke service where a customer could order items to match their existing decor and the Gillows’ Sketch Books provided the ‘corporate memory’ to support this practice. For Morgan & Sanders, the discovery of a new catch, clip or fold-flat handle would be seen as a way to improve and enhance their products but, for the family firm of Gillows, it would be the quality of the timber, the appropriateness of the finish and the exactness of execution that would help them to maintain their reputation. Standing back from the six chairs a few quality touches are immediately apparent.
The flame-figured mahogany veneers set into the top-rails of the chairs at Tatton Park and Trinity College are a clear sign of quality, just as the spherical pedestals and contoured side-reeding of the Mallett chair demonstrate superior craft skills (Figure 26a). Of equal importance are the proportions of the chair (Figure 26b). As Sheraton (1970, p. 145) explains in his Dictionary, chair-making required ‘a particular turn in the handling of shapes, to make them agreeable and easy’. Sheraton went on to observe that, ‘it is very remarkable, the difference of some chairs of precisely the same pattern, when executed by different chair-makers, arising chiefly in the want of taste concerning the beauty of an outline, of which we judge by the eye, more than the rigid rules of geometry’ (Sheraton, 1972, p. 106).

To appreciate the chair-maker’s ability to create an ‘agreeable and easy’ shape, in which the curves of the uprights, arms and legs blend naturally together, it is necessary to see an alternative. The contrast is abundantly clear in the Old Library at Trinity College Oxford where there are three Metamorphic Library Chairs (Figure 26b). While many provincial chairs have ‘charm’, there was often a disregard for the proportions or finish of the chair. The asymmetrical spiral of a voluted arm, the exaggerated curve of a sabre-shaped leg or the dull finish of a carved surface.
decoration can be sufficient to break the harmony of the chair. The voluted arms of the *Trafalgar Chair* were clearly a challenge for the maker of chair C003 who decided to compensate by adding a crudely carved spiral motif on the top-rail. Chair C015 is a slightly better example complete with voluted arms and an out-scrolled top-rail but it is clear from the oversized hinges and the ‘hook-and-eye’ locking mechanism that this is also a provincial piece. The sample chairs selected for the field research are all good quality chairs. Based on the timber, construction and proportions of the chairs it is clear that all were made by notable firms such as Gillows or Morgan & Sanders and it would be difficult to separate the examples based on quality. Although the Mallett chair stands out as a particularly fine example, all of the chairs were made from fine cuts of Honduran or Spanish mahogany, they were skilfully and carefully manufactured and the proportions of each chair would certainly pass the Sheraton test and qualify as ‘agreeable and easy’.

### 7.1.5 Fittings

There are wide variations in the fittings used for each chair but two of the chairs show remarkable similarities in this area. Close examination of the Trinity College chair and that residing in the library at Tatton Park reveal that they have identical lever-operated latch style locking mechanisms. Although Gillows and Morgan & Sanders were both retailing in London during the Regency, most of Gillows’ furniture was manufactured in Lancaster (Stuart, 2008, p. 63, vol. I). It is therefore unlikely that the lever-operated latch would have been purchased from the same supplier. Furthermore, according to the Gillows *Sketch Book* entry in July 1815, the locking mechanism was described as a ‘spring catch’ discounting the possibility that an earlier version of the Gillows *Metamorphic Library Chair* design would have used the latch design. The evidence is so compelling that it must throw doubt onto the original assumption that the Tatton Park chair was made by Gillows. Despite the quality of the timber, the use of a crotch-cut veneer on the top-rail and the Egerton family’s patronage of Gillows, it is possible that the Tatton Park chair was supplied by Morgan & Sanders. When this evidence is combined with other similarities between the chairs, including the overall dimensions, the reeded decoration and the concave-sided pedestal designs, the possibility of both chairs originating from the same
workshop cannot be overlooked. The similarities in the lever-operated latch mechanisms are clearly shown in Figure 27a.

Figure 27a – Catches
Field Research Results

Figure 27b – Hinges and Casters
Field Research Results

Figure 27 – Field Research Results – Fittings
Source: Field Research

With the exception of the Trinity College chair, there is no evidence of replacement hinges on any of the other inspected chairs, although many of the original screws holding the hinges in place have been replaced with later machine finished versions. The hinges on the Mallett chair, each with a raised portion in the centre of the knuckle plate, could easily be a later addition (Figure 27b). Castors had been added to only two of the chairs and, from close inspection, both sets appear to be original. With reference to Chapter 3 regarding the use of castors and the safety of the chair, it is interesting to note that four of the six examples have remained castor-free for almost two hundred years. Uneven wear on two of these chairs indicate that they were seldom used as Library Steps due to the difficulty of moving them around.

At Tatton Park, a much more practical cylinder ladder is propped up against the library bookcase to gain access to the higher shelves. Fittings that were provided with the original chair provide a useful and reliable means of identification. Since most of these parts were set into the frame of the chair and the height and design integrity of the chair changes dramatically when castors are added, any later
additions or substitutions are easy to identify. If a link can be established between a cabinet-maker and a specific hinge, castor, or catch then this would certainly assist the attribution. Gillows are known to have favoured Copes castors and, although James Lewty’s castors were not patented until 1833, this may also help to narrow down the options. As a common feature, hinges would be more difficult to identify but the latches and catches used to secure the two halves of the chair together in the closed position could provide a reliable means of identification.

7.1.6 Finish

The caning on all six chairs has been replaced, as expected on chairs of this age, and none had their original cushion. Of more interest were the additional marks discovered on two of the chairs (Figure 28a).

![Figure 28a – Caning and Makers’ Marks](image1)

![Figure 28b – Condition](image2)

The chair in the Schneidman Collection carries the mark of William IV on the outer edge of a rear leg and first indications are that the mark is genuine. The initials ‘T.G’ on the top edge of the rear seat-rail on the Mallett chair are likely to be the mark of a journeyman. According to Susan Stuart (2008, p. 240, vol. II) Thomas Greenhall was apprenticed in 1830 and it is possible that the stamp bears his initials.
Makers and journeyman marks are invaluable to the task of attribution and should be included in any new attribution methodology. Most of the pieces examined are in good condition but two chairs require attention. The rear stretchers on the chairs at Tatton Park and Trinity College both need immediate repair. At Tatton Park there is evidence that the same section of the chair was repaired and strengthened during the latter half of the nineteenth century but the new damage threatens the integrity of the chair and the problem must be resolved quickly. The damage on the chair at Trinity College appears to be recent and urgent attention should prevent a more serious problem. In addition to the split frame on the Trinity College chair, it has also lost much of its patina due to sun exposure and, once again, the problem should be attended to immediately. During the restoration of the Trinity College chair a thorough examination of each surface should be undertaken to identify the previous location of the Morgan & Sanders nameplate. Two visits to Trinity College Oxford as part of the field research for the dissertation have failed to discover any trace of the nameplate or evidence that a plate has been previously attached to the chair.

7.2 The Failure of Current Attribution Methods

In today’s market antique buyers expect a comprehensive and factual description of the items on offer. A well crafted novelty chair in the Regency style may be appealing but without the historical context and information on the firm that made it, the chair is worth a fraction of its true value. For many years, collectors, antique dealers and auction houses have struggled to find information on the Metamorphic Library Chair. An internet search carried out in April, 2009 indicated that there were twenty seven Regency period Metamorphic Library Chairs for sale – most claiming to be derived from a Morgan & Sanders’ original design. Thanks to the publicity provided by Rudolph Ackermann in 1811, today’s vendors are presented with a tantalising link to the past and here are some of the misinformed results:

- Morgan & Sanders held the patent for this particular model.
- A fine example of the metamorphic chair invented by Morgan & Sanders.
- Attributed to Gillows of Lancaster, after the designs of Morgan & Sanders.
- This chair design was patented by Messrs Morgan & Sanders.
- A Regency mahogany Metamorphic Library Chair attributed to Gillows.
- A metamorphic armchair after the design patented by Morgan & Sanders.
- Morgan & Saunders held the patent for this design.
- Regency leather-lined metamorphic Library Steps in the manner of Gillows.
- Chairs converting to steps were originally developed by Morgan & Sanders.
- Metamorphic Library Chair produced and patented by Morgan & Sanders.

Some antique dealers, aware of the tenuous connection between Ackermann’s sketch and a showroom example, take care when they reference Morgan & Sanders. Others, based on a little knowledge and misinformed research, exaggerate their claims. A few have even been known to reference the Gillows Sketch Books and try to attribute a chair by claiming dimensional similarities. The result is that the majority of showroom and catalogue descriptions are inaccurate and there is an urgent need for improvement. Aware of the facts and wary of unfounded assumptions, it is still possible to provide the historical context of the chair and to suggest the most likely source of manufacture without misleading the potential buyer. With this in mind, the following section offers a simple approach to attribution and practical help with the future cataloguing of the Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair.

7.3 Attribution Criteria and the Associated Risks

Following a detailed comparison and analysis of several Regency period Metamorphic Library Chairs, it is now possible to develop a revised set of attribution criteria. While each design element has been thoroughly researched there is always room for improvement and it is hoped that future research will uncover new evidence that can be used to enhance the process. The Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair attribution guidelines are arranged in the order of importance where each attribute has been graded according to its significance in the process. Notes have been added against each stage in the evaluation to provide clarity and to increase the level of confidence in the end result. The process only applies to high-quality chairs. There are many regional and later copies in circulation and these should be quickly discounted due to the quality of construction, the crudeness of the applied decoration or evidence of machine finished components. Based on the research undertaken the following questions should be answered before attributing any Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair:
1. Does the chair carry a maker’s mark or nameplate? Gillows and Morgan & Sanders are known to have identified their Metamorphic Library Chairs in this way. Gillows would sometimes stamp their chairs ‘GILLOWS·LANCASTER’ and Morgan & Sanders would attach a brass nameplate or paper label containing their name, address and occupation e.g. ‘Inventors & Manufacturers’ to the chair.

