

## 2.3 Made for Heal's : Key Suppliers

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine thoroughly the other factories used by A.H. and the Heal business to make furniture for the shop, details of a number of suppliers are recorded here because they throw light on his methods and may also provide some leads for further research. Some of these workshops were evidently very small and little is known of them other than the fact that their relationship with Heal's was so close that the same piece of furniture might sometimes be manufactured by Heal's own factory or sometimes by the subcontractor. Others were larger and capable of supplying large quantities if required, but one maker who was supplying Heal's even before A.H.'s time and whose relationship with the firm was very close was Frederick Coote.

### 2.3.1 Frederick Coote (1832-1919)

Frederick Coote was a furniture manufacturer with workshops at 187a Tottenham Court Road, London at the end of the 19th century. He had close links with Heal's of 196 Tottenham Court Road, for whom he made bedroom furniture but he also is known to have produced furniture for CFA Voysey, so evidently he supplied other traders as well.

Although A.H. himself did not list any Cootes in his book of *London Furniture Makers 1660-1840*,<sup>324</sup> the *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers* mentions a cabinet maker and upholsterer called Benjamin Coote at 104 Tottenham Court Road in 1839 and an I.C. Cootes (sic) at the same address as upholsterer and house agent in 1837.<sup>325</sup> Tallis's *London Street Views* published from 1838-40 confirm that Coote was a 'Furniture Dealer' at that address and the 1841 census shows Benjamin and his wife Helen (both aged 40) living in Tottenham Court Road with their six-year-old

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<sup>324</sup> Sir Ambrose Heal, *The London Furniture Makers 1660-1840*, Batsford, 1953.

<sup>325</sup> Geoffrey Beard & Christopher Gilbert (eds), *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers 1660-1840*, Furniture History Society, 1986. A century later a Harold Coote was proprietor of the retail furnishing business Coote & Co., of High Street, Wimbledon. (*Cabinet Maker* 28.05.1938)

daughter.

So far there is no obvious link between these Cootes and Frederick Coote, the subject of this section. The 1851 census shows that Frederick, a “Cabinet Maker Apprentice” was still living with his parents in Braintree, where his father, William, was a “Perfumer. Agent for Essex Weald & Suffolk Fire Office”.<sup>326</sup>

By 1861 Frederick Coote was lodging at 11&12 Francis Street, Marylebone and his profession is given as “Upholsterer Salesman”. This was the address of the 18th century farmhouse (latterly known as Miller’s Stables) that John Harris Heal junior had acquired in 1840 behind his shop with its frontage at 195 Tottenham Court Road. John Harris Heal lived in the farmhouse until 1848 and thereafter it was used as a salesmen’s hostel for members of staff. A list of salaried employees of the firm of Heal & Son survives that commences in 1866. The record seems not to be complete but we do know that in that year Frederick Coote was paid £25, so he was well paid for whatever he did for the firm. The following year, in July 1867, he left the Company’s employment and most unusually, the person who kept the ledger has noted that he left to join *Cook & Sons, Warwick*, suggesting perhaps that the move was made with the approval of his employer, John Harris Heal junior.<sup>327</sup> In the same year he married Isabella Carruthers who was from Croydon but by then was working close by as a “House Servant”.

Melanie Hall records that Frederick Coote took over the business of J. and W. Cookes of Warwick and Leamington Spa, and the firm traded, from 1867 to 1869, as Frederick Coote & Co. Cookes was a well-established business capable of producing high quality cabinet work and *were perhaps best known for the so-called ‘Kenilworth Buffet’, made for the Great Exhibition of 1851 and now at Warwick Castle.*<sup>328</sup> However, for some reason, Coote must have decided to return to London, for the business in Warwick became Collier & Plucknett in about 1870, making Coote’s Warwickshire adventure fairly short lived.

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<sup>326</sup> I am grateful to Rod Moulding for information extracted from the censuses concerning the Cootes.

<sup>327</sup> Heal & Son Archive, V&A Archive of Art & Design, ref 1994/16/1146.

<sup>328</sup> Melanie Hall, *James Plucknett*, Furniture History Society Journal, 1996, p 159.

In 1870, on 10 August, Frederick Coote, who was described, in the legal document, as a ‘Furniture Manufacturer’, took a lease on two workshops at the rear of 187 Tottenham Court Road, London. His address is given as 17 Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, so he had moved back to London by then. The 1871 census confirms that at that point he was living in Charlotte Street and, from the fact that he was listed as “Furniture Maker employing 49 men and 2 boys” one concludes that the new business venture of this 39-year-old was proving very successful already. By then he and his wife had two children, William, aged 2, born in Warwick and Bessie, aged 6 months, born in Marylebone, and they were able to employ a nurse and a general servant to look after them. In 1876 he was taking on additional premises in the basement of 1&2 New Yard, St Pancras *for his trade of Deal Furniture Manufacturer*, but he evidently had further premises in the area as a letter from J.W. Walker & Sons, Organ Factory from 1878 survives in which they suggest taking over *the portion you might discontinue holding of 27 Francis Street*.<sup>329</sup>

In 1890, the young A.H., grandson of Coote’s original employer, was apprenticed to James Plucknett in Warwick, the firm that Frederick Coote had run some twenty years before. Plucknett’s had, by then, become an *Art Furniture Maker* his partner having retired, but the connection tends to confirm Coote’s continuing close involvement in the Heal business.

From the bedroom furniture stockbooks that survive from 1897 onwards, it is evident that Coote was an important supplier of bedroom furniture to Heal & Son, which in the main was painted white thereby suggesting that it would mostly have been made of deal. Heal’s bedroom furniture range in 1900 included no less than 26 suites from Coote – by far the biggest single supplier. He had evidently decided not to continue with the same standard of top quality cabinet work with which he had been associated in Warwick.

Interestingly, the first item of furniture displayed by A.H. at the Arts & Crafts Exhibition of 1899, the Cottager’s Chest (Fig. 2-196), painted green and highlighted

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<sup>329</sup> Heal & Son Archive, V&A Archive of Art & Design, see AAD/1994/16/ 1231, 1232, 1233 and 1978/2/502, for leases and correspondence concerning 187a Tottenham Court Road.

in red, was made for him by Coote who had by then established links with those involved in the movement. At the 1896 Arts & Crafts exhibition he had made an unusual dining table designed by W. Reynolds-Stephens. Coote was also responsible for a number of items made to the designs of the architect C.F.A. Voysey such as the case of the clock for his own use, dated 1895-6, displayed in the Victoria and Albert Museum's *International Arts & Crafts Exhibition*, 2005 (Fig. 2-194).<sup>330</sup> However he was evidently still capable of producing higher quality cabinet work, rather than just painted deal, for the famous Kelmscott 'Chaucer' cabinet, designed by Voysey to house a copy of William Morris's book, was also made by Coote in solid oak with brass fittings in 1899 (Fig. 2-193).<sup>331</sup> Other Voysey articles were an oak chair exhibited at the same time as the cabinet and a writing table shown at the 1903 Arts & Crafts Exhibition.<sup>332</sup> For Heal's Coote even made a mahogany bedroom suite that was priced at £112, right at the top of the range.

Isabella Coote had died in 1889 aged fifty-six and by 1901 Frederick was boarding at Mary Gillard's boarding house in Gower Street. Frederick Coote retired in 1905 and he died in 1919, at which point his executors contacted Heal's as he still held three debentures in the Company.

When Coote retired in 1905 his business was taken over by William Page who continued trading from the same premises until March 1920 when Heal & Son took over the lease, and the workshop, and seem to have employed Mr Page to continue running it for some years after that.<sup>333</sup> In 1905 Coote was supplying Heal's with 21 different bedroom suites (still the biggest single supplier) and in 1910 (according to the stockbook, still under the name of Coote) 14 different suites were listed from this source, all painted white except one which was painted *French Grey* (Figs 2-197, 2-198). It appears as though the workshops at 187 Tottenham Court Road were finally closed and merged with the Heal Cabinet Factory in the late 1920s as from 1930 onwards there is no differentiation between the source of both painted and timber furniture.

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<sup>330</sup> Livingstone, K. & Parry, L.(Eds.), *International Arts & Crafts*, V&A Publications, 2005, p 21.

<sup>331</sup> Carruthers, A. & Greensted, M., *Good Citizens Furniture*, Lund Humphries, 1994, p 69.

<sup>332</sup> Matthew Denney, PhD thesis unpublished, BCUC, 1997.

<sup>333</sup> The 1926 inventory only records 6 benches, 1 veneer press and 2 glue pots as 'Plant at 187 TCR', so the workshop was much reduced from its heyday at this point. See AAD/1978/2/349.

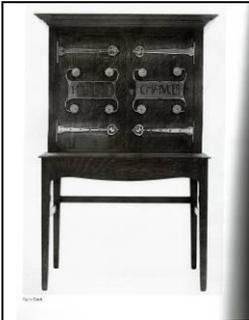


Fig. 2-193. 1899 Kelmscott 'Chaucer' cabinet designed by C.F. A. Voysey made by F.C. Cooté (Caruthers & Greensted 2003, p 68)



Fig. 2-194. 1895-6 clock designed by C.F.A. Voysey, made by Frederick Cooté. (Livingstone & Parry 2005, pg 21)

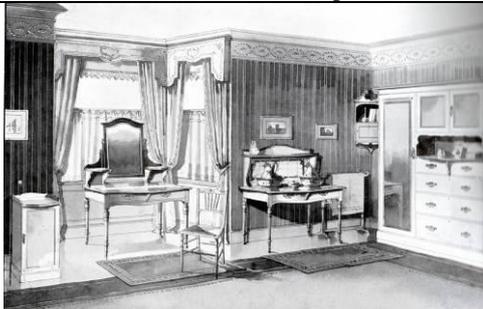


Fig. 2-195. '25' "Knowsley" suite by Cooté/Page ca 1895 (H&S catalogue 1910 p 284)



Fig. 2-196. '267' "Cottagers Chest" designed by Ambrose Heal, made by Cooté, from 1899.

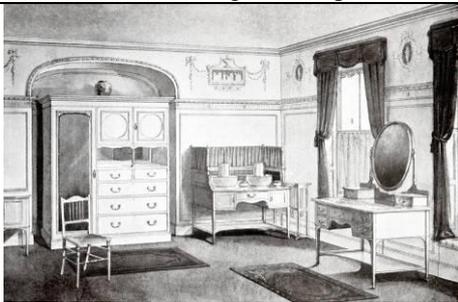


Fig. 2-197. '326' "Hardwick" suite by Cooté/Page ca 1910 (H&S catalogue 1910, p 293).

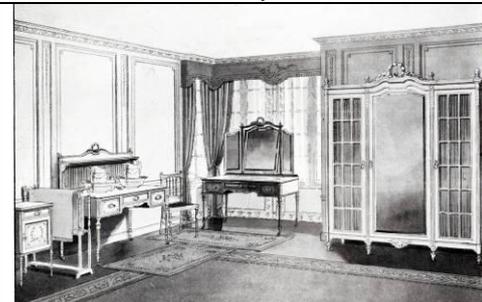


Fig. 2-198. '468' "Trianon" suite by Cooté/Page ca 1910 (H&S catalogue 1910 p 302)

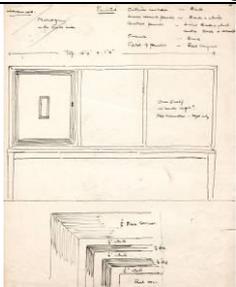


Fig. 2-199. '732' painted and decorated sideboard. AH original pen and ink sketch (author's collection)



Fig. 2-200. '732' painted and decorated sideboard designed by AH, made by Page/Heal II from 1918 (AAD).

