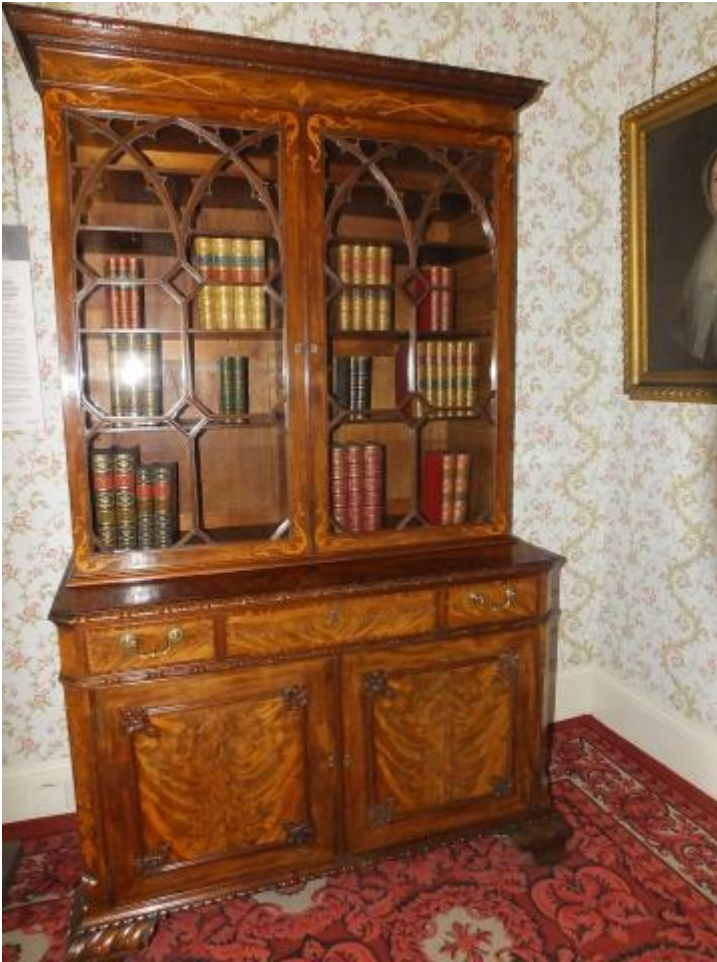


## **"Gillow masterpiece" returns home**

30 January 2008

Lancashire County Council's Museums Service is celebrating after bringing a rare 18th century bookcase made by Gillows of Lancaster back to the city.

Image



Gillow bookcase made for Mary Hutton Rawlinson

Thanks to continued local support and securing external funding, the unique mahogany bookcase has been transported from Apter - Fredericks Ltd of London to Lancaster to be displayed permanently at the Judges' Lodgings museum where the majority of its Gillow Collection of furniture is held.

Described as a "Gillow masterpiece" the bookcase, which measures seven feet tall and four feet wide, was made for Mary Hutton Rawlinson, widow of wealthy Lancaster Quaker merchant, Thomas Hutton Rawlinson, in 1772. The piece has remained in the ownership of Mary Rawlinson's descendants for more than two

centuries. Portrait's of Thomas and Mary Hutton Rawlinson also hang in the Judges' Lodgings. Gillows employed their most skilful craftsmen, Thomas and John Dowbiggin, to make the piece at a total cost of £17.17s. 0d.

In September last year, the Government's culture minister Margaret Hodge intervened and agreed to place an export ban on the bookcase. The minister's ruling followed a recommendation by the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, an independent advisory committee, which confirmed the piece was of out-standing national significance. The Museums Service had to raise the sum of £260,000, plus VAT to acquire the piece. This was the sum agreed by the independent valuation committee.

Since then, the County Council has enlisted support from a number of local, regional and national agencies to help raise funding to purchase this rare piece. These have included substantial grants from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), The MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, The Art Fund and the North West Regional Development Agency. The local community has also been very supportive with individual donations from Samlesbury (NADFAS) and others anxious to secure the bookcase for Lancashire.

In a recent letter of support, Sir Nicholas Goodison, former Chairman of the London Stock Exchange and current President of the Furniture History Society, said, "The Society has always recognised the pre-eminent importance of the firm of Gillows.... In 1992 you were able to purchase the Denton Desk, made in 1778. This handsome piece is certainly of great distinction and importance, but I would suggest that it is clearly eclipsed by the emergence of the Rawlinson Bookcase. The Rawlinson Bookcase shines even in comparison with a piece which would, until its emergence, have been regarded as the summit of Gillows' production at this period. That both should find a home in the Judges' Lodgings, which is obviously the most appropriate home, would be the happiest of outcomes."