2. Are there any other identification marks? Gillows pieces were sometimes stamped with the initials of the journeyman who made the chair. The practice was not unique to Gillows but some marks have been documented and this may provide a useful source of additional information (Stuart, 2008, pp. 94-96, vol. I).

3. Is the chair constructed of close-grained Spanish mahogany? As timber importers, Gillows had access to the best cuts of mahogany from the West Indies. Chairs made by Gillows from Spanish mahogany are unlikely to contain any reeding or other surface decoration since Gillows believed that this would detract from the beauty of the natural material.

4. Do the Library Steps follow the standard Trafalgar Chair design? If the chair does not have flat sides, sabre-shaped legs and a concave tablet top-rail then it is unlikely to have been manufactured by Morgan & Sanders. Morgan & Sanders chairs were based on a standard pattern and customer variations are thought to have been restricted to the location and extent of the applied decoration or the addition of castors. From the field research it also appears that many of their chairs are heavily reeded to most of the front edges including the arms, the legs and the front seat-rail.

5. How are the two halves of the chair fastened together in the closed position? Some Metamorphic Library Chairs rely on small location lugs and gravity to hold the two halves of the chair together. Others use a lever-operated latch or a spring catch mechanism that must be released before the steps can be deployed. Early Morgan & Sanders chairs are known to have used the lever-operated latch design whereas Gillows specified a spring catch as early as 1815 in a Library Chair Step design they employed for a chair they supplied to John Upton.
A combination of these design elements increases the accuracy of attribution. For example, if a Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* is made of Spanish mahogany, there is no applied decoration and the two halves of the chair are locked together by a spring-loaded catch then the chair is more likely to have been made by Gillows than Morgan & Sanders. If there are conflicting design attributes then this should throw doubt on the authenticity of the chair. Most Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chairs* follow the traditional *Trafalgar Chair* design with open-arms, sabre-shaped legs, a curved-over knee and concave top-rail. If a chair is made of a good quality evenly grained Honduran mahogany then the attribution process could still suggest either Gillows or Morgan & Sanders. Heavy reeding to the front elevation would favour Morgan & Sanders, but the chair could still have a spring catch. As a patent furniture manufacturer Morgan & Sanders would have had access to many new brass locks and fittings and it is highly likely that they would have changed the design of the locking mechanism during the seven or eight years of production. A spring catch was used on the Thomas Weeks example discussed in Chapter 3 and there is also a button-operated catch on the chair in the Schneidman Collection. Perhaps it was the earlier versions of the Morgan & Sanders design that used the lever-operated latch. The mechanism was probably based on the lock of an eighteenth century sash window. Despite the possibility of catch variations in the Morgan & Sanders design the process is still relevant since heavily decorated chairs are unlikely to have originated from Gillows.

### 7.4 Improved Referencing and Cataloguing

The dissertation has also uncovered several problems associated with the cataloguing of *Metamorphic Library Chairs*. While it would be impossible to standardise the terms, it would be helpful for chair descriptions to contain a minimum level of information. The following details should be included:

- **Provenance** – Maker’s marks, documentation, or known historical details that may help to trace the origins of the chair.
- **Dimensions** – Height, width and depth in the open and closed positions.
- **Design** – Photographs of the chair in the open and closed positions.
- **Decoration** – The location and extent of any applied decoration.
- Timber – An assessment of the timber used and the quality of the finish.
- Fittings – Specifically the type of locking mechanism i.e. lever-operated latch, spring catch, hook-and-eye etc.

Before any attempt is made to develop an informative and accurate template for the catalogue description it is important to review the facts. From the preceding research this is what we know about the design and development of the Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair:

- Mechanical desks and dressing tables were introduced to the French court of Louis XV from Germany during the middle of the eighteenth century.
- London cabinet-makers soon developed versions of these mechanical pieces.
- Stools and tables containing Library Steps first appeared in England in the 1760s.
- Thomas Chippendale made a ‘Library stool with a seat to rise as a step ladder’ for Nostell Priory in 1767.
- An ‘Adam Style’ version of the Nostell Priory stool was made by Chippendale for Harewood House during his collaboration with Robert Adam in 1772.
- A patent was granted to Robert Campbell for Library Steps in 1774.
- Robert Campbell’s patent expired in 1788 and was never renewed.
- Campbell’s Library Steps Table design was reproduced in Sheraton’s Drawing-Book in 1793.
- The Trafalgar style open-arm chair, with sabre-shaped legs, a curved-over knee and a concave tablet top-rail appeared in London around 1808.
- A Metamorphic Library Chair based on the Trafalgar design first appeared in Ackermann’s Repository in 1811.
- Morgan & Sanders were producing the Metamorphic Library Chair by 1811.
- Gillows quoted for Library Chair Steps of a similar design in 1815.
- Gillows made a Library Step Chair of the same pattern in November 1834.
- The Metamorphic Library Chair was the most popular Library Step design and several hundred were made between 1811 and 1840.

It would therefore be factually correct to use the following text to describe the Regency period Metamorphic Library Chair:
‘Metamorphic Library Step designs were produced in the second half of the eighteenth century. Thomas Chippendale produced a stool containing Library Steps for Nostell Priory in Yorkshire as early as 1767. In 1774 Robert Campbell patented a number of Library Step designs including a version that concealed steps under the seat of a chair. His patent expired in 1778 but the idea was revived and popularised by Thomas Sheraton in 1793 in the Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer’s Drawing-Book. In July, 1811 a Metamorphic Library Chair was featured in Rudolph Ackermann’s Repository and the novel neo-classical interpretation of Robert Campbell’s idea captured the imagination of Regency London. Cabinet-makers such as Morgan & Sanders and Gillows are known to have manufactured variations of the design and several fine examples can still be found in the libraries of England’s palaces and stately homes’. A combination of these facts, two good photographs and details of the chair’s dimensions, design characteristics, timber and fittings will provide most of the information needed for an accurate and informative description (Figure 29).

Figure 29 – Catalogue Description
Source: Dissertation Research
8. Discussion

Although a *Library Step Chair* design was patented by Robert Campbell in 1774 there is little evidence of manufacture until the second decade of the nineteenth century. In 1793, Thomas Sheraton (Sheraton, 1972, p. 186) suggested how an infringement of Campbell’s patent could be avoided but it was not until the neo-classical form was combined with the mechanical simplicity of a front-hinged design that a popular version of the chair was developed. In 1811, Rudolph Ackermann featured this new design in ‘The Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufactures, Fashions and Politics’. Referring to the device as the *Metamorphic Library Chair*, Ackermann declared that it was ‘the best and handsomest article ever yet invented’. The design became so popular that Gillows was still manufacturing a version of the chair in 1834. By this time, the *Metamorphic Library Chair* had become a fashionable feature in hundreds of libraries throughout the United Kingdom.

During the first few years of the nineteenth century, over three thousand cabinet-makers were competing for business within a few miles of London’s city centre. The Industrial Revolution was well under way and museums of curiosity exhibiting mechanical automata were a popular attraction in the capital. Aristocratic families and the new ‘champions of industry’, fresh from their grand tours, were keen to share their ideas and eager for change. Entrepreneurial cabinet-makers such as Morgan & Sanders seized the opportunity and started to manufacture novel, space-saving, multi-purpose furniture. Competition was fierce and new designs were frequently copied by rival firms. Some protected their ideas with patents and a small group of patent furniture manufacturers assembled around Catherine Street and the Strand. To these cabinet-makers mechanical and metamorphic furniture production came naturally. They were familiar with the mix of engineering and cabinet-making skills necessary to succeed having worked on knock-down furniture for the military campaigns and grand tours of the eighteenth century. For the larger, traditional firms mechanical furniture had been treated as a sideline and represented only a small fraction of their total output. To avoid disrupting the flow of their busy workshops Gillows, in common with their peers, relied on journeymen to master the mechanics and meet the market demand. Domestic versions of the campaign pieces became hugely popular and within a few years two distinct markets had been created.
In parallel with the growing popularity of mechanical furniture the neo-classical designs developed by Hope, Sheraton and Smith were being embraced by Palladian architects and their upholders. Fashion writers such as Ackermann were promoting interior design based on the emerging English Empire Style. A desire for functional furniture in the neo-classical style resulted in several new interpretations of earlier patented designs. Some of the designs were poorly conceived and failed to deliver the promised functionality but an elegant adaptation of the Library Step Chair offered a compelling blend of comfort and practicality. The design had been based on an open-armed version of the Trafalgar Chair, a familiar and popular pattern which Thomas Shearer had illustrated in a supplement to the ‘London Chair-Makers’ and Carvers’ Book of Prices for Workmanship’, in 1808. The Metamorphic Library Chair design became a ‘best seller’ and several hundred were made during the Regency.

Although several sources have credited Morgan & Sanders with the design of the Metamorphic Library Chair there is no evidence that they were the first firm to manufacture a chair of this type. There is however, documentary and physical evidence linking Morgan & Sanders and Gillows to design variations of the chair and it is this evidence that has formed the basis of the dissertation. Comparisons between the Metamorphic Library Chairs made by Morgan & Sanders and those made by Gillows have revealed a number of differences in design and construction. The differences include: the quality of the timber, the use of applied decoration and the type of catch employed to hold the two halves of the chair together in the closed position. Based on an analysis of the data collected it is highly likely that the Regency period Metamorphic Library Chairs made by Gillows were made of close-grained Spanish mahogany and that they were comparatively plain. Gillows chairs also made use of a spring catch to secure the upper half of the chair to the sub-structure of the library steps. In contrast, Morgan & Sanders’ chairs were made of Honduran mahogany, surfaces were heavily reeded, and early versions of the chair used a lever-operated latch mechanism to lock the two halves of the chairs together.

The research also suggests that other cabinet-makers produced variations of the same design. Thirty six patent and campaign furniture manufacturers are known to have been operating in London between 1810 and 1820 and, since Robert Campbell’s patent had expired in 1788, it is unlikely that Morgan & Sanders and
Gillows were the only manufacturers. Charles Wild’s painting of the Queen’s Library at Frogmore House dated 1817 shows a *Metamorphic Library Chair* in the foreground (Figure 30a). The chair follows the French bergère design. It has an upholstered back and sides with an elaborately carved and exposed wooden frame.