In 1918 A.H. designed a painted and decorated sideboard (732) to be made in this workshop that remained in production for many years (Fig.s 2-199, 2-200). The Coote/Page/Heal workshop at 187a Tottenham Ct Rd was responsible for much of the coloured furniture that Heal's did so much to promote through the Twenties.

### **2.3.2 Shapland & Petter**

Shapland and Petter was one of the rare furniture manufacturers that at the end of the nineteenth century wholeheartedly embraced mechanisation. As recorded in the history of the company by Daryl Bennett, in 1900 the works were employing 400 people in workshops equipped with the latest machinery imported from America, and supplied many of the leading retailers with fashionably styled, but soundly constructed furniture.<sup>334</sup> Although Bennett was unable to trace trade with Heal's at the turn of the century, the Heal archives reveal that S&P were in fact well established suppliers with a peak of seventeen different suites being offered in 1899 (Fig.s 2-201, 202, 203) but this had been reduced to a selection of three by 1905. However A.H. evidently appreciated the potential that such a factory could offer but most of the standard products were not to his taste so he had special models made. By 1910 the selection had increased to seven suites of which it has been possible, with the assistance of the Museum of Barnstable & North Devon, to positively identify three of them and it is clear that only one of these is a standard Shapland & Petter model (Fig. s 2-204, 205, 206, 207). In the nineteen-twenties Heal's were still buying half-a-dozen suites from Shapland & Petter, although by 1930 the choice had dwindled down to just one suite before fading out completely.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Daryl Bennett, *Shapland & Petter Ltd of Barnstable*, Museum of Barnstable & North Devon, 2005.

<sup>335</sup> Correspondence with Claire Gulliver, Museum of Barnstable & North Devon, in 2006 who kindly provided copies of pictures from the S&P archives which it was possible to cross reference with H&S catalogues and stock books.





More significant was the fact that Heal's approached Shapland & Petter during the First World War to manufacture their 'Unit Furniture System' (Fig.s 2-210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215). Well ahead of his time, A.H., along with his colleague Hamilton Temple Smith, developed in 1914 designs for units of furniture to be made to standard dimensions with independent bases and tops that could be used to link the components together. This was a real attempt to design for machine production that re-thought furniture from the point of view of modern manufacturing techniques as well as the look of the product itself and the needs of the modern home.<sup>336</sup> They patented the system in 1915 both in the UK and the USA. The patent states:

*According to our invention we make use of several standard units or sections of ordinary dimensions which are determined with a view to the various sections combining to form pieces of furniture conforming to the proportions established by common usage and convenience and which are not multiples or sub-multiples of any theoretic dimensions as has already been proposed.*<sup>337</sup>

This seems to imply that others had made theoretical attempts at standardisation but now Heal and Smith with their knowledge of historical forms and customers' practical needs had come up with a really workable solution that had not existed before. Technically the system depended on interlocking battens to work which was summarised thus:

*...what we claim is:-*

*1. sectional domestic furniture of the kind hereinbefore described built up of a series of units or sections of varying shape, the main elements or carcasses having battens one of the battens being rebated to engage with a tongue or tongues on the slot rails of the plinth, cornice, top, stand or the like...*

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<sup>336</sup> According to David Joel (in his book *The Adventure of British Furniture*, Ernest Benn, 1953,) *...the idea of 'Unit' furniture was, it is believed first successfully developed in this country in 1936 when Marcel Breuer designed a range for Crofton Gane of Bristol. See p 108. Presumably this would have been based on the standardised units Breuer designed at the Bauhaus in 1927. See Bayer, Gropius & Gropius (Eds.), Bauhaus 1919-28, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1938, reprinted Secker & Warburg 1975, p 128. However Joel seems to have overlooked Serge Chermayeff's Plan Ltd which manufactured the unit furniture designed by Franz Schuster from 1933. (See Barbara Tilson Plan Furniture 1932-38, The German Collection, Journal of Design History, Vol 3 no. 2/3, 1990, pp 145-155.) as well as the Heal/Smith system described here.*

<sup>337</sup> Patent No. 3955, *Improvements in Domestic Furniture*, Date of Application 12 March 1915, Complete Specification left 10 September 1915, accepted 13 March 1916.

Discussions were held with Shapland & Petter in 1915 about producing the Heal-Unit range. S&P produced an estimate in August and before the end of November the Directors of Heal's resolved to place a £600 order for the different components necessary to make up the range. However with the continuation of the war it was eventually decided to put the matter in abeyance for the time being and it was not until August 1919 that Mr Long of S&P met with Hamilton Temple Smith to discuss this order once again. Heal's agreed to pay an advance of 50% but how quickly delivery took place is unclear. There exists in the Heal archive a Unit Furniture Stock Book dated 1923, devoted solely to this range, from which it seems that Heal's did not start trying to sell the range until that late date. Commercially it was not a success but whether this was due to the market not being ready for the concept of a unit furniture system, or the effects of inflation which had completely changed prices in comparison to pre-war times, or perhaps by then the rather austere design in dark mahogany was just out of fashion, is not evident. What is clear is that the idea and the approach to design were well ahead of their time and far removed from the backward looking ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Traditionally the introduction of 'unit furniture' to Britain has been ascribed to Marcel Breuer in 1936 working for Crofton Gane in Bristol (see footnote 342). A.H. and Temple Smith were evidently well ahead of this.<sup>338</sup> In 1925 Heal's were selling sectional bookcases that could be fitted together in different combinations supplied by Angus and Greenings and this as a simpler concept proved more successful.

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<sup>338</sup> See Board Meeting Minute book, AAD/1978/2/1. British patent 3955, 1915 and USA patent 1254499, AAD/1994/16/546. Unit Furniture Stock book AAD/1978/2/175.

Patented unit furniture system



Fig. 2-210. Sideboard from unit furniture system patented by AH and HTS, 1914, components made by S&P c 1920.(AAD)



Fig. 2-211. Combination wardrobe from unit furniture system designed 1914, components made by S&P c 1920. (AAD)

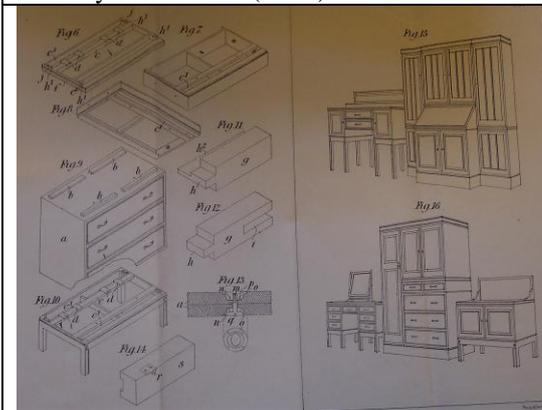


Fig. 2-212. Diagrams from the unit furniture system patent 3955, 1915. (AAD)

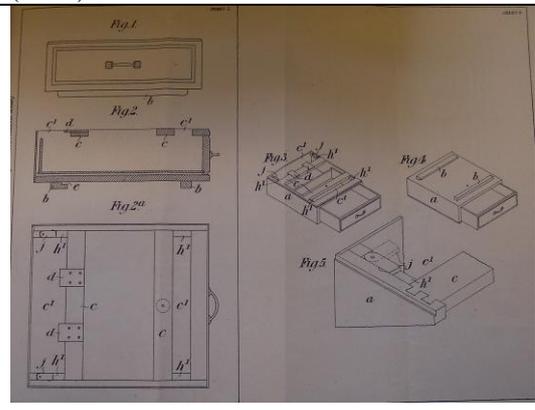


Fig. 2-213. Diagrams from the unit furniture system patent 3955, 1915. (AAD)



Fig. 2-214. Original model of chest from unit furniture system. (Author)



Fig. 2-215. Model to demonstrate functioning of patent – stand separated from carcass. Note £1 coin for scale. (Author)

### 2.3.3 Aircraft manufacturers

The story of furniture makers contributing to the Second World War effort by making moulded plywood aircraft parts, for the Mosquito in particular, has often been told, but the fact that similar events happened during the First World War is much less well known. From the Heal archive it is evident that immediately after the 1914-18 conflict there were a number of factories seeking to convert from aircraft production to furniture production. Heal's bought furniture from a number of firms such as:

- Wycombe Aircraft Co.<sup>339</sup>
- Central Aircraft Co.<sup>340</sup>
- Sadgrove Aircraft Co.

But the most interesting is the one from whom, in the end, they bought nothing but with whom a remarkable project was developed that might have had a considerable impact on the furniture trade nationally. That firm was the John Dawson Manufacturing Co. of Newcastle.

#### 2.3.3.1 John Dawson

During World War One, A.H., as befitted one of the founders of the Design & Industries Association, turned his mind increasingly to the possibilities of producing well-made, well-designed furniture in quantity in order to be able to sell it at reasonable prices. He designed a range of furniture that extended across dining, living as well as bed rooms, devoid of any decoration and conceived with elements of standard size to simplify production. However most of it was still to be made in solid oak to the normal high standards of quality. Interestingly the bedroom furniture was largely based on a design that A.H. had produced as early as 1905 and which

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<sup>339</sup> According to L.J. Mayes, *A History of Chairmaking in High Wycombe*, Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1960, p 115: *In the autumn of 1917 the Government decided that in addition to using as many of the existing firms as possible they would also build a large factory in the town to supplement their output. A site was chosen between Dovecot and Bellfield and the buildings were erected with remarkable speed. It was intended that production should be on a very large scale...whether or not the new factory would have been a success no one can say for the war ended before a single aeroplane could be completed.*

<sup>340</sup> R. Smith, *British Built Aircraft*, records the Central Aircraft Co. as a subsidiary of the joinery and cabinet works R. Cattle Ltd, set up in 1916 at Palmerston Works, Kilburn.

had been manufactured in varnished spruce by Paul (Fig. 2-218, 2-223) and which had sold in some quantity and which continued to be offered in parallel.

What was most original about the concept was that it was intended to be marketed nationwide under the Heal brand, and not just through the Heal shop in Tottenham Court Road. The manufacturer was to be responsible for sales and service to other selected retailers across the country, only paying a small royalty to Heal & Son. One assumes that Heal's must have retained for themselves exclusivity in the London area, but outside this area written agreements with one retailer in each district were to be signed that would fix a uniform retail price and allow retailers to purchase from the maker at a 30% discount off this price. A.H. proposed to devote a proportion of the royalty payment to local advertising in support of these provincial retailers. Each item was to be marked with a specially designed 'Heal Brand' insignia as a guarantee, both to the public and the retailer, of its quality and originality.<sup>341</sup>

In order to get this range made to the necessary standard and on to the market at a reasonable price, A.H. turned to a company that had been manufacturing aircraft during the war and therefore had the required machinery and workforce available. This company was the John Dawson Manufacturing Company of Newcastle who must have been able to convince A.H. and his colleagues that not only did they have the production capacity and skills, but also they had the right sales force to place the range with suitable retailers across the country.<sup>342</sup> By August 1919 the collection was already attracting enthusiastic attention as the magazine *Land & Water* carried an article on the Bungalow Army Hut that Heal's had been invited to furnish on Horse Guards Parade to assist the Disposal Board sell a quantity of these for £100. The journalist wrote:

*In the living room and one of the bedrooms the furniture, some of it plain unpolished oak, some painted, belongs to what has been named the Dawson-Heal series from the fact that it is made to designs by Heal by the John Dawson Manufacturing Co. This latter firm have throughout the war devoted*

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<sup>341</sup> A.H. recorded these ideas in one of his notebooks along with some sketches for a possible brand mark. See AAD/197/2/382

<sup>342</sup> Curiously Tyne & Wear Archive services, contacted on my behalf by Gail Robson, have no record of the company. Email to Gail Robson from A. Pigott, TWAS, 01.11.2006.