Welcoming the piece back to Lancaster, County Councillor Chris Cheetham, Cabinet Member of Adult and Community Services at Lancashire County Council, said, "I would like to thank all the people and bodies who have helped the County Council retain this bookcase here in Lancashire. Work of this quality is a testament to the skills and endeavours of the craftsmen of Lancashire. I am delighted that we have been able to add this to our collection at the Judges' Lodgings so that people can come and see it in a suitable setting."

Edmund Southworth, County Museums Officer for Lancashire County Council, added, "We are delighted that this rare and valuable piece of local history has

been proudly returned to its rightful home back here in Lancaster. It is one of the finest pieces of 18th century English furniture made by Gillows in the country. We are extremely grateful for all the letters of support and offers of financial assistance we have received in helping us to secure this important national treasure for public display in our museum. Visitors to the Judges' Lodgings will be able to judge for themselves when the museum opens again at Easter."

Carole Souter, Director of NHMF, said, "This wonderful bookcase is an outstanding example of English craftsmanship. The National Heritage Memorial Fund's grant will ensure that it is put on display where people can enjoy it for many years to come."

The Judges' Lodgings is currently closed and will reopen on Good Friday, 21st March 2008.

For more information about the Gillow collection or Lancashire County Council's Museum Service visit online at [www.lancsmuseums.gov.uk](http://www.lancsmuseums.gov.uk)

## **Notes to editors**

### **MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund**

The MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund is a government fund, established at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in 1881 as part of its nationwide work. 2006 marked the Fund's 125th anniversary.

The annual grants budget, currently £1,000,000, is provided by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). The Fund supports the acquisition of objects relating to the arts, literature and history by regional museums, record offices and specialist libraries in England and Wales. Each year it considers some 300 applications and in 2006/2007 awarded grants to 225 organisations, enabling acquisitions of over £4 million to go ahead.

### **Samlesbury NADFAS (National Association of Decorative and Fine Art Societies)**

NADFAS has over 340 local Decorative and Fine Art Societies in the UK and mainland Europe. All NADFAS societies subscribe to the aims and objectives of the National Association: the advancement of arts education and appreciation and the preservation of our artistic heritage.

## **The Rawlinson family**

The Rawlinson family was particularly prominent in the North West region throughout the course of the 18th Century. They were the chief ironmasters in the Backbarrow Company, supplying a commodity which was not only exported but was useful in outfitting ships for the new and rapidly developing markets between Lancaster and the West Indies. They dominated the West Indian trade at Lancaster; indeed the family's level of involvement and influence in transatlantic commercial activities is well evidenced: in 1756, for example, at least 8 of the 17 vessels returning from the West Indian and mainland American colonies during that year were Rawlinson owned (M. Elder, *The Slave Trade and the Economic Development of 18th century Lancaster*, p.183). The commercial interests of the family in the West Indies Trade were wide and all embracing; in the mid-1760s they became the owners of the Goyave Plantation in Granada. It is particularly interesting to know that for a number of years they were the principal importers of the finest mahogany into Lancaster, supplying it to Gillows of Lancaster.

In 1756 Thomas Hutton Rawlinson consolidated his Lancaster slave-trading interests in a new company, in which Mary, her daughters, and other members of the family each received a one sixth share. Mary Rawlinson not only received £5,000 and her substantial house on the death of her husband in 1767, but continued to receive the fortunes from her one sixth share in her slave-trading company up to her death in 1786.

## **Gillows**

The Lancaster firm was established by Robert Gillow (1702/3-1772). After his retirement in 1769 his sons, Richard (1733-1811) and Robert II (1746/7-1795) began to expand the thriving Lancaster firm. Richard remained in Lancaster whilst Robert II managed the firm's London branch on Oxford Street (now Oxford Road). The Gillow firm made furniture for a large number of eminent people – possibly one of their greatest commissions was to supply furniture to the architect AWN Pugin for the New Palace of Westminster in 1846. Gillows became one of the leading metropolitan upholsterers of the 19th century, attracting a wide-ranging clientele that embraced the aristocracy and the middle classes.

## **Further information**

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