Frogmore House was built by James Wyatt for Queen Charlotte, the wife of George III, in 1808. The chair is no longer in the Royal Collection but Wyatt’s relationship with Gillows could suggest that the chair was supplied by the Lancaster firm. There are significant similarities between the chair at Frogmore House and that recently retailed by Mallett Antiques. Both chairs have over-scrolled backs and a contoured, taper-reeded frame. A *Metamorphic Library Chair* of the same design was attributed to William Trotter by Sotheby’s in 2002. Trotter was an eminent cabinet-maker in Scotland during the Regency and, according to Sotheby’s, he made chairs of a similar design for Paxton Hall in Berwickshire around 1814. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, George Seddon was employing over four hundred apprentices from his workshops in Aldersgate Street (Von La Roche, 1933, p. 175). Following the death of Seddon in 1801, the firm hit financial difficulties and most of the stock was sold at auction. An article in the Times during April 1804 (Anon, 1804) gave
highlights of the forthcoming sale which was to include: ‘patent library tables and chairs’. As Sophie Von La Roche had observed during her visit to Seddon’s in 1786, some of Seddon’s departments contained ‘nothing but chairs, sofas and stools of every description, some quite simple, others exquisitely carved’. It appears from the auction records and Von La Roche’s account that the firm of Seddon, Sons & Shackleton could also have been manufacturing an earlier version of the Library Step Chair. There was certainly no shortage of demand. Figure 31 shows a portrait of John Foster, a business acquaintance of Charles Dickens ca. 1850. Foster is sat on a Metamorphic Library Chair in a modest library indicating that the chair appealed to the middle-classes as well as the aristocracy and wealthy merchants. Elizabeth Burton (1967, p. 113) makes a similar point when she comments, ‘Every great house had to have a library’ and ‘middling houses often had them too’.

Figure 31 – John Foster by E.M. Ward ca. 1850

While cabinet-makers in London perfected the Metamorphic Library Chair design, small workshops and individual craftsmen outside of the capital also kept watch on new furniture developments. Ackermann’s publications together with first-hand accounts of the London fashion scene kept rural communities well informed of the latest trends. Regional copies of the Metamorphic Library Chair would have
appeared within a few years of the original designs. At least three examples were encountered while undertaking the field research for the dissertation. The first is located in the library at The Travellers Club in London\textsuperscript{75}. The chair was apparently a favourite of the Queen Mother (Figure 32a).

The assumption that this is a regional chair is based on the quality of construction and the crudeness of the carvings on the front seat-rail and the top-rail. But, according to Mary Ann Hunting Massie (1990, p. 27) in her MA dissertation entitled, ‘The Furnishings of the Reform Club Interiors’, Stephen Taprell and William Holland had enjoyed a monopoly of supply to establishments such as The Travellers Club and there is always the possibility that the chair was made by Taprell & Holland. It is interesting to note that the chair utilises a lever-operated latch mechanism similar to that used by Morgan & Sanders. The stylised tulip motif could be a reference to the club member that donated the \textit{Metamorphic Library Chair} to The Travellers Club\textsuperscript{76}. Two regional \textit{Metamorphic Library Chairs} were also discovered alongside the Morgan & Sanders example in the Old Library at Trinity College Oxford (Figure 32b). The first has straight reeded arms, sabre-shaped legs, a plain front seat-rail and a hand-carved tablet top-rail. The second, which is a better quality chair, is of a more
‘traditional’ design, complete with voluted arms and an over-scrolled top-rail. Whatever the source of these chairs, the proportions are less precise than the Morgan & Sanders example and the construction is somewhat inferior to the sample group. They are, nevertheless, charming examples of chairs made by firms other than Morgan & Sanders or Gillows during the early nineteenth century.

At Kiplin Hall in Yorkshire there is another fascinating chair (Figure 33a). The chair carries a small silver plaque bearing the inscription, ‘LORD NELSON’S CHAIR ON BOARD THE VICTORY’ (Figure 33b).

![Figure 33a – Nelson’s Chair](Kiplin Hall)

![Figure 33b – Nelson’s Chair Detail](Kiplin Hall)

Figure 33 – Lord Nelson’s Chair
Source: Kiplin Hall

It is claimed that the chair was presented to Kiplin Hall by Alexander Scott, Lord Nelson’s personal chaplain during the nineteenth century. It was Scott who held Nelson in his arms as the Admiral died on board the flagship HMS Victory on October 21, 1805. It would be natural to assume that this is a Morgan & Sanders chair since they provided several pieces of furniture for Merton Place and for Nelson’s cabin on board HMS Victory. Dual-purpose and knock-down furniture was ideally suited for life on board a naval warship at the time. The Admiral’s cabin furniture would have been quickly moved out of the way to make room for the guns.
and carronade as the flagship turned broadside to engage the enemy (Tomlinson, 2009). But the claim that a *Metamorphic Library Chair* was used on board HMS Victory may be flawed. Nelson was five feet six inches tall, exactly the same as the beam height of his cabin, and *Library Steps* would therefore have been unnecessary (Goodwin, 2009). Even so, this is a good ‘honest’ chair of the period, with a strong verbal provenance and initial research has failed to prove or disprove the claim.

It is clear from the few examples provided that Morgan & Sanders and Gillows are unlikely to have been the only manufacturers of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair*. In addition to the London-based firms such as Seddon and Taprell & Holland there were several hundred equally competent chair and cabinet-makers in the city and many would have had the skills necessary to add library steps to the *Trafalgar Chair* design. In addition to the cabinet-makers of London, top-end makers such as Trotter in Edinburgh as well as Gillows in Lancaster and others, would also have been asked by their clients to make versions of the chair. Nevertheless, there appears to be no dominant style other than that employed by Morgan & Sanders and there is little doubt that they were responsible for a large proportion of the *Metamorphic Library Chairs* being manufactured and sold at the time.

The *Metamorphic Library Chair* was only one example of the mechanical furniture phenomena that was sweeping through the furniture trade at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It seemed as though everything needed to serve a purpose and the more purposes it served the more desirable it became. Beds including chair-beds, sofa-beds and beds contained in bureaus had been around since the middle of the eighteenth century and they remained a reliable source of income for most patent furniture manufacturers. Despite the problems of bed bugs, it seemed as though the capacity to unfold a mattress from a cupboard or wardrobe more than justified the infestation. Viscount Linley in his book entitled ‘Extraordinary Furniture’ describes a commode-bed that was made by the Swedish cabinet-maker, Georg Haupt for Gustavus III around 1780 (Linley, 1996, p. 125). Even Campbell (1774), in his patent application, recognised the wider potential for his invention and the specification covered *Library Steps* in stools, tables, desks and chairs. The metamorphic design limitations seemed endless and furniture manufacturers certainly pushed the boundaries. As the demand for novelty furniture increased,
writing desks appeared in fire screens, games tables could be transformed into sewing tables and dining tables disguised as sideboards could be quickly reconfigured to seat between fifty and one hundred guests\textsuperscript{79}. Mechanical furniture for the home, such as cupboard-beds and Library Steps (Figure 34a), were generally manufactured by established family firms such as Gillow and Seddon whereas the campaign beds, desks and chairs, popular for touring and military expeditions, were mainly supplied by patent furniture specialists such as Thomas Butler, William Pocock and Morgan & Sanders (Figure 34b). Nevertheless, there were no strict rules and cabinet-makers often worked in both of these markets.

Figure 34 – Metamorphic and Knock-Down Furniture
Sources: National Trust (17774, 76081), Christopher Clarke and Nicholas Brawer

The component parts and skills needed to produce a Metamorphic Library Chair could readily be applied to a portable desk or washstand and it is easy to see how patent furniture manufacturers were tempted to move upmarket as the domestic demand for novelty furniture developed. But furniture for the home needed to be both functional and fashionable and the quality of the finished goods, especially in the library, had to meet the exacting needs of the gentleman and his upholsterer. Few patent furniture manufacturers made the transition but Morgan & Sanders, keen to benefit from the opportunity and to outmanoeuvre their rival Thomas Butler, were
determined to succeed. A continuous stream of new, innovative products fuelled by third-party manufacturing licenses and supported by aggressive advertising campaigns helped Morgan & Sanders to build an impressive client base. The quality of their work exceeded that of the other firms around Catherine Street and the Strand and, by 1811, when the *Metamorphic Library Chair* was featured in Ackermann’s *Repository* they had already started to challenge the position of established firms in many of the Royal residences and stately homes.

Regency London welcomed the novel ways in which Morgan & Sanders combined neo-classical elegance with mechanical gadgetry. Globe writing tables, circular bookcases and metamorphic sideboards all appeared in 1810 and, by 1811 the *Metamorphic Library Chair* had made its debut. While Thomas Weeks claimed that it was his invention and sold a branded version of the *Metamorphic Library Chair* from his mechanical museum in Tichborne Street, Morgan & Sanders were probably busy planning their next product launch. Gradually, Morgan & Sanders’ mechanical tables, desks and chairs started to appear in the homes of the wealthy. Similarities between the chairs at Trinity College Oxford and Tatton Park suggest that Wilbraham Egerton could have purchased a Morgan & Sanders *Metamorphic Library Chair* for his library in Cheshire. Gillows had already provided the bookcases, tables and other chairs in the same room and over one hundred other pieces to the Egerton family. A *Metamorphic Library Chair* bearing a William IV inventory mark in The Schneidman Collection, and two similar chairs in the Royal Collection, are adaptations of the Morgan & Sanders design. It is clear that Morgan & Sanders were successfully carving out a new market based on innovation and design and given their rate of growth it was only natural for Gillows and others to offer an alternative solution. In the words of, Charles Caleb Colton ‘imitation is the sincerest form of flattery’, and by 1815 Gillows had made their own version of the *Metamorphic Library Chair*.