*themselves entirely to the production of aircraft...*<sup>343</sup>

The Heal archive contains a ribbon-bound set of large photographs, mounted on boards, of twelve pieces of furniture from the range that was probably used for showing to potential customers. It is entitled *An attempt in standardisation of furniture on very simple lines for mass production.*<sup>344</sup> (Fig.s 2-216, 2-217, 2-219, 2-220, 2-221, 2-223) An especially printed 24-page 'Reasonable Furniture' catalogue with line drawing illustrations of the range was also produced.

However, by early September things started to go wrong with this ambitious project. Hamilton Temple Smith reported to the Board of Directors that

*20 packages of furniture despatched to John Dawson Mnfg. Co., Newcastle were held up by N.E. Rly Co. subject to a lien for money due to them from John Dawson & Co.*

One wonders if perhaps these were prototypes sent North to be copied for production. Information contained in the stockbooks indicates that at least some early samples were made by Cooper in February 1919 and from these not only was the Army Hut furnished and a dresser supplied on loan to the Architectural Association, but also this was the source of the items sent to John Dawson.<sup>345</sup> What happened to the packages subsequently is not recorded, but a couple of weeks later the whole scheme was in danger and the minutes of the Board meeting record that

*the proposed agreement with John Dawson Co for the manufacture and sale of "Heal" design furniture not having materialized it was decided to open up negotiations with Messrs Sadgrove.*<sup>346</sup>

By January 1920 John Dawson & Co were in liquidation and their stocks were sold off.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Land & Water 07.08.1919 see Heal Press Cuttings book 1911-26 AAD/1978/2/179

<sup>344</sup> See Photo Album, AAD/1978/2/455.

<sup>345</sup> See French Furniture Stockbook 1917-19, AAD/1978/2/161.

<sup>346</sup> Minutes of Heal & Son Ltd, Directors' Board Meetings 12.09.1919 and 25.09.1919. AAD/1978/2/1.

<sup>347</sup> Ron Smith, *British Built Aircraft Vol 5 Northern England, Scotland, Wales & Northern Ireland*, Tempus Publishing, 2005, records that John Dawson & Co (Newcastle-on-Tyne) *had a number of works and offices in the Newcastle area... in 1919 the company announced its return to the furniture business thus: 'Contributory to the Nation's need for aircraft during the war, they now contribute to the Nation's need in furniture in the re-establishment of England's homes – in the firm conviction that war shall be no more.'* I am grateful to Chris Snelling of Letchworth Historical Society for providing this information.

Although Messrs Sadgrove, another aircraft manufacturer, did make certain items of furniture for Heal's thereafter, no record of these being marketed anywhere else but through Tottenham Court Road has been found, and they were unable to meet Dawson's prices.<sup>348</sup> Putting mechanised production theories into competitive practice in the furniture trade was not simple for those previously engaged in aircraft work. Coincidentally a report of an Investigation of Prices for Furniture, presented to Parliament in 1920, remarked:

*Firms which originated as aircraft manufacturers have not as yet made a success of the manufacture of cheap furniture. Any success which converted aircraft firms may have achieved...has been purely in the department of high class and expensive products.*<sup>349</sup>

Surviving pieces of this range of furniture were therefore not made by Dawson but by Cooper (such as those items AH used to furnish the servants quarters of his own house) or by Sadgrove and by Heal's own Cabinet Factory.

Heal's "Reasonable Furniture" catalogue was, in 1923, merged with the "Cottage Furniture" catalogue with only a small proportion of the original range surviving. In the face of this evidence it has to be assumed that the project to market the Heal brand nationally never got off the ground despite its aeronautical connections. Trade went very rapidly from boom to recession in the years immediately after the war which no doubt made planning any long-term major developments particularly difficult.

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<sup>348</sup> Sadgrove & Co were a long-established furniture-making firm, established since 1780 in the City of London. They were still in existence in 1966. see J.L. Oliver, *The development & structure of the furniture industry*, Pergamon Press, 1966, p 164.

<sup>349</sup> A sub-committee was set up to carry out an Investigation of Prices for Furniture and to report to Parliament under the Profiteering Acts 1919 & 1920. Under the Chairmanship of John Perring twenty seven factories and workshops were visited in the autumn of 1919, but obtaining a true picture was not simple as: A) many firms were in transition from aircraft work to furniture. B) there was a lockout in many furniture-making districts and C) there was only a slow return of many service men to the workshops. They concluded that *the economic unit still remains the small master* and that there was no evidence of profiteering.

“John Dawson” range

<p>Fig. 2-216. Cover of catalogue – <i>An attempt at standardisation of furniture on very simple lines for mass production.</i> (AAD).</p>	<p>Fig. 2-217. No. 510, 2ft 6in hanging cupboard in oak with ebonised black oak knobs, prototype made by Cooper. 1919 (AAD).</p>	<p>Fig. 2-218. The original stained spruce design ‘431’ which dates from 1905 made by Paul (AAD).</p>
		<p>blank</p>
<p>Fig. 2-219. No. 741, 4ft dresser in oak by Cooper 1919 (AAD).</p>	<p>Fig. 2-220. No.350, 3ft 8in cupboard in oak by Cooper 1919 (AAD).</p>	<p>blank</p>
<p>Fig. 2-221. No. 508, 3ft 6in wide, 5ft 6in high cupboard chest in oak by Cooper 1919(AAD).</p>	<p>Fig. 2-222. No. 439, 3ft dressing chest in oak by Cooper 1919 (AAD)</p>	<p>Fig. 2-223. The original stained spruce design ‘431’ from 1905 (AAD)</p>

But the name John Dawson, at least internally in the Heal organisation, became inextricably linked with those designs and a dining table that continued in the range for many years was known, for identification purposes, as “the John Dawson table” even when it was being made in Heal’s own factory in the late twenties (Fig.s 2-158, 2-159).

### **2.3.4 Greenings of Oxford**

Although the firm of Greenings became the major furniture supplier to Heal’s in the 1930s little information seems to have survived about them. One reason for this must be due to the fact that they appear not to have had their own product range but were specialists in making exclusive products for retailers and so were not known to the public at large but only to the trade. According to Tim Benton:

*They were a middle-sized firm with about 50 workmen and modern machinery. They made the kind of clean, simple furniture in oak and mahogany that Heal’s liked best. The managing director Mr E.W. Shepherd had worked at Heal’s cabinet factory under Johnson.*<sup>350</sup>

An interview with Mrs Olive Shepherd, daughter-in-law of E.W. Shepherd, enables us now to add more detail to this picture. It emerges that Greenings was founded just after World War One by four partners, one of whom was E.W. Shepherd. Greening was the name of two of the partners whose family had previously been in the antiques business so the name was chosen to provide some continuity from the past. Initially based in Oxford High Street antiques were restored and furniture production was started. The Greening brothers soon left and another partner was taken in but the business continued under the Greening name. Under E.W. Shepherd’s leadership the firm expanded and soon moved to larger premises in Cowley Road, Oxford.

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<sup>350</sup> There may be confusion here between the retail cabinet department run by Johnson and the cabinet factory run by Adams. Tim Benton, *Up and Down at Heal’s, 1929-1935*, Architectural Review, February 1978, pp 109-116.

E.W. Shepherd (1882-1965) was a very skilful cabinet maker who had previously worked for a number of London furniture makers, including Heal's. Being an excellent craftsman (pieces he made himself survive as witness to this fact) he could show his men exactly how he wanted the work carried out and he set them high standards to maintain. He had the additional advantage of being a very competent draughtsman, personally designing most of the company's products. He made sure that they always had a team of skilled designers in the drawing office where each item would be fully worked out in detail and the retailer's requests could be realized. The total workforce numbered between seventy and ninety.

For the period the factory was well mechanised in order to save time and manual labour where possible, but everything was still hand-fitted and the fine 'London' dovetails on the drawers were hand-cut, as evidence of Shepherd's training and high standards. The matching and laying of the veneers was of the best so Greening's products could be found, not only at Heal's but also in stores like Harrods and other up-market furnishers of the period. Production was based around small batches of three or six but one-offs were also made despite being very time consuming.<sup>351</sup>

Heal's started buying from them in the early twenties. In 1925 they were supplying ten bedroom suites, which had risen to thirty by 1930 and then to fifty-six suites by 1936. Benton has recorded the crucial role the firm played in providing Heal's with competitively priced furniture through the difficult years of the depression. At A.H.'s insistence in 1931, J.F. Johnson (Heal's furniture buyer) and Arthur Greenwood (Heal's designer) worked with E.W. Shepherd (Greening's managing director) to produce cheap bedroom suites and dining room furniture that enabled Heal's to weather this difficult period (Fig.s 2-224, 2-225, 2-226, 2-227, 2-228, 2-229). Greenwood and Shepherd worked particularly closely together developing a strong mutual respect. Heal's range

*Moved increasingly towards what Greenings could do particularly well – stylish laminboard and veneer pieces with cleverly designed details and a*

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<sup>351</sup> Interview with Mrs Olive G. Shepherd, at Oxford, 25.01.2008. Mrs Shepherd was married to Don Shepherd who died in 2005, son of E.W. Shepherd. Mrs Shepherd had herself worked in the business from the 1950s.

*clean 'modern' look. Most of these suites could turn over 20-30 a year, and the best sellers could sell 50-60 per year. ...The three-way relationship between Shepherd, Johnson and Greenwood contains the secret of success of many of these designs. Greenwood was an excellent draughtsman, who could interpret the Heal's look for Greenings. And Shepherd made sure that he only made things which suited his firm's methods.*<sup>352</sup>

Greenings advertised themselves as *An organisation equipped for the manufacture of Special Pieces!*<sup>353</sup> So they were completely focused on working with retailers to produce what they required. For Heal's this certainly worked well and Benton concluded by saying that: *the sentiment that "Greenwood and Shepherd saved our bacon" could still be heard on Tottenham Court Road in the 1970s.*<sup>354</sup>

After World War Two, the shortage of raw materials led E.W. Shepherd's son Don, who had joined the business in the thirties, to specialize in making radiograms for which wood could be obtained under special licence. Contracts were obtained from firms like Ferguson, Decca, E.J. Cole etc., and production of 'normal' furniture was never recommenced. Radiogram cabinets were followed, after the 1953 coronation, by a huge trade in television cabinets which became the firm's only product and soon they were sending a lorry load per day to Ferguson's. However this came to an abrupt halt on Christmas Eve 1960 when the stop-go economics of the times caused Ferguson to refuse a delivery and indicate that no more cabinets would be required for three months. As a result the decision was taken to close the factory down.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Tim Benton, *Up and Down at Heal's, 1929-1935*.

<sup>353</sup> See *Cabinet Maker & Complete House Furnisher*, 9.04.1938.

<sup>354</sup> Tim Benton, *Up and Down at Heal's: 1929-35*,

<sup>355</sup> Interview with Mrs O.G. Shepherd, 25.01.2008.



Fig. 2-224. '972' Russet oak suite, with 3ft wardrobe. £33 15 0 excl. bedstead, 1933. (H&S catalogue).



Fig. 2-225. '930' weathered oak suite, with 3ft wardrobe. £39 10 0. excl. bedstead, 1933. (H&S catalogue).