From the evidence collected it appears that there were two distinct groups of cabinet-makers at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Around Catherine Street and the Strand were the fast-moving entrepreneurs with roots in the competitive, product-oriented campaign furniture market. These, young, fashion-conscious businesses co-existed with well-established firms such as Chippendale, Gillow and Seddon. The older firms, while willing to manufacture *Library Steps* for their clients,
probably viewed the arrival of the *Metamorphic Library Chair* with suspicion. But Morgan & Sanders, with aspirations to move up-market, advertised heavily and thought nothing of renaming their premises\textsuperscript{80} and their products to take advantage of a fleeting association with Lord Nelson and public sympathy surrounding the death of William Pitt the Younger. With one hundred mechanics, Morgan & Sanders were able to deliver significant volumes of furniture and there is every justification to believe that they were responsible for a large proportion of the *Metamorphic Library Chairs* made at this time. But it is equally justifiable to assume that others copied and adapted the designs to take advantage of a buoyant market. While we only have evidence for the output of Morgan & Sanders and Gillows it is inevitable that *Metamorphic Library Chairs* made by others firms will surface over time. Those most likely to have manufactured versions of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* include: George Seddon, Ince & Mayhew and Marsh & Tatham\textsuperscript{81}. In the meantime, given the scarcity of marked examples and the striking similarities between many of the *Metamorphic Library Chairs* being manufactured, there can be no foolproof attribution process. Nevertheless, the dissertation can still provide a reliable source of factual information, improve the quality of attribution and dispel a few myths. First the facts:

- Although Robert Campbell patented the *Library Step Chair* in 1774, Thomas Chippendale made a stool-based variation for Nostell Priory in Yorkshire seven years earlier in 1767 and he used a similar design when he collaborated with Robert Adam at Harewood House in 1772. The French immigrant cabinet-makers, John Meschain and François Hervé, were also known to be making *Library Step Tables around* this time.

- The *Trafalgar Chair* design evolved between 1802 and 1808 significantly influenced by the work of Charles Percier and Pierre Fontaine in France and early nineteenth century London based designers such as Thomas Sheraton, Thomas Hope, Thomas Shearer and George Smith.

- The first documented account of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* appears in the July 1811 edition of Rudolph Ackermann’s *Repository* under the heading of ‘Fashionable Furniture’ where it was described as a ‘truly novel and useful article’.
Morgan & Sanders and Gillows are the only two Regency period cabinet-makers who are known to have manufactured the *Metamorphic Library Chair* but there is evidence that other firms were making versions of the chair at the same time.

In addition and based on the results of the research it would also be reasonable to assume the following:

- An even earlier version of the *Library Step Chair* may have been conceived by Jean-François Oeben for Madame de Pompadour during the 1750s (Linley, 1996, p. 121) and the origins of the idea probably date back to the seventeenth century.

- Specific elements of the *Trafalgar Chair* design, such as the flat-sided single-piece construction of the rear legs and uprights, are likely to have originated in London (Payne, 1989, p. 96). This was probably in response to the increase in demand and the need to improve productivity. The exaggerated volutes of the arms are also likely to have first appeared in London based on the illustrations of George Smith.

- Although Ackermann acknowledged Morgan & Sanders as the maker of the chair in July 1811, there was no suggestion that they originated the design. Since Ackermann was keen to celebrate the innovative achievements of Morgan & Sanders, it can be assumed that the *Metamorphic Library Chair* design was developed elsewhere. It is interesting to note Thomas Weeks’ claim to have invented the chair and the evidence of a marked catch offered by Norman Adams (Claxton Stevens & Whittington, 1999, p. 459).

- The Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* was made by firms other than Morgan & Sanders or Gillows. A chair that is almost identical to the Mallett example was attributed by Sotheby’s in 2002 to William Trotter and there is no reason to question their assessment. Based on the evidence collected it would be reasonable to assume that *Metamorphic Library Chairs* were being manufactured by several cabinet-makers in London, a small number of regional firms and many others in the provinces during the second decade of the nineteenth century.

Since this is the first detailed analysis of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* the research has also exposed a few myths:
- Morgan & Sanders did not hold a patent for the *Metamorphic Library Chair*. Campbell's earlier patent of 1774 expired in 1788 and it was never renewed. Morgan & Sanders made several of their products under license but they failed to register a single patent under their own names.

- Sheraton was not the first person to illustrate the *Trafalgar Chair*. His designs for ‘Nelson Chairs’ illustrated in the *Encyclopaedia* bore little resemblance to the the sabre-legged, flat-sided form. Plates 2, 5 and 29 in the ‘London Chair-Makers’ and Carvers’ Book of Prices, for Workmanship’ for 1808 clearly illustrate the *Trafalgar Chair* design complete with reeding, tablet top-rail and curved-over knee. Given that Thomas Shearer provided most of the illustrations for this publication it would be more appropriate to credit him with the design.

- There is no proof that Morgan & Sanders developed the *Metamorphic Library Chair* design despite the claims of several well-respected sources. A number of prominently published observations and suggestions of authenticity should now be re-examined.

- Claims that the size or style of a *Metamorphic Library Chair* provides evidence of authenticity are unfounded. The major dimensions and proportions of the chair were based on guidelines first published during the second half of the eighteenth century and these were consistently applied.

Given all of the evidence, the recommended attribution approach has been based on the timber used, the applied decoration and the design of the catch that locks the two halves of the chair together. These attributes relate to the original construction of the *Metamorphic Library Chair* and are therefore unlikely to have been affected by subsequent repair or restoration. Design and manufacturing variations between the firms appear to be insignificant and largely unintentional. From the sample chairs examined it is clear that many of the differences could be the result of customer preferences, changes in the source of component supplies or the individuality of the journeyman cabinet-maker. Useful pointers such as the quality of the timber, the use of applied decoration and the type of catch will certainly help in the attribution process but the antiques trade will continue to rely heavily on the experienced eye of a well established dealer or collector for the final word.
9. Conclusions

Despite the appeal of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair*, there is limited information available on the development of the design or the firms that made them. Most contemporary design references are based on two outline sketches. The first, by Rudolph Ackermann in 1811, illustrates a Morgan & Sanders chair and the second shows a chair made by Gillows in 1834. The lack of detail in these sketches and the scarcity of research relating to mechanical furniture design of this period, have led to many inaccurate claims. The objective of the dissertation was to separate the facts from the assumptions by comparing the chairs of Morgan & Sanders against those of Gillows. The results could then be used to improve the attribution and cataloguing of *Metamorphic Library Chairs* being handled by the trade. From the documented, physical and circumstantial evidence collected it has been possible to draw the following conclusions:

1. Nineteenth century sketches of the *Metamorphic Library Chairs* made by Morgan & Sanders and Gillows suggest a number of design differences but the evidence is unreliable and attribution will continue to be difficult.

2. Although the differences between Morgan & Sanders and Gillows *Metamorphic Library Chairs* remain elusive, there are some design and manufacturing characteristics that can be used to improve attribution and cataloguing.

3. Frequently referenced sources relating to the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* appear to be inaccurate and the material must now be verified and modified where necessary to prevent further misleading claims.

The following information is presented to support these conclusions:

1. The dissertation has exposed several problems relating to the identification of unique design and manufacturing features that are specific to Morgan & Sanders or Gillows *Metamorphic Library Chairs*. Despite the claims of some antique dealers and auction houses, the nineteenth century sketches and descriptions provided by Ackermann and Gillows provide insufficient detail for reliable attribution. The similarities between the designs of each maker are such that
references to the proportions or decorative features of a chair cannot be used to support claims of authenticity. These issues are compounded by the lack of marked examples and widespread plagiarism even at the highest end of the furniture trade during the Regency period. The removal of some Gillows marks by retailers following the merger of Waring and Gillow in 1897 has also added to the problem. It is clear from a physical examination of twelve chairs, including those previously attributed to Morgan & Sanders and Gillows, that there are few, if any, features that are specific to these makers and that attribution will continue to be difficult. Nevertheless, variations of construction within the sample, does demonstrate that the chair design was used by other cabinet-makers and, while Morgan & Sanders and Gillows chairs may be difficult to identify at the present time, a similar investigation on a much larger sample may yield different results.

2. While it will continue to be difficult to differentiate Morgan & Sanders and Gillows Regency period Metamorphic Library Chairs, there are three design and manufacturing characteristics that should be taken into account when appraising a chair. The attributes are: the quality of the timber, the application of surface decoration and the design of the catch.

**Timber** – The dissertation has identified several contemporary references to the quality of the timber selected by Gillows and, in view of the company’s role as a primary importer of mahogany during the nineteenth century, it is likely that the best timber would have been reserved for their own workshops. In addition, Gillows’ reputation for the robustness of construction and possible concerns over the load-bearing capabilities of a Metamorphic Library Chair would probably have encouraged them to use a strong, close-grained Spanish mahogany.

**Decoration** – A previously marked example of a Morgan & Sanders chair, currently located in the Old Library at Trinity College Oxford, has reeded arms and legs and a reeded front-rail. These decorative features are somewhat consistent with Ackermann’s 1811 sketch. In contrast, Gillows are known to have shunned excessive reeding and paterae in favour of unadorned surfaces that featured the natural wood grain. A marked example and two Sketch Book entries help to confirm Gillow’s preference for a plain Metamorphic Library Chair design.
Fittings – The makers of Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chairs* used different locking mechanism to secure the two halves the chair together in the closed position. During the eight years that Morgan & Sanders manufactured the chair, it is likely that they used a lever-operated latch design. As a campaign furniture manufacturer this is surprising since they had access to the very latest locks and catches and perhaps they considered a small spring catch unsuitable for such a heavy chair. In contrast, the Gillows *Sketch Book* entry for July 1815 specified a ‘spring catch’ and it appears that the same device was used nineteen years later when R. Lowthian was asked to make a chair for Ferguson & Co.

![Figure 35 – Metamorphic Library Chair Attribution](source: Desk and Field Research)

3. Based on previously documented evidence the *Metamorphic Library Chairs* at Tatton Park and Trinity College Oxford were assumed to have been manufactured by Gillows and Morgan & Sanders respectively. Nevertheless, similarities between the chairs including: all of the major dimensions, the applied decoration and the type of locking mechanisms suggest that they could have been made by the same firm. It is unlikely that Morgan & Sanders based their design on a Gillows chair. Gillows designs were jealously guarded as Lindsay Boynton points out in the introduction to his book entitled ‘Gillow Furniture Designs 1760-1800’ (Boynton, 1995, p. 22). Since Morgan & Sanders were located almost two hundred miles from Cheshire, it is also unlikely that they had
physical access to the chair at Tatton Park. During a recent meeting with Stephen Sartin of the Judges Lodgings he pointed out that Gillows were a regular subscriber to The Repository and the similarities between the illustrations in Ackermann’s 1811 publication and Gillows 1834 Sketch Book could be more than a coincidence (Sartin, 2009).

Figure 36 – Metamorphic Library Chair Illustrations
Sources: British Library (c.119.f.1) and Westminster City Archives (344/102)

Gillows specified a spring catch in 1815 and appear to have used the same mechanism in 1834. It is therefore unlikely that they sourced a lever-operated latch that was identical to the Morgan & Sanders design for the Tatton Park chair. Although it is improbable that Gillows would create an exact replica of a rival’s chair the possibility cannot be totally ruled out. Further investigations, including a thorough examination of the Tatton Park accounts, will be necessary before the previous Gillows attribution can be questioned but it looks increasingly likely that Morgan & Sanders managed to displace Gillows as the exclusive supplier to the Tatton Park library during the nineteenth century. The Curator at Tatton Park has been notified and the website has been temporarily modified pending the results of the investigation (Tatton, 2009).
Evidence has also been discovered that questions the accuracy of published information relating to the Morgan & Sanders chair at Trinity College Oxford. An attribution by G. Bernard Hughes (1967, p. 453) based on a Morgan & Sanders nameplate must be re-examined following a forensic inspection of the chair. The chair no longer carries the maker’s mark and while the design features of the chair are consistent with those expected of Morgan & Sanders, Hughes’ discovery of a nameplate describing the firm as ‘carpenters and manufacturers’ throws doubt on the original attribution. Hughes’ research is frequently referenced by dealers and auction houses and has also been quoted in other published works on the subject. The results of continuing investigations at Tatton Park will also help to clarify the identity of the Trinity College chair and new evidence will be made generally available to improve the quality of the research available.

In addition it has also been possible to conclude that:

1. The Library Chair was patented by Robert Campbell in 1774, thirty seven years before the Regency, but there is no evidence that a dual-purpose chair became popular until the second decade of the nineteenth century.

   Patents registered during the eighteenth century expired after a period of fourteen years but Campbell, who was still trading in Marylebone Street during 1788, failed to extend the patent. Few chairs were made to Campbell’s original specifications and it was not until the Trafalgar Chair based version appeared in 1811 that the design became popular. The Regency period interpretation was made for over twenty years; the majority during the second decade of the nineteenth century. Based on an extrapolation of the number of chairs passing through the trade and those recorded in known collections, it is estimated that there are four hundred Regency period Metamorphic Library Chairs in circulation.

2. While other cabinet-makers produced Metamorphic Library Chairs during the nineteenth century, Morgan & Sanders and Gillows are the only firms that left documentary evidence relating to their designs.

   Ackermann’s illustrations of a Morgan & Sanders chair in 1811 and Gillows’ Sketch Book entries during 1815 and 1834 provide the only evidence that links
the *Metamorphic Library Chair* designs to the firms that made them. A painting by Charles Wild showing the interior of the Queen's library at Frogmore House in 1817 shows a more elaborate, scrolled-back version of the chair but research has failed to positively identify the maker\(^{34}\). Despite compelling evidence that other London based and provincial firms made the *Metamorphic Library Chair* it has not been possible to establish the identities of any other maker. Therefore, while it is extremely likely that other variations of the chair were being manufactured during the Regency, the Morgan & Sanders and Gillows materials are the only reliable contemporary design references available.

Despite a thorough examination of the available reference materials, numerous conversations with Georgian furniture experts and the physical inspection of several Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chairs*, it has not been possible to identify any categorical differences between the designs of Morgan & Sanders and those of Gillows. It is clear from the research that both firms adopted the *Trafalgar Chair* design, that the design could be modified to meet customer requirements and that they both delivered a quality product. While variations in the quality of timber, the applied decoration and the catch design could have been unique to a particular firm, it is also possible that these differences reflected the individual needs of the customer, the availability of fittings or the preferences of the journeyman chair-maker. Nevertheless, the dissertation represents the first full review of the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chair* and the outcome offers attribution advice that should be of value to collectors and the antiques trade.

By the 1820s Morgan & Sanders had ceased trading, the *Trafalgar Chair* had disappeared from the pages of *The Repository* and Augustus Pugin was designing Gothic style furniture for Windsor Castle. But the fascination for metamorphic furniture survived. J. Stokes (1838) wrote, ‘In a business where change and caprice rule with unbound sway, in which the fashions of today may become obsolete tomorrow, an inventive genius and discriminating judgment are certainly essential qualifications.’ Whether Charles Hess, the inventor of the piano-bedstead in 1866 was blessed with genius or judgment is for the reader to decide, but the sofa-bed has been popular for over two hundred and fifty years and few Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chairs* remain unsold at auction.
10. Appendices

The following documents are included to supplement the observations within the main body of the dissertation and to provide a source of reference for future related research. The Appendices include:

10.1 References – A list containing details of the source material referenced directly or indirectly in the dissertation; sorted alphabetically by author.

10.2 Bibliography – A list of all sources consulted during the preparation of the dissertation including books: articles, conference proceedings, websites, interviews and other academic works; sorted alphabetically by author.

10.3 Glossary – A short glossary of terms and definitions specific to mechanical furniture and the Metamorphic Library Chair.

10.4 Notes – Additional information and data that supplements the text but is tangential to the main topic.

10.5 Metamorphic Library Chairs – A table containing details of the Metamorphic Library Chairs considered for field research. Six chairs were selected from this list including the marked chairs. Further details can be provided if required.

10.6 Furniture Design Publications – A chronologically organised list of the furniture design books published between 1754 and 1835. Many of these were published in instalments across several editions.

10.7 Patent Furniture Manufacturers – An alphabetically sorted list of the Patent Furniture manufacturers who were operating in London at the time when mechanical and metamorphic furniture was in demand.

10.8 Field Research Results – A table containing the observations made during the field studies of the chairs in the comparative group. Information for each chair was collected against a predefined list of key attributes. These attributes were chosen to reveal differences between the Metamorphic Library Chairs in the sample. Results of the comparisons are included in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.
10.1 References


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Von La Roche, Sophie, (1933). *Sophie in London, 1786: being the diary of Sophie v. La Roche*. Translated from German by Clare Williams. London: Jonathan Cape.


10.3 Glossary

Many of the cabinet-making and chair-making terms used in the dissertation can be found in Sheraton’s Dictionary published in 1803. Nevertheless, there are a small number of words, specific to the Regency Metamorphic Library Chair that may require further explanation and these are given below to avoid ambiguity:

**Baywood** – A wide-grained, soft mahogany that originated from the Bay of Honduras. Often used for hidden surfaces such as the library steps.

**Curved-over Knee** – The term given to the rounded tops of the front legs of a chair. The curved shape of the knee is usually extended across the length of the front-rail.

**Dual or Multi-purpose** – Used in connection with a piece of furniture that serves more than one purpose e.g. a night table where a small bedside cabinet conceals a chamber pot.

**Flame Veneer** – A veneer of finely figured timber taken from near the root of the tree or the junction of a branch.

**Fluting** – A series of parallel concave channels carved into the surface to represent the vertical patterns used on ancient Greek columns. During the last ten years of the eighteenth century reeding became more popular than fluting.

**Journeyman** – A chair or cabinet-maker that had served a full apprenticeship and was qualified to manufacture an item without supervision. Most journeymen were self-employed and they were paid a fee for each item they manufactured. According to Pat Kirkham, less than one percent of furniture making masters and apprentices were women during the eighteenth century (Kirkham, 1988, p. 4). Nevertheless terms such as journeymen, craftsmen etc. are assumed to include female members of the trade.

**Klismos** – A style of chair used in ancient Greece from the fifth century BCE. The concave back and sabre-shaped legs allowed a more natural posture.

**Knock-down** – The term applied to furniture that can be disassembled and packed into a box for ease of transportation. Typically, the legs of chairs and tables could be unscrewed. The principle is similar to the flat-pack furniture of today.
**Metamorphic** – Used to describe a piece of furniture where the same structure can be reused in an alternative form e.g. the *Library Step Chair* where the seat of the chair is also used as one of the steps or a chair table where the back of the chair is reconfigured to provide the top of the table. A metamorphic piece is, by definition, a dual or multi-purpose item.

**Over-scrolled** – The name used to describe the outward scrolling of a chair arm or the upper edge of a top-rail to imitate the shape of ancient Greek couches.

**Patent Furniture** – The word ‘patent’ was used to represent mechanically assisted knock-down and multi-purpose furniture during the early nineteenth century regardless of any formal patent protection. A ‘patent’ bedstead or chair would arouse considerably more interest than a run-of-the-mill alternative and the term was often used as a marketing ploy.

**Patera or Paterae (plural)** – An applied circular or oval decorative feature representing a shallow Greek dish used for drinking wine. Many paterae designs were discovered during the early excavations of Pompeii. Paterae with a floral design are often referred to as rosettes.

**Rails** – The frame sections of a chair including: front-rail, side-rail and top-rail. The top-rail is sometimes referred to as the crest-rail or yoke.

**Reeding** – A surface pattern often applied to the edges of Regency period furniture to represent a tight bundle of reeds or canes.

**Sabre-legs** – The term used during the early nineteenth century to describe the concave curve of the Regency Style chair legs.