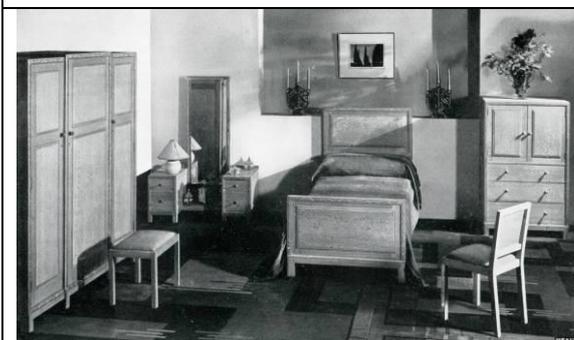


Fig. 2-226. '956' weathered oak suite, with 5ft wardrobe. £60 0 0 excl. bedstead, 1933. (H&S catalogue)

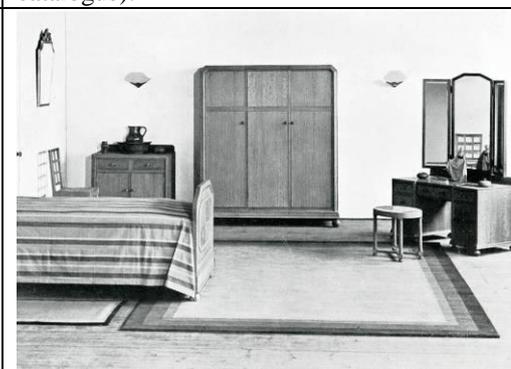


Fig. 2-227. '913' weathered oak suite (Buttery Hutch) with 5ft wardrobe. £73 10 0 excl. bedstead, 1933 (H&S catalogue)



Fig. 2-228. '990' waxed walnut suite, finely figured with 3ft 6in wardrobe. £47 10 0, 1933. (H&S catalogue).



Fig. 2-229. '976' Polished chestnut suite, finely figured, with 4ft fitted wardrobe. £98 10 0, excl. bedstead, 1933. JFJ design.(H&S catalogue)

### 2.3.5 Chairmakers

Because the Heal Cabinet Factory did not make any chairs and all chairs sold through the business were therefore bought in, even those made to Heal designs, they are outside the scope of this present study. The fact that chairs were bought in emphasises that the Cabinet Factory was just that, a cabinet making factory employing cabinet makers and not chair makers. This specialisation was quite common, particularly within smaller manufacturing units, but concrete evidence from other makers is hard to find so that, for example, it is not known for certain where William Morris sourced his famous rush-seated Sussex chairs (see below). In contrast it is on record that Gordon Russell manufactured his chairs in house and was capable of producing considerable quantities in the late nineteen twenties although he too sometimes sub-contracted to specialist makers.<sup>356</sup> The Heal Cabinet Furniture Stockbooks contain a considerable amount of information of use to furniture historians intent on discovering who made what and when, in this particular area of the simple Windsor or rush seated chair. Sadly all Heal records of upholstered chairs, including dining chairs, have disappeared so only a partial picture remains.

AH was inspired by vernacular furnishing traditions and sought to include in his range from the earliest days simple ladder-back and Windsor chairs. This was very much in tune with the thinking of members of the Art Workers Guild. The story of Ernest Gimson learning chairmaking skills from one of the traditional regional bodgers, Philip Clissett of Bosbury, after he had been ‘discovered’ by an AWG member, is well known. We know that A.H. also became familiar with Clissett’s workshop, (whom Mary Greensted described as one of *the old aristocratic poor*.<sup>357</sup>), as he wrote that visiting it was one of his *earliest recollections*.<sup>358</sup> However no trace has been found of any commercial relationship between Heal and Clissett that would confirm the reason for Gimson’s reported disapproval of A.H. for buying Clissett chairs for 8s 6d after his death and selling them for a guinea. The name Clissett simply does not appear in the Heal records as a supplier at this period so it would

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<sup>356</sup> Conversation with Ray Leigh, Gordon Russell Museum, 10.03.2008.

<sup>357</sup> Mary Greensted speaking at *Heart of England Conference*, BCUC, 15.07.2005.

<sup>358</sup> A.H. letter to Mr Bramley, 16.10.1952, preserved in Burrough Collection, Cheltenham Museum & Art Gallery.

seem that the story has somehow got distorted in the re-telling.<sup>359</sup>

A name that does appear frequently as a supplier of chairs is that of Cox and some details of the trading relationship are included here as an illustration of how they operated.

### **2.3.5.1 James Cox & Co, High Wycombe.**

As far back as surviving Heal records go, 1897, it is possible to find evidence of Cox being a key chair supplier to Heal's. For example the rush-seated chairs sold with AH's most successful design of that period, the St. Ives bedroom suite, came from Cox (their model no. 1381) (Fig. 2-230) as did those for the Newlyn suite (model no. 1442) (Fig. 2-231), the Bushey suite (model no. 1442 – square legs) and, a little later, the Chelsea suite (model no. 1382) and the '240' suite (model no. 1385) (Fig. 2-232). Another interesting discovery was that Cox was the maker of the Heal version of the high-ladder-backed rush-seated vernacular style armchair that appears in the 1897 catalogue as model 'no.918' (Fig. 2-234, 2-235). In 'fumed oak' and priced at 35 shillings, half a dozen were sold in 1898 and three dozen in 1900.<sup>360</sup>

Cox were an old-established firm having started trading in 1850. By 1870 the works on High Wycombe's Oxford Road employed 150 people with, for a while, a separate cabinet works as well, and, at a time when chairmakers had to provide their own lamps and oil to light the workplace, Cox's factory was notably one of the first in Wycombe to be lit by gas. In addition to selling chairs throughout England, a considerable export business was done as far afield as Australia. Ebenezer Gomme, founder of E. Gomme Ltd., later to become the largest furniture manufacturer in the town, was apprenticed to Cox, for whom his father also worked, and Charles E. Skull, who went on to build up the renowned Walter Skull chair making firm with his father of that name, had also been apprenticed to Cox in 1865.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Record of John Gregory conversation with Norman Jewson preserved in Burrough Collection at Cheltenham Museum & Art Gallery.

<sup>360</sup> Other Cox rush seated chairs sold by Heal's in 1898 were: '1218', stained green arm. '1385', oak splat back. '1010a', stained brown arm. The surviving example of the '918' appears to be made in ash so presumably 'fumed oak' referred to the colour of its finish.

<sup>361</sup> Charles E. Skull, *Fifty years of the Furniture Trade*, Bucks Free Press, 08.10.1915.

Rush Seated Chairs made for Heal & Son by James Cox, High Wycombe

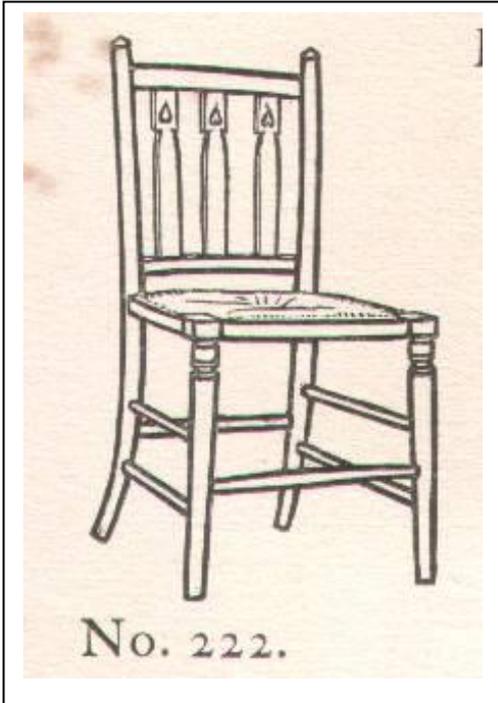


Fig. 2-230. Model No. 222 for Heal's 'St. Ives' bedroom suite introduced 1897. Cox model No. 1381.

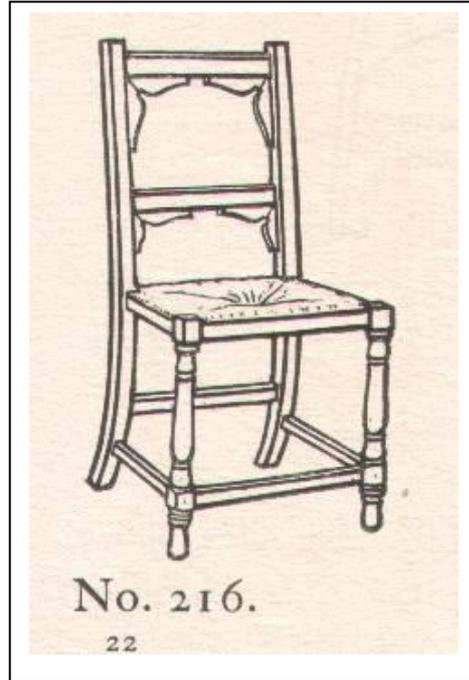


Fig. 2-231. Model No. 216 for Heal's 'Newlyn' bedroom suite introduced 1897. Cox model no. 1442. The same design with square section front legs was sold with the 'Bushey' suite.



Fig. 2-232. Model No. 240 for the bedroom suite of the same number introduced 1898. Cox model no. 1385.

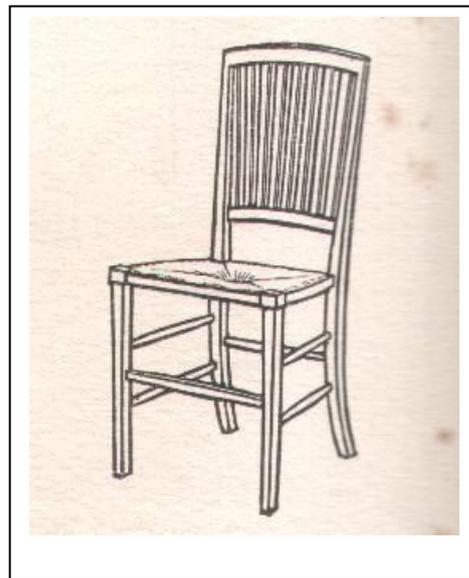


Fig. 2-233. Model no. 147 for the bedroom suite with the same number introduced 1899. Cox model no. 1495.

B.D. Cotton has published information that Cox sometimes subcontracted work to other local bodgers.<sup>362</sup> By 1900 it was reported that much of their furniture was in a Sheraton style but *very nice chairs and settees of the best old designs are made in the modern fumed oak*. Cuba mahogany wooden bedsteads were also made. The majority of the workforce were locals *but a considerable proportion who originally lived in London had been only too glad to establish family life under more comfortable conditions*.<sup>363</sup> There is a suggestion in the local paper of the period that the Cox factory was the source for William Morris's Sussex chairs.<sup>364</sup> They certainly were later the source of Heal's version of a Sussex chair (Heal's model no.1406 – Cox no. 3041, see illustration Fig. 2-237). However the only known surviving catalogues for the firm show that they were capable of making every sort of chair from basic church and schoolroom chairs to reproductions of fine 18th century antiques but do not help in answering this riddle.<sup>365</sup>

The very simple rush-seated ladderback chairs with deep, straight stretchers, retailed by Heal & Son from 1905 onwards as model numbers '953' (armchair) and '954' (no arms) were supplied to them by Cox (Fig. 2-241, 2-242).