**Tablet Top-rail** – A rectangular chair rail used to support the back. These chairs were often referred to as having a ‘tablet top’ during the Regency.

**Upright** – The vertical members of the chair that provide support for the backrest and top-rail. The uprights of the *Trafalgar Chair* were an extension of the rear legs.

**Voluted arms** – The spiral-shaped arms of a chair based on the ancient Greek capitals of the ionic, Corinthian and Composite orders.
10.4 Notes

1 Examples of the collaboration between Robert Adam and Thomas Chippendale can be found at Nostell Priory and Harewood House in Yorkshire.

2 Opinion is divided but most furniture historians now agree that Thomas Sheraton was not a practicing cabinet-maker. In the Drawing-Book, Sheraton often references other makers but there are no examples of his own manufacture. In The Dictionary under the heading of ‘Carver’, Sheraton mentions that he was trained in the ‘ingenious art’ of carving and was ‘employed in the country occasionally’ in this capacity but there is no record of his workshop and nothing has ever been attributed to him. He died penniless in 1806.

3 Napoleon had declared himself Emperor in 1804 and the neo-classical design, of Napoleon’s ascendance, was soon to be referred to as the ‘Empire Style’.

4 The ‘Journal des Dames et des Modes’ was the most influential women’s fashion magazine in Paris between 1797 and 1839. This journal under the management of Pierre de La Mésangère contained regular features illustrating the latest furniture designs based on the work of Charles Percier & Pierre Fontaine and others.

5 The ‘exaggerated’ voluted arms that appear during the first few years of the nineteenth century are thought to be an English invention. The first examples appear on a chair made for Carlton House in 1805 (Musgrave, 1961, p. 95).

6 Although there is no evidence to suggest that ‘The London Tradesman’ was written by the same Robert Campbell that patented the Library Steps in 1774, there is a distinct possibility. ‘The London Tradesman’ was compiled by Campbell to provide ‘Advice to Parents in what manner to discover and improve the Natural Genius of their children, before they put them out Apprentices to any particular Trade, Mystery or Profession’ and he appears to have an excellent understanding of cabinet-making and the furniture trade.

7 Carlton House was on the south side of Pall Mall where Carlton House Terrace now stands. When the building was demolished in 1827, most of the furniture and paintings were moved to Buckingham Palace and many of the doors in the house were re-used at Windsor. The portico of Carlton House was donated to the National Gallery. A manuscript inventory of the contents of Carlton House drawn up in 1826 is preserved at Windsor Castle.
One of these cabinet-makers, Nicholas Morel, was later appointed ‘Upholsterer in Ordinary’ by George IV to furnish his personal apartments at Windsor Castle. Robert Campbell, who patented Library Steps, also worked for Henry Holland at Carlton House (Heal, 1988, p. 33).

Of the three hundred and nine subscribers to the 1754 edition of Thomas Chippendale’s Director, almost fifty percent were cabinet-makers, joiners, carvers or otherwise connected to the furniture trade. Notable sponsors include: Richard Gillow, William Ince and George Seddon. It is interesting to note that none of the patent furniture manufacturers are listed.

Napoleonic emblems adopted from the Roman and Egyptian empires included: laurel wreaths and eagles, hieroglyphics, pyramids and winged disks. The emblem of the bee symbolised immortality and resurrection and was derived from the motifs of ancient Gaul used during the fifth century.

Duchess Street had originally been designed by Robert Adam but the architect in charge of the renovation was Charles Heathcote Tatham. Tatham had previously been employed by Henry Holland to document the results of excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii. Thomas Hope referenced many of Tatham’s engravings for his subsequent furniture designs.

The term ‘English Empire Style’ was used in London to describe the more restrained, anglicised versions of the French-inspired designs. The term ‘Regency Style’ was introduced by Frances Collard during the twentieth century.

At this time the term ‘antique’ was primarily used with reference to an object having the characteristics of ancient Greece or Rome.

David Roentgen was born in Neuwied, Germany in 1743. He was appointed ébéniste mechanicien (master cabinet-maker) to Marie Antoinette during the 1780s.

Several marked ‘Meschain & Hervé’ Library Step Tables have been identified and photographs of two examples can be found in the ‘Pictorial Dictionary of Marked London Furniture 1700-1840’ by Christopher Gilbert (1996, p. 329-331).

Thomas Sheraton (1970, p.124) suggests that camp bedsteads ‘may be considered for domestic use ... either for servants or children to sleep upon’.

Rudolph Ackermann used home workers to hand-colour the printed sheets and the work was often done by children in poorly lit rooms.
This style of chair was often referred to as the *Trafalgar Chair* during the second decade of the nineteenth century. Morgan & Sanders had furnished Lord Nelson's cabin on HMS Victory and they renamed their ware-room ‘Trafalgar House’ in 1809. Some furniture historians believe that there is a direct link between the name of the chair and the Morgan & Sanders ware-room, crediting them with the design. It is also tempting to speculate that the design was a favourite of Lord Nelson. The sabre-shaped legs could have provided extra on-board stability and the nautical motifs such as rope-twist carvings were certainly added to the chair at this time but there is no direct evidence of a Morgan & Sanders connection.

The London Chair Maker’s and Carver’s Book of Prices for Workmanship was an annual publication commissioned and distributed by the ‘Committee of Master Chair-Manufacturers and Journeymen’. It was a trade catalogue offering recommended prices for labour and materials.

Jane Austen published *Sense and Sensibility* in 1811.

The Sophie Von La Roche reference to Lüttich is simply the German name for the city of Liege in Belgium where John Joseph Merlin was born.

James Wyatt was a contemporary of Henry Holland but he detested both Palladian and Adam Style architecture. According to Elizabeth Burton in ‘The Georgians at Home’ (Burton, 1967, p. 100), James Wyatt became so popular that ‘he took on more work than he could handle and often drove his clients to despair’.

Other suppliers included George Simson of St. Paul's Church Yard who made ‘mechanical organ secretaries’ for Thomas Weeks (Gilbert, 1996, p. 6).

While the aristocrats and merchants furnished their libraries others lived in abject poverty and according to Elizabeth Burton in her book entitled, ‘The Georgians at Home’, in Manchester during the latter years of the eighteenth century, ‘it was not uncommon for ten people to be living in one room’ (Burton, 1967, p. 87).

Books during this period were relatively expensive with a three volume novel costing up to £2.00, the price of a custom-made chair.

The design of the Reading Chair allowed a gentleman to sit with his coat-tails hanging down the front of the chair to avoid unsightly creases.

The *Library Step Stool* at Harewood House was made together with a Writing Table in the same English Empire Style. In the Day Work Book for the estate Mr. Reid (Chippendale’s Foreman) records, ‘making covers for Library Table and Stool’.
The stool was made in April 1772, at least two years before Robert Campbell registered his patent for Library Steps. According to the accounts of Nostell Priory, a similar Library Step Stool was also supplied by Chippendale in 1767, seven years before Campbell’s patent (Boynton & Goodison, 1969).

28 Plate XXII in William Ince & John Mayhew’s ‘The Universal System of Household Furniture’ published between 1759-1763 shows a collapsible ladder described as ‘being contrived (for little room) to fold up’. Some furniture historians believe that this Ladder – a wooden pole that opens up to reveal a ladder – was originally designed to be carried on the roof of a stagecoach. The ladder would be opened up to access the baggage that was typically carried on the roof of the coach.

29 The ‘chair-table’ was also known as a ‘table-chair’ and a ‘table-chairwise’.

30 Although these chairs could not be transformed into a full bed, it was possible to lower the back of each chair from an upright to a semi-reclined position.

31 A prie-dieu was an armchair with under-seat storage for religious books.

32 This estimate is based on an extrapolation of the chairs passing through the trade and the number of genuine chairs that are known to exist in the collections of the National Trust, English Heritage, The Royal Collection and other recorded sources. There are many Victorian copies in circulation and this creates the impression that there are many more.

33 In the Morning Chronicle of February 4, 1850 it was estimated that there were eight thousand cabinet-makers and upholsterers in London. In the same newspaper a few days later the number for 1831 was estimated at over six thousand (Kirkham, 1988, p. 4). This represents an increase of one hundred cabinet-makers per year over a twenty year period. Assuming a similar rate of growth in the preceding thirty years there would be approximately three thousand at the turn of the century.

34 According to Ralph Edwards (1964, p. 172) the first reference to ‘chayre-makers’ appears during the sixteenth century and this specialised branch of the furniture industry had evolved from earlier trading disputes between joiners and carpenters.

35 The major impact of the Industrial Revolution on furniture manufacturing was the introduction of cutting and planning machines to prepare the timber. The first circular saw for cutting planks was patented in 1805 and hand-tools were used to make furniture until the end of the nineteenth century.
The ‘imperial’ dining table appears to have been designed by Morgan & Sanders. According to their trade cards, it could be extended to seat ‘Four to Twenty Persons’ or collapsed to fit ‘into the space of a Large Pembroke Table’. The firm also produced tables with removable legs that could be folded into a box ten inches deep (Brawer, 2001, p. 193).

The ‘ladies screen writing-table’ was an invention of Thomas Shearer although it first appeared in Sheraton’s Drawing-Book in 1793 (Simmons, 1905).

According to Stephen Van Dulken in his book ‘British Patents of Invention 1617-1977’ the fees for obtaining a patent before 1852 were in the region of £100 which would represent four or five times the average annual income of a skilled cabinet-maker during this period.

All patents were valid for fourteen years at this time.

Against the patent sketch of the chair-based Library Step design, Robert Campbell adds a rather convoluted description of his invention i.e. ‘a pair [of steps] in a Chair ‘A’ the bottom standing edgeways ‘B’ the front step and a false bottom hinged to the back having ye back steps hinged to ye front of it which rises up and makes room for them either to turn up or down’.

Ovid’s narrative poetry entitled ‘Metamorphoses’ is written in fifteen volumes and describes the transformations that had taken place in the creation and history of the world according to Greek mythology.