In the last few years, amongst dealers in furniture specialised in this period, these chairs have become known as "Letchworth Chairs", and the design has been ascribed to A.H., because they were used by Heal's when they furnished two cottages constructed as entries for the "Cheap Cottages Exhibition" at Letchworth Garden City in 1905. (One of the cottages was by the architect Lionel Crane whilst the other was by the architectural partnership Smith & Brewer). Subsequently Heal's kept these chairs in their range for many years so a considerable number of them were sold.

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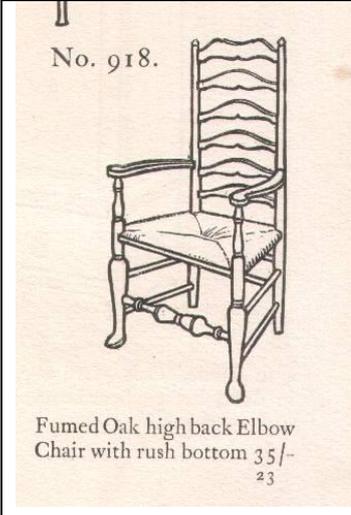
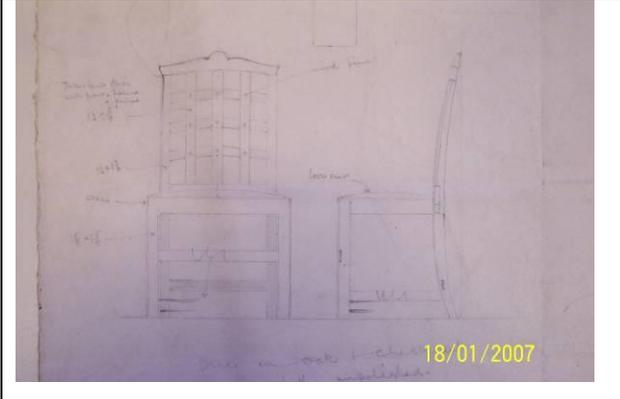
<sup>362</sup> Letter from Dr Catherine Grigg, Curator, Wycombe Museum, 29.12.2006. See also B.D. Cotton, *The English Regional Chair*, Antique Collectors Club, 1990, p 43.

<sup>363</sup> Bucks Free Press, *Round the Trade – The High Wycombe Factories*, 16.03.1900.

<sup>364</sup> Bucks Free Press, *Round the Trade – The High Wycombe Factories*, 16.03.1900. In describing a visit to Messrs Cox & Sons, Oxford Rd the journalist wrote: *A very large business is also done in the rush seats which Morris revived and for which his firm has always been the great customer. Most of these rushes are imported from Holland.*

<sup>365</sup> Held as part of the Pratt Collection at Temple Newsam House, Leeds, ref. 10.1/72 to 10.343/72. I am grateful to James Lomax, Curator, for access to copies of these.

Cox chairs

 <p>No. 918.</p> <p>Fumed Oak high back Elbow Chair with rush bottom 35/- 23</p>	
<p>Fig. 2-234. '918' ladderback chair first catalogued by Heal's 1897 (H&amp;S catalogue)</p>	<p>Fig. 2-235. '918' ladderback from Ambrose Heal's own collection. (Author)</p>
	
<p>Fig. 2-236. Similar ladderback chair from A.H.'s collection. Was this the vernacular prototype for the Cox production model? (Author)</p>	<p>Fig. 2-237. '1406' 'Sussex type' chair. Cox no. 3041. A.H. collection. (Author)</p>
 <p>18/01/2007</p>	
<p>Fig. 2-238. A.H.'s design for portcullis back chair (AAD)</p>	<p>Fig. 2-239. Armchair version of portcullis back chair 'D1020a' (Millinery Works).</p>

Whilst it seems evident that A.H. designed the oak dining table, bench and dresser that forms the rest of this suite (all of these items were at some time manufactured in Heal's own factory, although the table was also subcontracted), the similarity between the chairs and those designed by the architect Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott (1865-1945) is noteworthy and raises questions of paternity.

The chairs designed by Baillie Scott were 'manufactured' by J.P. White, The Pyghtle Works, Bedford and are illustrated in that firm's 1901 catalogue along with other items of furniture by Baillie Scott. The arm chair, model number 8, cost £1. 15s. 0d., whilst the side chair, model number 9, cost £1. 7s. 0d. in oak. Heal's, incidentally, retailed their version some years later for £1. 2s. 6d. and 12s. 6d. respectively. Pauline Agius in her book *British Furniture 1880-1915* notes that J.P. White stopped promoting the Baillie Scott range after 1905 and returned to concentrate on making garden furniture which raises the question whether the rights to these designs passed from White to Cox at this point.<sup>366</sup> No records from the Pyghtle Works that might throw light on the subject have survived as Baillie Scott's archives were destroyed in a fire in 1910.<sup>367</sup> Neither does the High Wycombe Museum have any records of the Cox business that might help.

From the Heal archives Cox's reference number for this chair would appear to have been 'No.3' for both the dining chair without arms (Heal model '954') and the dining armchair (Heal model '953'). There was also a child's version (Heal model '950' with arms, '951' without, - Cox no. 1. and no. 2.), a high-chair version (Heal model '909', - Cox no. ?) and a low-seat version with a lower back having only three horizontal splats (Heal model '952', - Cox no. 4.). Credence is given to the hypothesis that the Cox-made chairs were not exclusive to Heal's by a brass plate of the retailer Druce & Co, Baker Street, that a dealer recently removed from one of them "in order to avoid confusion" – in other words, although it was originally sold by Druce, today it would be more saleable as a Heal's chair. Other chairs with plates

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<sup>366</sup> Pauline Agius, *British Furniture 1880-1915*, Antique Collectors Club, 1978, p.126.

<sup>367</sup> Letter to the author from Caroline Bacon, Curator, Bedford Museum, 18.07. 2006. In addition according to Diane Haigh, author of the book on Baillie Scott's houses, *J.P. White destroyed all their records when the firm stopped trading*. Letter to the author, 23. 09. 06.

Cox , Heal & Baillie Scott Chairs

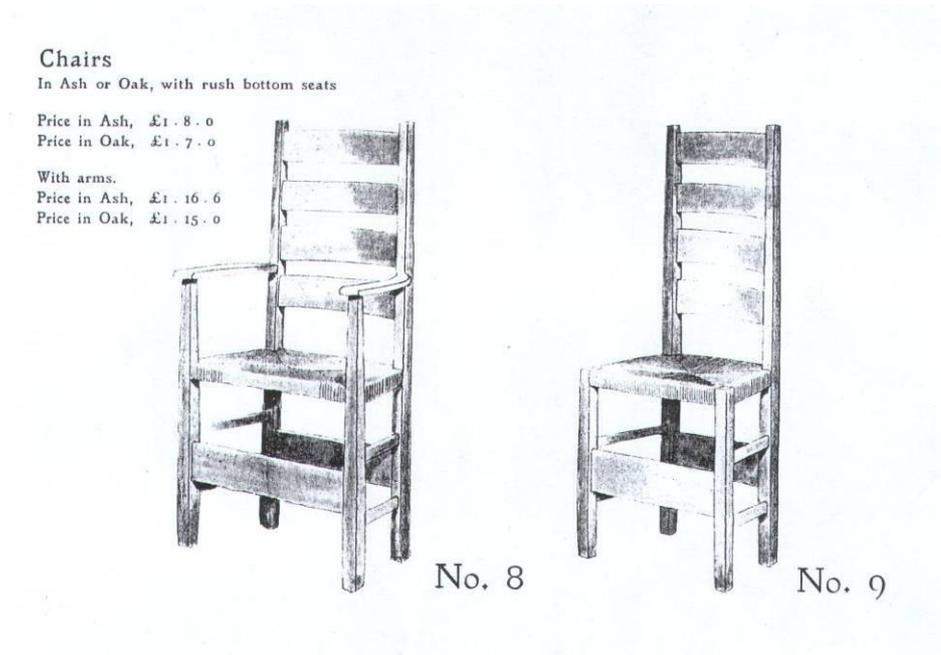


Fig. 2-240. Chairs designed by M.H. Baillie Scott for J.P. White, the Pyghtle Works, Bedford around 1900, as illustrated in their 1901 catalogue. (Manx Museum)

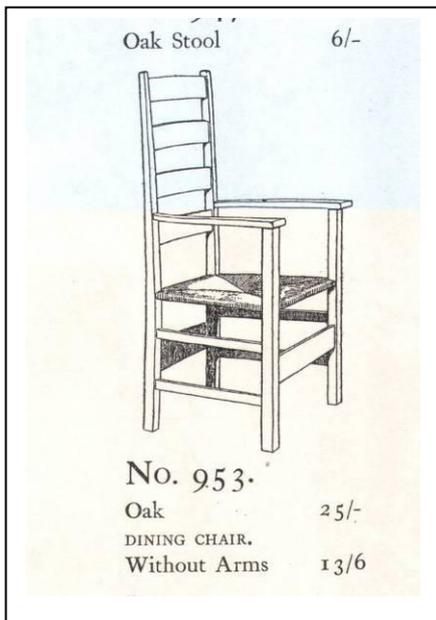


Fig. 2-241. the Heal version of the chair supplied by Cox from 1905 onwards. Cox model no. 3, Heal model no. 953. (H&S catalogue)

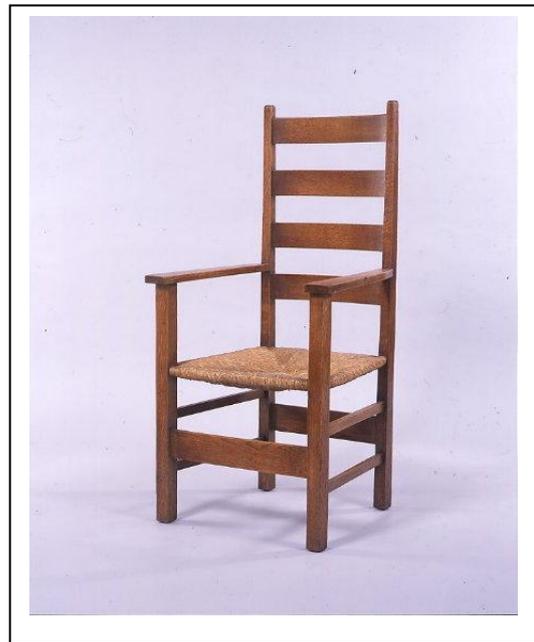


Fig. 2-242. One of the surviving chairs. Although the catalogue illustration remained unchanged later versions had a back leg that was shaped. (Millinery Works)

from other retailers have also been heard of.<sup>368</sup>

It seems possible that when J.P. White stopped making Baillie Scott's designs, Cox (perhaps encouraged by Heal) took up making the chairs as one of their standard models and this happened to coincide with the Letchworth Garden City Cheap Cottages Exhibition. An alternative and perhaps an even more probable hypothesis might be that Cox were the manufacturers of these chairs all along, supplying them to White before they supplied them to Heal's. It is quite likely that White, as a small manufacturer of cabinet furniture like Heal's, did not make all their own chairs but bought them in from a specialist such as Cox. If White dropped the Baillie Scott range in 1905, Cox would have then been free to place the model elsewhere. Interestingly, it was probably at about the same time that Shapland & Petter started using inlay motifs that are very similar to those designed by Baillie Scott for J.P.White which might provide corroboration for the theory that the architect's designs then became available for wider distribution. However, the fact that Gustav Stickley also produced his version of that chair design across the Atlantic is not linked to these events as he had already got his version into production in 1902 soon after the J.P White catalogue had been published.<sup>369</sup>

Whatever happened it seems erroneous to ascribe the design of these particular chairs to A.H. Relationships between A.H. and Baillie Scott do not indicate any ill-feeling over this matter as it is recorded that Heal & Son furnished Baillie Scott's cottage at Gidea Park in 1911.<sup>370</sup>

Cox also supplied Heal's with Windsor chairs that were sold as part of the 'Cottage Furniture' collection, (Fig.s 2-243, 2-244, 2-245, 2-246, 2-247) the most distinctive being the 'Gothic' lattice backs (H&S model '926'/Cox model 2506), although versions of the traditional wheelback came too from Dancer & Hearne and later Goodchild.

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<sup>368</sup> Conversation with Chris Scorey, Southampton, 2006.

<sup>369</sup> David Cathers, *Gustav Stickley*, Phaidon, 2003, p 44.

<sup>370</sup> R.W. Kornwolf, *M.H. Baillie Scott and the Arts & Crafts Movement*, John Hopkins Press, 1972, p 421.

Chairs by Cox for Heal's Cottage Furniture Catalogue from c1905.



Fig. 2-243. Three seater wheel back settee model No. 923 (H&S catalogue)



Fig. 2-244. "Lattice Back" Windsor chair model 926 and 927 with arms. Cox model no. 2506. Priced at 11s 6d. (H&S catalogue)



Fig. 2-245. Three seater stick-back settee, model no.932, Cox no. 2288. (H&S catalogue)



Fig. 2-246. "Wheel Back" Windsor arm chair model no. 931. Cox model no. 533. Priced at 17s 6d with bowed stretcher and arm supports this was an up-market model and few were sold. (H&S catalogue)



Fig. 2-247. Windsor chair sold in quantity. Model 921. Cox model no. 11. priced at 6s 6d. (H&S catalogue)

Amongst the relatively small number of surviving design drawings in the archive of Heal documents, held at the Archive of Art & design, is A.H.'s sketch for his own 'portcullis-back' dining chair in an Arts & Crafts style ('D1020'), thought to be from 1916, on which he has written that the chair was to be costed by Cox in Chestnut and Oak, both unpolished (their price in chestnut with the seat in lining was 28s 6d.). It seems likely therefore that Cox was the maker of this sturdy well-proportioned chair, whose subtle curves demanded great accuracy of work and is one of A.H.'s most satisfactory designs. The drawing details the dimensions of the legs and the ovolo moulding required on the legs and seat. It was made in both timbers and later also sold in walnut and a less expensive variation was introduced without the horizontal slats in the back (Fig.s 2-238, 2-239).<sup>371</sup> The front stretcher rail, initially right at the front between the legs, was subsequently moved back a third of the way to form an H with the side stretchers. Sometimes surviving chairs are found with a chamfered detail to the legs instead of the ovolo moulding and with the horizontals of the back rest to the fore, rather than the verticals as originally designed. All of this evidence tends to suggest that Cox was not the only manufacturer to make these chairs for Heal's.

The Cox factory seems to have closed down around 1935 at which point production of the 'Letchworth' chairs was taken over by another High Wycombe firm, Boreham.

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<sup>371</sup> See AAD/1994/16/819.

### **2.3.6 Small Makers**

Heal's had commercial relationships with a number of small cabinet-makers to whom they could turn when they needed extra capacity or specialist skills. Little is known of many of these beyond their names. For example Cooper made tables that on other occasions were made in house and their quality was so good that they were even entrusted with the making of 'Signed Edition' furniture but no more information about them has yet emerged. Mansfield seems to have developed from making relatively simple products to producing the brilliantly veneered macassar ebony bedroom now in the Victoria & Albert Museum. William Rowcliffe was another maker whose services were called upon for particular designs but whose work is very little known. For the first time personal research has revealed previously unknown details of these last two makers that are therefore recorded here.

#### **2.3.6.1 William Rowcliffe**

In 2005 I visited William Rowcliffe's granddaughter Mrs Barbara Fenton who told me that William had been a cabinet-maker *who had worked for Heal's and made furniture for the Paris Exhibition*. It seemed that not only had Rowcliffe worked for Heal's but so had his son and grandson, E.J. Rowcliffe, Mrs Fenton's cousin, who has lived in Australia since the War. Subsequently I was sent some photographs of furniture made by William Rowcliffe but was surprised to find these were mainly very finely made reproduction pieces. Although these pictures confirmed that Rowcliffe was evidently an exceptionally fine cabinet maker they were difficult to reconcile with working for Heal's. However there was one photograph of a desk on the back of which is written *made by W. Rowcliffe for Mrs Maufe* which provided a clue that started to unravel the story (Fig. 2-251). This confirmed that Mr Rowcliffe had not worked on furniture for the 1900 Paris Exhibition but had made the desk designed by Edward Maufe for the 1925 Paris exhibition. This is the desk now preserved at the V&A and which featured in their 2003 Art Deco exhibition complete with its silver gessoed finish and its silk tassle handles. From correspondence with Mr E.J. Rowcliffe in Australia it was learnt that William had lived and had a workshop in North Wembley running his own business until it burnt down,

Rowcliffe Furniture



Fig. 2-248. Commode with painted (?) panels inlaid for unknown client (Rowcliffe).



Fig. 2-249. Commode with marquetry inlays for unknown client (Rowcliffe).



Fig. 2-250. Appears to be Harlequin Pembroke table after a Sheraton pattern. For unknown client (Rowcliffe).



Fig 2-251. Maufe designed silver gilt writing table for Heal & Son, 1925 (Rowcliffe).



Fig. 2-252. secretaire for unknown client (Rowcliffe).



Fig. 2-253. Bureau bookcase with roll top for unknown client (Rowcliffe).



Fig. 2-254. Writing table with tambour roll for unknown client (Rowcliffe).



Fig. 2-255. Writing table as 2-254, open (Rowcliffe).

after which he was apparently employed by Heal's as a cabinet-maker until he retired in about 1935.

Research in the Heal stock-books revealed that in 1921 Rowcliffe appears as a supplier making two mahogany dining tables, both with semi-circular ends, the first (no. 80) in a Hepplewhite style was 9ft 6in long and a few were sold, the second (no.99) was picked out in black. He also supplied a mahogany writing table. His name still occurs in the suppliers column of the stockbook right up until 1939 when the mahogany and black dining table (No. 99) was finally sold off having been reduced from £27 to £14 10s 0d. This does not mean that he was still working independently until then, but simply that Heal's still had the original model in stock.

According to his grandson, when Rowcliffe joined Heal's as an employee, he worked in *the little workshop, not the big main workshop*, where his son H.J. Rowcliffe also worked. H.J. Rowcliffe remained with the firm until 1940/41, being part of the Heal's Home Guard and E.J. Rowcliffe, the third generation of the family, started work in the main workshop aged 14 towards the end of 1939 and stayed a year before moving on to wartime aircraft work elsewhere.<sup>372</sup>

### **2.3.6.2 C. Mansfield & Sons**

Mansfield was one of the small local cabinet making workshops that built up a very close working relationship with Heal's during the period under review to the extent that examination of the surviving records conveys the impression that they almost functioned as an extension of Heal's own workshop. For example the No. 7 "Letchworth" dining table in fumed oak (Fig. 2-104) was made by Heal's when it was first introduced in 1905, then subcontracted to Mansfield from 1906 to 1909 before being taken back 'in-house' again. Mansfield's contribution to supplying the 'Cottage Furniture' range was considerable as, for a period before 1910, they made not only the refectory table No. 7 but the circular tables No.s 8 (Fig. 2-125) and 9

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<sup>372</sup> Visit to Mrs B. Fenton, Pinner, 06.05.2005 and subsequent correspondence with Mr E.J. Rowcliffe, N. Queensland, Australia.

(Fig. 2-126) and the dressers '507', '510' (Fig. 2-111) and possibly '505' (Fig. 2-105) as well, before these were made by Heal's Cabinet Factory. But it would be incorrect to classify Mansfield just as makers of such simple furniture for they were also capable of more sophisticated work.

The Mansfield family originated from the Birmingham area and Charles Frederick Mansfield (1836-1917) was so poor that he had to walk to London from Birmingham when he decided to seek his fortune there in the late 1850s. In the 1851 census he had been recorded as an errand boy but by 1861 he was living in a Soho slum with his wife and first son. Somehow he got employment with a cabinet maker and in due course two of his sons – Charles (1860-1936) and John Henry, known as 'Jack', (1865-1934) joined him there too. Around 1880 trade went through a bad patch and the three, in order to try to bring in some money made some furniture at home on the kitchen table. This was loaded onto a barrow and wheeled up Tottenham Court Road until it was sold to some of the retailers there. Encouraged by this experience they rented a shed in Priory Place, Camden where they started their own furniture making business. Kelly's Directory of 1894 records Charles Mansfield & Son as retail cabinet makers in Priory Place, Bonny Street, Camden Town, N.W. although it must have been about this time that they moved to larger premises in Albert Street.<sup>373</sup> A.H.'s personal address book which he was using at around this time records them as makers of "Sheraton Furniture" at 131 Albert Street. Business built up to such an extent that they were able to move to Priory Works, Jeffreys Place, off Priory Place, around 1910, where they rented two floors in a factory building. By then the business was known as C. Mansfield & Sons, wholesale cabinet makers, and it continued trading in this manner until 1932 when Charles and Jack retired leaving the business in the hands of their younger brother George (1878-1958) and one of Charles's sons, Frank (1892-1950). At this point the business was reduced in size, only occupying one floor of the factory and was also converted from a partnership into a limited company. George retired after World War Two and so Ted Goldsmith, the foreman cabinet maker, joined Frank as the second director. Through the Second World War they had managed to survive by getting war contracts but after, with the shortage of

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<sup>373</sup> Information on Mansfield furniture firms in the Kelly's Directory kindly supplied by J.E. Bedford, Evan Bedford Library of Furniture History, 18.04.2005.

timber supplies, business became increasingly difficult so that when Frank died in 1950, it finally folded and was absorbed by Bianco.<sup>374</sup>

Although they sold to other retailers, Heal & Son were their major customer as it seems that Jack, who took care of sales whilst Charles junior looked after design and production, had built up a friendship with both Ambrose Heals (senior and junior) through a shared interest in local history.

In 1900 Mansfield was supplying one bedroom suite model to Heal's; by 1910 this had risen to 13 different models; in 1925 there were 9 models and even in 1935 there were still 5 suites available. Of the thirteen models listed in the stockbooks for 1910, four were illustrated in the Heal catalogue of the period and could be described as sober contemporary reinterpretations of traditional themes.

- No. 391, the "Kelmscott" suite in fumed oak with ebony and boxwood inlays, £16. 0.0. (almost certainly an A.H. design) (Fig. 2-256).
- No.403, the "Melton" suite in mahogany, with satinwood bandings, 50 guineas (Fig. 2-257).
- No. 405, the "Newstead" suite in walnut or mahogany, £20. 0. 0. (Fig. 2-258).
- No. 446, the "Eynsham" Sheraton suite of mahogany, inlaid satinwood, £40 0. 0. (Fig. 2-259).

As is clear from the first paragraph, they could cope easily with Heal's basic 'Cottage Furniture' designs but inlaid mahogany was really their speciality. The "Eynsham" suite demonstrated an ability to lay decorative veneers and this skill was one that Heal's were to call upon between the wars for special pieces of furniture, particularly when J.F. Johnson designed his '888' bedroom suite in macassar ebony, inlaid with ivory lines and with ivory knobs. This was in 1926 and this excellently made, up-market set of furniture, inspired by the 1925 Paris Exhibition of 'Arts Decoratifs', and which is now preserved in the Victoria & Albert Museum, was made in the Mansfield works. It includes a wardrobe, cupboard chest, dressing table (with shagreen covered tops and triple mirror), bedside cabinet and a tall narrow cabinet

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<sup>374</sup> I am much indebted to Mr John Gough, grandson of Charles Mansfield, for the information concerning the history of the firm. Interview 29.10.2007.