Original copies of trade-cards and advertisements can be seen at the British Museum in London. There are two collections: The Banks Collection and the Heal Collection and both are held in the Department of Prints and Drawings.

According to Edward Pinto (1962, p. 118), chamber horses were invented by Henry Marsh of Clare Market during the first half of the eighteenth century.

Morgan & Sanders advertised regularly in Ackermann’s Repository but they also advertised in The Times newspaper and the provincial press in Sussex and Windsor.

Outside of the hotspots around Westminster City, other patent furniture specialists were equally innovative. Anthony Eckhardt patented a portable table and chair in 1771 (No. 995) and in 1774 Robert Campbell registered his design for library steps (No. 1086). The trend continued through the first and second decades of the nineteenth century when, in 1809, James Hakewill registered a patent for tables, chairs and stools that would ‘pack together and fold easily’ (No. 3217).
As a Catholic family, the Gillows had certain political and social restrictions. It was not until 1829 when Parliament passed the ‘Roman Catholic Relief Act’ that they had the right to vote or hold public office. But Gillow’s religious affiliations did result in several commissions for alters, tabernacles, fonts and pulpits as well as a loyal following among wealthy Catholic families.

The range of furniture that Gillows manufactured in any given year was vast, covering almost every conceivable item from picture frames and tea caddies to beds, bookcases and billiard tables. Gillows also made clock cases for many eminent clock makers including Thomas Worswick.

According to Sir Ambrose Heal (1988, p. 128), Thomas Oxenham was a Mangle and Napkin-press maker based at 354 Oxford Street in 1808.

The name of ‘Trafalgar House’ was dropped in 1811 ‘when the commercial usefulness had been played out’ (Austen, 1974).

The company had been renamed Morgan & Co. following the death of Joseph Sanders in 1818.

French cushions had square edges and were usually stuffed with horse-hair. The reference to Morocco leather related to leather made from the hide of a goat.

The Trafalgar sideboard was a patent metamorphic piece of furniture where an extendable dining table could be slid between the two pedestals of a sideboard when it was not in use. According to Rudolph Ackermann, the first was made for Merton House, the home of Lord Nelson and it is possible that the original design was the work of Morgan & Sanders.

Jerome Phillips (1979) also refers to a patent Metamorphic Library Chair, ‘made by Morgan & Sanders for Trinity College’. A recent interview with Mr. Phillips (2009) confirmed that he was relying on the evidence of others and had not inspected the chair.

Machine made screws had been produced since Job and William Wyatt registered their patent No. 751 for the ‘Cutting of screws of iron, called wood screws’ in 1760. The heads of these screws still have a hand finished appearance. It was not until 1837 that a new patent was registered for a machine to finish the screw heads. This process produces a circular pattern on the upper surface of the screw head. It is typical to find a mix of hand-made and machine-finished screws on items of this age but a full set of machine-made screws is often a sign of extensive restoration.
Replacement hinges should have been made to fit the existing recesses but hinges of a different size have been used and the poor restoration has damaged some of the surrounding structure.

Billiards was played in the court of Louis XI during the fifteenth century. The eighteenth century version involved a large table where the balls passed through arches to score points. Trou Madam was a separate game to billiards often played by the ladies while the gentlemen played billiards. Gillows supplied a ‘Troumadame Table’ for Tatton Park in December 1811.

The over-scrolled back was introduced in France ca. 1787.

Baywood is a soft, light mahogany that grows in the Bay of Honduras. The wood was cheaper and easier to work than the closer grained Spanish mahogany and was often used on hidden parts of the furniture such as the steps of the Metamorphic Library Chair.

The journeyman Edward Pye worked on several pieces of furniture at Tatton Park including a wardrobe and a set of four ‘Edwards Pattern’ library chairs. The chairs had a twisted reed design on the back rail. Edward Pye’s name is also recorded against earlier pieces in the Sketch Books from 1805.

Such a large reduction in the cost of external labour suggests improvements in the methods of manufacture.

The sale took place on January 29, 1998. Christie’s estimated that the chair would sell for between £1,000 and £1,400 but bidding closed at £6,800. Interestingly, an almost identical chair was auctioned by Christie’s on June 14, 2001. This time the catalogue claimed that the chair had once belonged to Ann Jessop, the successor to the cabinet-maker James Jessop of Sheffield in 1839. This time the estimate was between £7,000 and £10,000 and bidding closed at £11,750.

These chairs, according to Nicholas Goodison and John Hardy (1970), were supplied to Tatton Park in 1811. They are described in a Gillows Account Book as ‘a set of twelve cane-seated library chairs’. The invoice references an original design created for Reverend H. Holland Edwards of Pennant in Wales.

Spanish mahogany is brighter, close-grained and often highly figured. It was the most expensive variety of mahogany and was used for the very best pieces. The closeness of the grain provided added strength to the chair, a feature that would appeal to Gillows in view of the fragility of the basic design and its intended purpose.
Honduran mahogany, is wider grained and relatively plain and was more generally used for chairs.

64 During the reign of William IV there was a tendency to embellish the Regency forms as a reaction to the severity of the neo-classical movement and some may feel that the Mallett chair is more likely to have been manufactured in the 1840s. This topic is addressed directly in Chapter 8 when the Mallett chair is compared to a similar model that was located in the Queen’s Library at Frogmore House in 1817.

65 Gillows are known to have used rosette paterae on furniture made towards the end of the eighteenth century. The design of patera applied to the Mallett chair is similar to that used for brass door handles of the same period. According to Nicholas Somers, a Chartered Arts & Antiques Surveyor and Forensic Appraiser, the design may have been based on the shape of a seed from the Sandbox tree.

66 The Metamorphic Library Chair at Tatton Park is almost imperceptible among the other library chairs made by Gillows. While the chair is made to the fashionable Trafalgar style, care has still been taken to use high quality timber and veneers that help to maintain the harmony of the room.

67 Concentric circles on the screw heads show that they were made after 1837.

68 The presence of a Lewty castor would eliminate Morgan & Sanders as the maker since the firm ceased to trade in 1819.

69 Further research on the mark is planned upon completion of the dissertation. A rubbing of a genuine William IV mark appears to correspond with the photographed evidence and William IV is known to have disposed of several library pieces during the consolidation of the Royal Libraries to Windsor Castle. It is possible that William IV, who disliked the frivolous taste of his elder brother, would have disposed of the chair as part of the process. Christie’s auction records may uncover more information and the Royal Collection has been notified.

70 Peter Blomfield is a cabinet-maker who manufactures reproduction Regency furniture. In 1991 he was asked to manufacture a replica of the Trinity College chair for one of the students. He could make and source every component except the lever-operated latch and he eventually adopted a window sash lock.

71 Thomas Sheraton, referring to Robert Campbell’s patent in the 1793 edition of ‘The Cabinet-Makers and Upholsterer’s Drawing-Book’ suggests that ‘This and the other design for Library Steps, have obtained a patent; yet any part being materially
altered, will evade the act, though the whole be nearly the same’. Campbell’s patent had expired in 1788 and the advice was therefore unnecessary.

72 A bergère chair has an upholstered back and sides with a large loose seat cushion and an exposed frame which was often elaborately carved. This style of chair was popular in France during the eighteenth century.

73 William Trotter (1772-1833) was a well-known cabinet-maker in Scotland during the Regency (Bamford, 1983, p. 51). According to Dr Clive Edwards (2005, p. 43) the first mention of Trotter’s business in Edinburgh was in 1747. Edwards includes a summary of the development of Trotter’s business through to 1797. There is no mention of a London branch or any connection with John Trotter of Soho Square but some form of relationship is possible.

74 The merged company was the result of Thomas Shackleton’s marriage to George Seddon’s daughter in 1780.

75 The Travellers Club had been created for those who had travelled for more than five hundred miles in a straight line from London to ‘form a point of reunion for gentlemen who have travelled abroad’.

76 There is even a possibility that it was Thomas Hope who provided the chair to the Travellers Club and that the tulip motif is a reference to his birthplace.

77 Merton Place was the home of Lord Nelson from 1802 and Morgan & Sanders were still providing furniture for the estate in 1805.

78 HMS Victory had 104 Guns and Carronade on board at the time of the battle. Carronade are the low velocity ‘cannon-like’ weapons used to engage the enemy at close quarters (Royal Naval Museum, 2009).

79 The Trafalgar Patent Sideboard was apparently designed for Lord Nelson at Merton Place. As Morgan & Sanders advertisement explained, ‘NELSON’S new PATENT SIDEBOARD and DINING TABLE, united in one handsome piece of furniture, the first of which article ever manufactured was intended for the most brave and ever to be lamented the late Admiral LORD NELSON it is perfectly built in principle, forming an elegant sideboard and also a ... dining table, to dine from two persons upwards to 50 or 100 executed in the most fashionable and elegant style’.

80 According to Brain Austen (1974) Morgan & Sanders, who had renamed their premises ‘Trafalgar House’ in 1809 dropped the name in 1811 ‘when the commercial usefulness had been played out’.
A partnership formed in 1803 between William Marsh and Thomas Tatham, the elder brother of Charles Heathcote Tatham. In 1811 Thomas Tatham was joined by Edward Bailey and Richard Saunders and the firm became known as Tatham, Bailey & Saunders. The firm subsequently provided furniture for Carlton House.

Fear that the reputation of Waring would devalue Gillows pieces prompted some dealers to remove the Gillows mark from their stock. Some dealers are known to have added new maker’s marks suggesting that the pieces had been manufactured by Sheraton Hepplewhite or Adam (Boynton, 1995, p.15).

To travel two hundred miles at the beginning of the nineteenth century could take up to five days and people that lived in London rarely ventured outside the capital.

Following the death of George IV in 1830 his brother and new King, William IV, consolidated several Royal libraries at Windsor Castle and there is a possibility that the chair was sold at auction as part of the exercise.
10.5 Metamorphic Library Chairs

The following table shows the Regency period *Metamorphic Library Chairs* that were considered for the field research. Those selected for comparison are highlighted in green. Details are also available for those highlighted in blue if required.