(Fig. 2-261).<sup>375</sup> Another piece also designed by J.F. Johnson was an inlaid mahogany book table ('379') and, although the first two were produced by the Heal factory, eight more were subsequently made by Mansfield. It is interesting that A.H.'s design for sideboard '726' which dates from 1920 and was an early one to feature veneered blockboard doors should have been made by Mansfield (Fig. 2-260).

In the late 1920s Heal's obtained orders to supply furniture to a number of Westminster Bank branches and many of the special writing tables in mahogany in a variety of sizes were made by Mansfield.<sup>376</sup> However a particularly prestigious order also confided to Mansfield was that for new tables and chairs for Westminster Abbey's Jerusalem Chamber that are still in use today. A.H. designed these in waxed walnut veneers and solids at the request of the Very Reverend William Foxley Norris, Dean of Westminster at the time. There were two tables, 8ft x 3ft 9in, on pairs of turned legs (similar to No. 148) for £95 and one, 10ft x 3ft 9in, with three legs at each end for £130. The edges of the tables have carved decoration and a carved inscription on the underside of the top of the longer table records details of this transaction in 1928.

In 1930 A.H. personally went to the new offices of Punch Magazine in Bouverie Street in order to look at the famous 'Punch table' into the top of which many famous personalities have carved their names over the years. He came away with an order to design and make a new underframe in English oak to support the old top, that measured 12ft x 6ft, and also to supply a new 5ft circular table on an octagonal base made in walnut.<sup>377</sup> The making of these two items was delegated to Mansfield even though contemporary press reports indicated they had been made in the Heal & Son workshops.<sup>378</sup> Sadly the records of who made the fourteen 'small' chairs and two 'elbow' chairs that formed part of the Punch order have not survived.

Even as late as 1935 Heal's were calling on Mansfield for assistance with major

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<sup>375</sup> V&A Furniture Department Register no.s W3 to W13-1975.

<sup>376</sup> Branches supplied in 1928/29 included: Borough High Street, Mincing Lane, Lothbury, Leadenhall Street.

<sup>377</sup> Ambrose Heal notebook AAD/1994/2/383.

<sup>378</sup> Connoisseur, August 1930.

special orders. One notable case was an order from Cambridge (University or Council?) for three very large tables. The making of these was spread across three different factories, one being made in Heal's own factory, another by Cooper, whilst the third, an 18ft by 13ft council table in British African mahogany was made by Mansfield.

Contract orders were no problem as in 1934 they were amongst the manufacturers (Green & Vardy and Bianco were the others) to make furniture for De Havilland's offices. For the Athenaeum Club in 1936 it was again Mansfield who made the 12 chests, tables and luggage stands required and more hotel furniture was supplied for Browns Hotel and Bridge Hotel, Arundel.



Fig. 2-256. '391' "Kelmscott" suite in fumed oak with ebony and boxwood inlays, 3ft 6in wardrobe, £16 0 0. Manufactured by Mansfield (H&S catalogue).

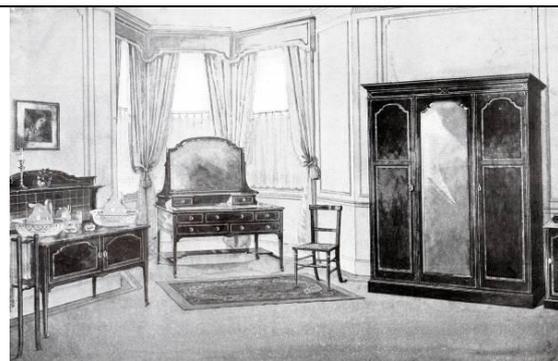


Fig. 2-257. '403' "Melton" suite in mahogany with satinwood bandings, 6ft wardrobe, 50 guineas 1910. Manufactured by Mansfield (H&S catalogue).

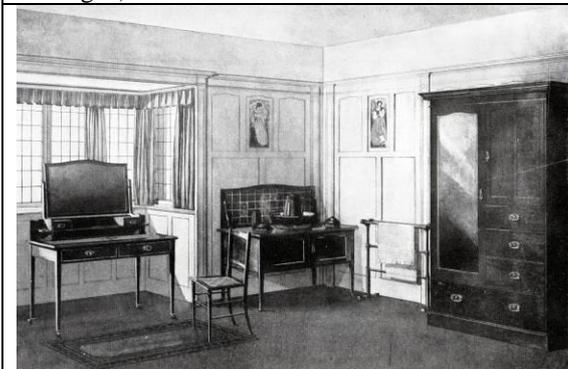


Fig. 2-258. '405' "Newstead" suite in walnut or mahogany, 3ft 6in wardrobe, £20 0 0, 1910. Manufactured by Mansfield. (H&S catalogue)

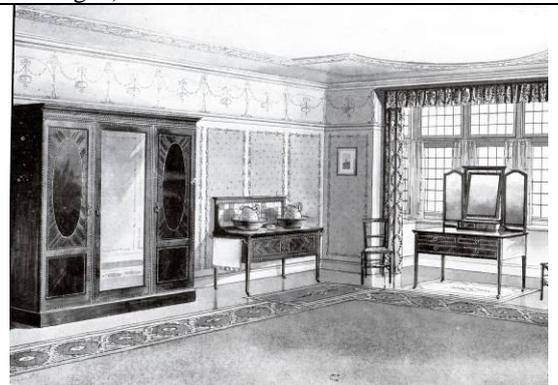


Fig. 2-259. '446' "Eynsham" Sheraton suite in mahogany inlaid Satinwood, 6ft wardrobe, £40 0 0, 1910. Manufactured by Mansfield (H&S catalogue).



Fig. 2-260. '726' mahogany sideboard inlaid with ebony and box, 4ft 6in, 1920, A.H. design manufactured by Mansfield (AAD).



20.2 J. F. Johnson, cupboard. Macassar ebony veneer with ivory inlays.

Fig. 2-261. '888' macassar ebony with ivory inlays wardrobe – part of suite. JFJ design manufactured by Mansfield 1926. (V&A: W.8-1975 illustr. in Benton, Benton & Wood 2003)

## 2.4 Cabinet Factory Conclusion

What conclusions can be drawn from this examination of the output of Heal's own Cabinet Factory and the work of a number of other suppliers?

Perhaps the most significant result of the study is the revelation that, despite AH's reputation as the man responsible for building the bridge between Arts and Crafts ideals and mechanised production techniques, the furniture produced by the Cabinet Factory was essentially handmade and produced in small quantities. Before examining that reputation and trying to produce some explanation for it, in the light of this knowledge, the size and output of the Heal Factory needs to be put into context.

It is difficult to find reliable comparative figures but there is no doubt that the Heal workshop was a relatively small one. It is estimated that there were between twenty and thirty cabinet makers,<sup>379</sup> at a time when major firms such as Shapland & Pether were employing four hundred, and Lebus (perhaps the largest) over one thousand at the same period. Another comparison may be made with Maples, a little further up Tottenham Court Road; a similar set-up of retail shop with its own production facility behind the scenes, but who employed 1295 people in manufacturing, albeit this figure included factories other than the cabinet factory. At the other end of the scale, although Sidney Barnsley worked alone, Ernest Gimson was, by 1914, employing nine woodworkers and Ashbee's Guild Of Handicraft had ten in the mid-1890s and perhaps as many as fifteen after moving to Chipping Campden.<sup>380</sup>

At Heal's there was no batch production (i.e. stocks of parts made in batches of 6, 12 or more for later assembly) and certainly no mass-production. Pieces of furniture were made one-by-one to order and many remained one-offs that were never

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<sup>379</sup> Jo Brandt, *Raising a Standard*, based on interview with Anthony Heal

<sup>380</sup> Mary Greensted, *Gimson & the Barnsleys*, Evans Bros., 1980, p 158. also Alan Crawford, *C.R. Ashbee*, p 282.

repeated, although others remained in production for years. Even models that were successful and regularly repeated, remaining available for as long as twenty years, never achieved enormous quantities in production. For example the St Ives bedroom suite ('no.222'), in production for fifteen years and one of the best sellers of its period, was made around two hundred times. Although this exceeds the sort of quantities produced by a more exotic cabinet maker like François Linke who might only repeat an article three or four times (despite having some 120 employees), it is nothing compared to the quantities made by 'mass-production' firms like G-Plan in the second half of the century for whom a batch size of 400 to 800 was normal, and success was a chair of which 2000 per week were produced for fifteen years.<sup>381</sup>

The pivotal role of the foreman C.V. Adams in setting up and running the Cabinet Factory has been pointed out and there are similarities between the Heal Cabinet Factory and the Guild of Handicrafts furniture workshops from whence he came. Apart from its size and what seems to have been a similar level of mechanisation, the similarity in looks of the products of the two units in the early days is remarkable. (I have suggested that the evidence does not support the theory that A.H. copied Ashbee). What emerges very clearly from this study of Heal's output is that the fashion for that chunky, slightly-medieval, Arts & Crafts furniture made initially by both Ashbee and Heal, suddenly stopped in the early years of the twentieth century (90% of the St Ives production was made before the end of 1902 even though the model continued to be available until 1910). A.H. succeeded in moving his designs forward to a more delicately refined look in a way that Ashbee did not which might explain, in part, the collapse of the Guild of Handicrafts.

However, although AH's designs evolved, the manufacturing techniques of the Heal Factory did not and it appears that Adams and the men continued to work in the same traditional manner using solid timbers, mostly oak, right through to the mid-twenties. As fashion continued to evolve after the war and more decorative finishes were

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<sup>381</sup> G-Plan figures from conversation with Les Dandy 21.09.2007. (Les Dandy was Design Director for E. Gomme Ltd/G-Plan from 1960 to 1984). For more information on François Linke see Christopher Payne *François Linke, 1855-1946, The Belle Époque of French Furniture*, Antique Collectors Club, 2003. For example p 438 Louis XIV style 'bureau plat' was made at an average of almost 2 per year over a 12 year period.

required Heal's inevitably found themselves subcontracting work increasingly to other manufacturers whether it was for veneering or lacquering.

What has also been shown is that A.H. developed working relationships with other factories that were prepared to operate as though they were almost extensions of Heal's own Factory. Some provided services that were not available "in-house" such as lacquering (Coote, Scuffell, Rowley) and chairmaking (Cox) whilst others seem to have had very similar levels of skill and operated as alternative capacity (Mansfield, Cooper). Traditionally retailers have not revealed their sources of supply so this study provides a valuable insight into some of the normally hidden manufacturers and their relationship with a key retailer.

The desire to make well designed products available to a wider public, combined with various economic crises, put pressure on prices and also led A.H. to source merchandise from fully mechanised factories, capable of making at very competitive prices. It would appear to be in this area that more research would be required to establish the foundation for A.H.'s reputation as the man who made good furniture available to a larger audience by the use of machinery. Whilst in the very early days of its creation the Heal Factory might have been regarded as mechanised and modern - particularly in comparison to those members of the Cotswold school who were rejecting machinery completely, - it has been shown beyond doubt that, by today's standards, its output was hand-made. Even at the time Heal's advertised their own furniture as being 'handmade'.<sup>382</sup> Yet A.H. was hailed by writers like C.H.B. Quennell (*It can very truly be said that Mr Heal has revolutionised the design and production of furniture on a commercial basis*) and Egan Mew, who wrote, in 1905:

*During the past ten years, no one has given more useful and intelligent study to the application of machinery in the manufacture of what is at once beautiful and useful than this firm... Of late the firm have set themselves the by no means easy task of providing the necessary articles for bedroom use at prices that shall come within the means of the modest man, and yet be well-constructed,*

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<sup>382</sup> Although most of the work carried out in the workshops of Ernest Gimson and Sidney Barnsley was done by hand, both workshops were equipped with a circular saw so the rejection of machinery was relative and the difference to Heal's workshop even smaller than might be thought. Mary Greensted, *Gimson & the Barnsleys*, p 166. For example see *Bystander* October 1905 for *Hand-Made Furniture* advertisement.

*simple, convenient and entirely satisfying to the senses.*<sup>383</sup>

A study of the Heal & Son general catalogues, at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, reveals three bedroom suites which are recognisably designs by Ambrose Heal, yet were not made in the Cabinet Factory. These were:

- Suite no. '391' Kelmscott at £16 in fumed oak, made by Mansfield.
- Suite no. '416' Lechlade, painted dark green, at £9. 9. 0. made by Miller.
- Suite no. '431' in spruce, at £6. 6. 0. made by Paul.

The first, '391 Kelmscott' was not that much cheaper than what A.H. could produce in his own factory and, as has already been discussed, the relationship with Mansfield was such that production from the two factories was very similar. (Fig. 2-256) However, at a time when the average price of a Cabinet Factory-made suite was around £20, it can be seen that the other firms, Paul and Miller, could offer more easily affordable ranges and undoubtedly it is as a result of getting such 'well-designed' pieces made by factories more accustomed to churning out less 'artistic' products that A.H. acquired his reputation.

'416 Lechlade' is interesting in that from the stockbook it can be seen that in 1905 the first suite was actually made by the Cabinet Factory and painted by Coote, but from 1906 onwards it was manufactured entirely by Miller. However right from the start A.H. had intended for it to meet the nine guinea retail price point and the selling price remained unchanged. The Factory/Coote total cost price had been five shillings higher than Miller's and had obliged the retail shop to accept a reduced margin during that first year of only 25%. Miller's costing allowed a 28% gross profit which was much closer to the cabinet department's average gross profit of the time. (Fig. 2-262)

'431' in spruce was the design that was later reworked and extended in oak for the abortive John Dawson project. Originally dating from 1905 it sold in some quantity before the First World War and stands out as a particularly crisp, well proportioned, functional design. (Fig.s 2-218, 2-223) It is probably on the success of making available bedroom suites like these that A.H.'s reputation of the time was built.

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<sup>383</sup> Egan Mew, *A Note on Bedroom Furniture*, Simple Furniture catalogue, Heal & Son, 1905. C.H.B. Quennell, *The Case for Modern Furniture*, Country Life,

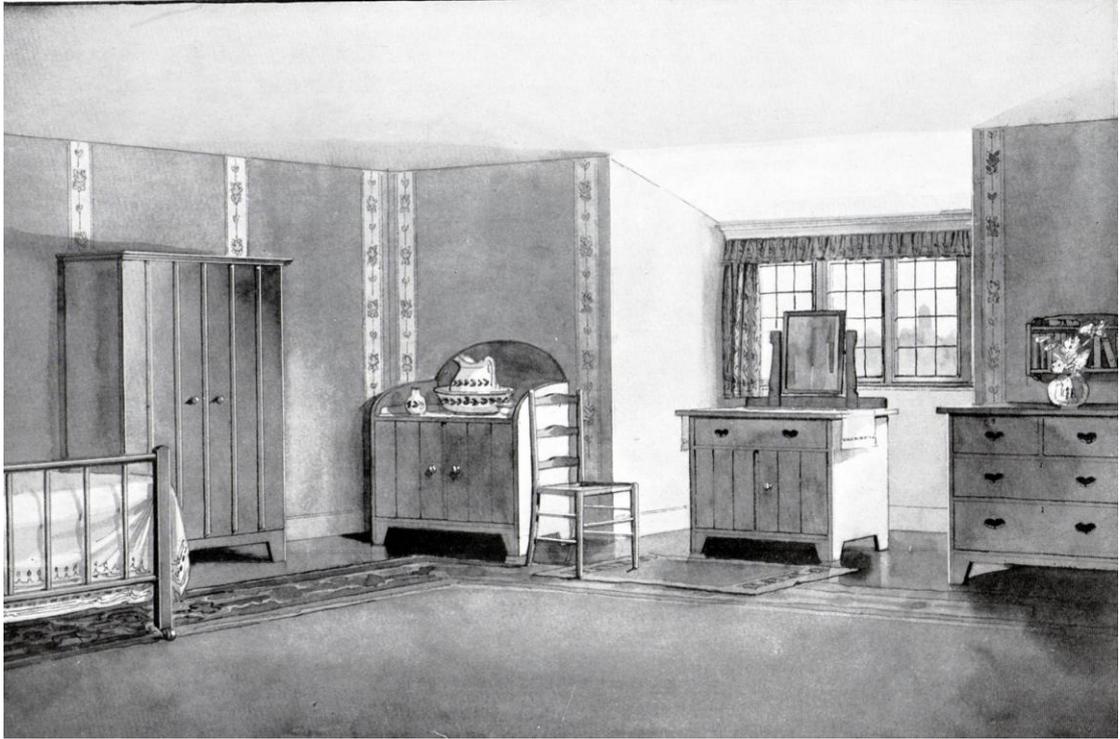


Fig. 2-262. '416' Lechlade suite painted white or dark green, including 3ft 3in wardrobe, cost £9 9 0, manufactured by Miller from 1905 onwards. (H&S catalogue).

Between the Wars the firm of Greenings in Oxford carried on this role of making more economically priced furniture to Heal's designs and much 'typically' Heal furniture was made by them. By that time however A.H.'s reputation as a champion of mechanised production was long established.

Nowadays A.H. is sometimes dismissed as a 'derivative' designer. Whilst his thoughts on design will be considered in a later chapter, the evidence assembled here on the output of his own factory has already demonstrated that his designs were, on the whole, deliberately inspired by historical precedents and might therefore be viewed as derivative. He was, however, working before the period when originality and modernity (in a 'Modernist' sense of a complete rejection of precedent) were considered the most important features in a designer's work. For him the lessons of the great furniture makers of the past were essential to producing good designs for his times and deriving inspiration from them was laudable and quite the opposite of today's deprecatory view. It is evident from the number of historical styles he studied and reinterpreted that he consciously explored different facets of furniture design for different interiors. His designs, however, were clearly early twentieth century A.H. designs and in no sense reproductions. At the same time his sources of inspiration were strictly selected to represent what was considered at the time the very best of the English tradition – the work of the great 18th century cabinet makers – but stripped of any decorative excesses. Victorian styles or French traditional styles were rigorously ignored as being unsuitable for the English 20th century home in line with architectural thinking of the period.

On record here for the first time are two attempts to 'think outside the box' by firstly designing a unit furniture system, well ahead of the normally accepted invention of such a thing, and secondly the idea to mass-produce simple furniture for distribution on a national basis. Neither project was successful but one might conjecture that, had either of them worked, A.H.'s reputation today might be quite different.

The analysis item by item, as well as the chapter on labelling, will enable collectors, dealers and future historians to date and identify Heal furniture far more reliably than has hitherto been possible. It should be noted however that a substantial proportion

of the Cabinet Factory's output each year was accounted for by special orders. These could be slight variations on a standard product or completely different products designed and made uniquely for a particular client. The stock-books only contain the briefest details on these but where an order stood out because of its unusual dimensions, timber or price these have been recorded in the text (and summarized in an appendix) as they too provide an insight into the capability and flexibility of the Factory. What emerges is that major 'contracts' were few and far between and although there is evidence of a hotel (Standard, Norrköping, Sweden), a hospital (King Edward VII, Midhurst), a town hall or two (Reigate, Bognor Regis), and a boardroom or three (Vickers Maxims, Merz & McClellan, Roe), the vast majority of the work was for domestic clients.

The gradual expansion of the range from a concentration on bedroom furniture in the early years to include more and more pieces of dining and living room furniture over the years has been demonstrated. The number of bedroom suite designs available from the Factory shrank, from over twenty before and after the First World War, to less than ten in the 1930s, whilst the selection of bookcases, bureaux, sideboards and dining tables grew and grew. This reflected the changing role of the Cabinet Factory over the period. Whilst in the early days the Factory was able to supply some 40% of the retail shop's cabinet furniture turnover it was outrun by retail growth. As the volume of Cabinet Factory output remained fairly static and eventually dwindled and the retail department sourced more and more from outside, the Factory's contribution to retail sales had dropped to 24% by 1910 and to less than 14% through the whole post-war period. The function of the Factory was no longer to produce the retail department's bread and butter but to produce the icing on the cake.

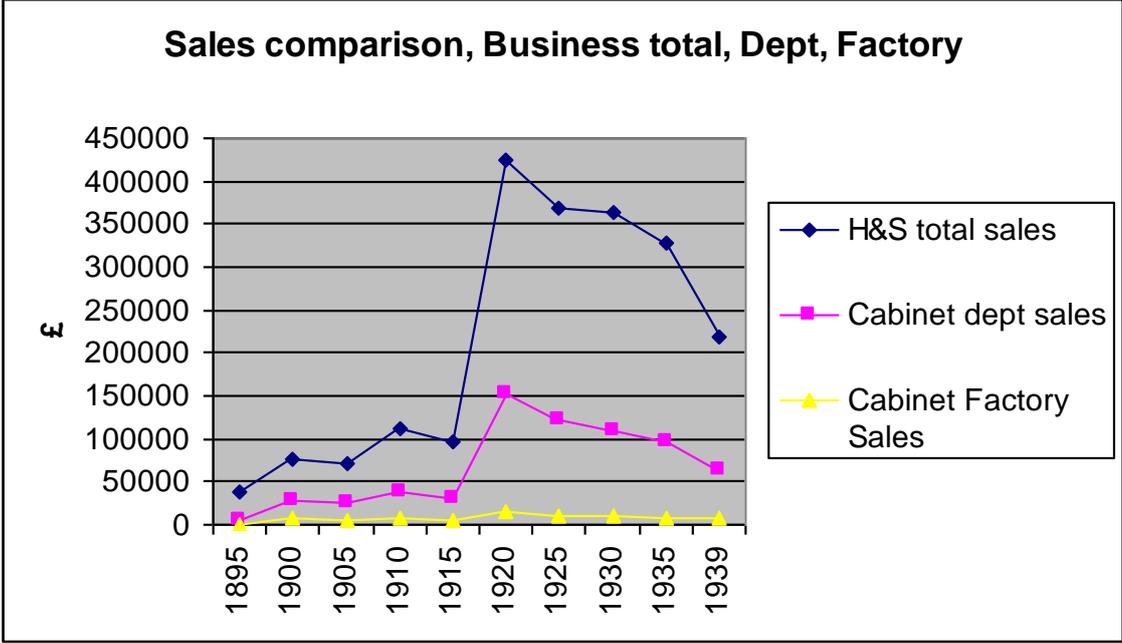


Table 1. Graph showing comparison of sales for the entire Heal & Son business with the Cabinet Furniture Department and the Cabinet Factory. This illustrates how the Cabinet Factory was supplying 40% of Cabinet Department's sales in 1900 but that then the rest of the business grew much faster and the Factory's sales significance dwindled.