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## 10.6 Furniture Design Publications

A chronologically organised list of the furniture design books published between 1754 and 1835. Note that many of these books were published in instalments across several editions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>First Edition</th>
<th>Last Edition</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker’s Director</td>
<td>1754</td>
<td>1762</td>
<td>Thomas Chippendale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Universal System of Household Furniture</td>
<td>1759</td>
<td>1763</td>
<td>William Ilice &amp; John Mayhew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cabinet and Chair-Maker’s Real Friend and Companion</td>
<td>1765</td>
<td>1765</td>
<td>Robert Manwaring</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Chair-Maker’s Guide</td>
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<td>1766</td>
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<td>1774</td>
<td>Thomas Shearer</td>
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<td>The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer’s Drawing-Book</td>
<td>1791</td>
<td>1794</td>
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<td>The Cabinet Dictionary</td>
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<td>Cabinet-Maker, Upholsterer and General Artists’ Encyclopaedia</td>
<td>1801</td>
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<td>Recueil de Décorations Intérieures</td>
<td>1802</td>
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<td>Charles Percier &amp; Pierre Fontaine</td>
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<td>Collection des Meubles et Objets de Gout</td>
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<td>1803</td>
<td>Pierre de La Mésangère</td>
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<td>The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer’s Guide</td>
<td>1805</td>
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<tr>
<td>Household Furniture and Interior Decoration</td>
<td>1807</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Collection of Ornamental Designs after the manner of the Antique</td>
<td>1812</td>
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<td>The Rudiments of Drawing Cabinet and Upholstery Furniture</td>
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<td>1826</td>
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<td>Peter &amp; Michael Angelo Nicholson</td>
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<td>The Modern Style of Cabinet Work Exemplified</td>
<td>1834</td>
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<td>Thomas King</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proprietors</td>
<td>From</td>
<td>Until</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Argles</td>
<td>c1795</td>
<td>1813</td>
<td>Catherine Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Butler</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Campbell</td>
<td>Pre 1754</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Chippendale</td>
<td>Pre 1748</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>St Martin's Lane</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Dawes</td>
<td>1820</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Margaret Street</td>
</tr>
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<td>William Day</td>
<td>1812</td>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Strand</td>
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<td>Anthony Eccardt</td>
<td>Pre 1771</td>
<td>1810</td>
<td>Hans Place, Chelsea</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Edwards</td>
<td>c1817</td>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Kings Street, Holborn</td>
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<td>James Faunon</td>
<td>Pre 1731</td>
<td>Post 1772</td>
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<td>William Gaimes</td>
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<td>1823</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Gillow</td>
<td>Pre 1764</td>
<td>1817</td>
<td>Oxford Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Hakewill</td>
<td>Pre 1809</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Harris Heal</td>
<td>1810</td>
<td>Post 1848</td>
<td>Tottenham Court, Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>François Hervé</td>
<td>Pre 1780</td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>Lower John Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Hewlin</td>
<td>Pre 1802</td>
<td>1820</td>
<td>Strand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Ince &amp; John Mayhew</td>
<td>c1758</td>
<td>1811</td>
<td>Marshall Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Jupе</td>
<td>Pre 1835</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Welbeck Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Kemp</td>
<td>Pre 1757</td>
<td>1816</td>
<td>Golden Ball, Cornhill</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Landall</td>
<td>Pre 1773</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Little St Martin's Lane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Lane &amp; Billing</td>
<td>Pre 1813</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Strand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James &amp; William Lowdies</td>
<td>Pre 1790</td>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Hay Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Marshall</td>
<td>1793</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Soho Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Minter</td>
<td>Pre 1829</td>
<td>Post 1845</td>
<td>Gerrard Street, Soho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan &amp; Sanders</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>1819</td>
<td>Catherine Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas &amp; Samuel Oxenham</td>
<td>Pre 1795</td>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Oxford Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Pocock</td>
<td>Pre 1801</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>Southampton Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel &amp; Henry Pratt</td>
<td>Pre 1813</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Regent Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Pryer</td>
<td>Pre 1810</td>
<td>Post 1837</td>
<td>Brydges Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Scott</td>
<td>1782</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Ludgate Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Seddon</td>
<td>1753</td>
<td>1868</td>
<td>New Bond Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Shepherd</td>
<td>Pre 1808</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Bishopgate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Simson</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>St. Pauls Church Yard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Smee &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Pre 1805</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Pavement, Moorfields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Stewart</td>
<td>Pre 1820</td>
<td>1827</td>
<td>St. Martins Lane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Tall</td>
<td>Pre 1813</td>
<td>1831</td>
<td>Cornhill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Thomas Thompson</td>
<td>Pre 1812</td>
<td>Post 1826</td>
<td>Long Acre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Trotter</td>
<td>Pre 1790</td>
<td>1808</td>
<td>Soho Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Waldron</td>
<td>1784</td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>Catherine Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Ward</td>
<td>Pre 1762</td>
<td>Post 1823</td>
<td>Leicester Square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas &amp; William Wilkinson</td>
<td>Pre 1766</td>
<td>1828</td>
<td>Broker's Row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Wilmot</td>
<td>Pre 1800</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>John Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Wilson &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Pre 1817</td>
<td>Post 1840</td>
<td>Wigmore Street</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.7 Patent Furniture Manufacturers
Regional manufacturers have been excluded.

Alphabetically sorted list of the Patent Furniture manufacturers who were operating in London at the time when mechanical and metamorphic furniture was in demand.
### 10.8 Field Research Results

Data collected during the physical inspection of the chairs previously attributed to Morgan & Sanders and Gillows. Key attributes include: dimensions, design, decoration, quality, fittings and finish. Additional data is available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chair Attributes</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Decoration</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Fittings</th>
<th>Finish</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Morgan &amp; Sanders</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>C001</td>
<td>36 x 22 x 23</td>
<td>Flat-Sided</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Sun Damage &amp; Damage to First Step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C002</td>
<td>36 x 22 x 24</td>
<td>Flat-Sided</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Fine</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Original Condition Damage &amp; No Marking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C003</td>
<td>36 x 21 x 22</td>
<td>Flat-Sided</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Fine</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Reeded Continuous Caned Seat &amp; Back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C008</td>
<td>36 x 22 x 25</td>
<td>Flat-Sided</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Fine</td>
<td>Simple Caned Seat</td>
<td>Restored Caned Seat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C009</td>
<td>36 x 22 x 26</td>
<td>Flat-Sided</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Fine</td>
<td>Simple Caned Seat</td>
<td>Restored Caned Seat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C010</td>
<td>36 x 22 x 27</td>
<td>Flat-Sided</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Fine</td>
<td>Simple Caned Seat</td>
<td>Restored Caned Seat</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Gillows</strong></th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Simple Caned Seat</td>
<td>Restored Caned Seat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trinity College Schneidman Collection**
- Butchoff Antiques
- Anthony James Antiques
- Tatton Park
- Mallett Antiques

**London**
- Oxford
- New York
- Cheshire
- London

**Closed Height, Width & Depth** (inches)
- 36 x 22 x 23
- 36 x 21 x 22
- 36 x 22 x 25
- Unknown
- 36 x 22 x 23
- 29 x 23 x 26

**Open Height, Width & Depth** (inches)
- 29 x 22 x 44
- 29 x 21 x 42
- 29 x 22 x 41
- Unknown
- 29 x 22 x 44
- 29 x 23 x 47

**Front-Rail**
- Full Width Reeding to Seat Edge
- Panelled Front-Rail to Depth of Knee
- Plain with No Reeding
- Plain
- Full Width Reeding to Seat Edge
- Spherical

**Sides**
- Flat-Sided
- Flat-Sided
- Flat-Sided
- Flat-Sided
- Flat-Sided
- Contour-Sided

**Top-Rail**
- Tablet Top-Rail with Flame Veneer
- Tablet Top-Rail
- Tablet Top-Rail
- Tablet Top-Rail with Flame Veneer
- Tablet Top-Rail
- Tablet Top-Rail

**Pedestals**
- Simple Flat-Sided
- Simple Flat-Sided
- Simple Flat-Sided
- Simple Flat-Sided
- Simple Flat-Sided
- Spherical

**Reeding**
- Fully Reeded Arms, Legs & Front-Rail
- Fully Reeded Arms & Legs
- Plain with No Reeding
- Plain
- Fully Reeded Arms, Legs & Front-Rail
- Fully Reeded Arms & Legs

**Paterae**
- Turned Boss with Concentric Circles
- Turned Boss with Concentric Circles
- Turned Boss with Concentric Circles
- Turned Boss with Concentric Circles
- Turned Boss with Concentric Circles
- None

**Carving**
- None
- None
- None
- None
- None
- None

**Maker’s Marks**
- Brass Nameplate in 1967
- William IV Stamp and Branded Crown
- GILLOWS LANCASHIRE
- Initials T.G to Top of Back Rail & Uprights
- Restored Continuous Caned Seat & Back
- Brass

**Condition**
- Fine
- Fine
- Fine
- Fine
- Fine
- Exceptional

**Timber**
- Honduran Mahogany
- Spanish Mahogany
- Honduran Mahogany
- Honduras Mahogany
- Honduran Mahogany
- Honduran Mahogany

**Construction**
- Fine
- Fine
- Fine
- Fine
- Fine
- Exceptional

**Catches**
- Lever-Operated Latch
- Button-Operated Spring Catch
- Unknown
- Lever-Operated Latch
- Unknown
- Lever-Operated Latch

**Castors**
- None
- Brass
- None
- Brass
- None
- None

**Caning**
- Restored Caned Seat
- Restored Caned Seat
- Restored Caned Seat
- Restored Caned Seat
- Restored Caned Seat
- Restored Continuous Caned Seat & Back

**Original Condition Damage & No Marking**
- Restored Caned Seat & Back
- Restored Caned Seat & Back
- Restored Caned Seat & Back
- Restored Caned Seat & Back
- Restored Caned Seat & Back
- Restored Caned Seat & Back