LANGLEY PARK TABLES

A pair of George II mahogany side tables
Attributed to William Hallett Senior, *c.*1750
Each with a verde antico marble top, on a carved frame.

Size of each
Width: 60 in. (152.5 cm)
Height: 35 in. (89 cm)
Depth: 30 in. (76 cm)





Classical Tables

This richly carved pair of mahogany tables are superb examples of the mid-eighteenth century fashion for Palladian-style classical furnishings, designed to harmonise perfectly with the architecture and accompanying furniture of the house for which they were supplied. These tables come from Langley Park, Norfolk and the room in which they once stood – quite possibly the *original* location for the tables – was furnished with carved and gilded oval mirrors, hung above this pair of tables. White painted and partly-gilded frames which enclosed full length portraits hung on the walls, all of which stood below the rich stucco-work of the ceilings.[1] In the Dining Room nearby, another carved mahogany marble-topped table stood at the far end, beyond a pair of Corinthian columns. These three tables would have been used originally as sideboard 'buffet' tables, designed for the display of silver or silver-gilt banqueting plate during a great feast or celebration: in the dining-room, a wine-cooler filled with bottles on ice was to be placed underneath between the table's legs.

Mahogany furniture of this high calibre was typical of London furniture makers of the middle of the eighteenth century. Dense, high quality mahogany was capable of taking ambitious, rich carving, such as that found on the present tables which is here combined with a crisply carved frieze design derived from classical architecture. The Italianate or antique classical 'Roman' fashion in furniture was to display a rich marble top or slab supported by a wooden, painted or gilded frame, appropriate for a Roman-style banqueting room. This Italian style was promoted by the aesthete, antiquarian and architect, Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington (1694–1753) and his *protégé* the talented designer William Kent (*c.*1685–1748), both of whom had toured Italy together. Here each table displays a rich *verde antico* marble slab, supported by mahogany frames carved with bold classical motifs: the stylised 'Greek key' frieze pattern and a shell – emblematic of Venus, the Roman goddess of love.





The Maker

The cabinet-makers responsible for supplying specific pieces of furniture to Langley Park are not known, although there are payments to a number of major cabinet makers who may plausibly be associated with making or supplying this pair of tables. Langley Park was built in the 1740s for Sir William Beauchamp-Proctor (1722–1773). In the absence of documentation, only an attribution is possible. However, if the tables are original to that house, rather than Beauchamp-Proctor's London house in Bruton Street, a maker with a known association with Matthew Brettingham (1699–1769), and architect of Langley Park, would give weight to an attribution.

There are payments to William Hallett Sr. (*c.*1707–1781) for furniture for Langley Park in the 1740s and these would plausibly form the basis of a convincing attribution for furniture of the calibre of these tables. In 1748 Hallett invoiced Beauchamp-Proctor for '3 large Mahog. Dining Tables to join to Dine from £15.5; Carved & Gilt Picture Frames £9. 10s. Received £64. 13s. 4d. less £5 Recd by 2 tea tables much broke'.[2] Looking beyond Hallett, in the 1750s John Cobb (*c.*1715–1778) and William Vile (fl. 1740–1767) were in partnership with William Hallett Sr and his son William Hallett Jr and invoiced Sir William Beauchamp-Proctor for a quantity of furniture for both his London and his Norfolk seats.[3] There are also payments to another leading maker, William Linnell (*c.*1703–1763) but of an unknown date.[4]

If one considers makers in the circle of Matthew Brettingham, one of the architects of Holkham Hall, an enormous house nearby which was started around the same time as Langley was being constructed, furniture made by William Hallett Sr. for Holkham and elsewhere may be considered as a basis for an attribution. William Bradshaw is also a possible contender, as he supplied furniture for Holkham from 1740 onwards and is recorded still supplying tapestries there in 1773. Interestingly, John Cobb's parents were married in 1705 at Ashby St Mary, just 2 miles to the east of Langley, and Cobb's relations (possibly his nephew) lived at Marlingford, west of Norwich at the time of Cobb's death in 1778. The cabinet-making nexus of Cobb – Vile – Hallett, when combined with Cobb's Norfolk origins cannot be ruled out. William Hallett Senior supplied furniture for Holkham



between 1737 and 1752, and on stylistic and documentary grounds is surely the most plausible candidate for a maker of this pair of tables.[5] The strong character of Palladian architecture on furniture design at that time is visible in cabinets and chairs almost certainly made by Hallett. Few pieces of case furniture may be firmly given to Hallett, and the sole piece which was likely by his or his son's hand was a great architectural cabinet bearing the inscription 'William Hallett 1763, Long Acre'. Other furniture which survives and can be documented as by Hallett include eighteen walnut chairs made for Jacob Bouverie, 1st Viscount Folkestone (1694–1761) for Longford Castle and long set for Arthur, 7th Viscount Irwin at Temple Newsam Hall, Yorkshire.[6] Indeed, on the basis of the foregoing, the set of at least ten armchairs and one settee with an x-frame front leg design (photographed at Langley Park in the 1920s), are likely to be by Hallett. Their Palladian design derives from the set made for George II by Henry Williams for the Queen's Withdrawing Room at Hampton Court Palace, 1737. The design was almost certainly made by William Kent (see D. Shawe-Taylor (ed.), The First Georgians: Art and Monarchy, London, 2014, no. 115, pp. 210–211). Brettingham, Thomas Coke and William Kent were all part of the circle around Lord Burlington, and between them introduced neo-Palladianism into English country house design, including William Kent's heavily Roman-influenced interiors of Kensington Palace (completed 1727) and Lord Burlington's Chiswick House (completed in 1729) and elsewhere.

1, Photographed in 1927 against the window piers in the Dining Room of Langley Park (O. Brackett, 'Langley Park, Norfolk. The Seat of Mrs Barker-Hahlo', *Country Life*, 2 July 1927)

2, William Hallett entry from *Dictionary of British & Irish Furniture Makers 1500–1914*, BIFMO, accessed 17.9.2024

3, From 1754–61 John Cobb worked in partnership with William Vile at Langley Park, a mere two miles from Cobb's childhood home at Ashby, Norfolk. He and Vile charged £130.14.5 for furniture supplied to Sir William Beauchamp Proctor in 1754, see Dictionary of Norfolk Makers, 1700–1840, BIFMO; and Dictionary of British & Irish Furniture Makers 1500–1914, BIFMO, accessed 17.9.2024; John Stabler, *Furniture History Society Newsletter*, 'John Cobb in Norfolk' , February 2006, pp. 7–8. William Vile entry from Dictionary of British & Irish Furniture Makers 1500–1914; BIFMO, accessed 17.9.2024.

4, *Dictionary of British & Irish Furniture Makers 1500–1914*, recorded under entry for William Linnell Norfolk Record Office BEA 305/760, BIFMO, accessed 17.9.2024

5, *Dictionary of British & Irish Furniture Makers 1500–1914*, BIFMO, accessed 17.9.2024 – although payments are for items of lesser furniture.

6, A. Coleridge, 'A Reappraisal of William Hallett', *Furniture History*, 1965, pp. 11–12 and plate II; and R. Bird, 'Visits to Longford Castle', *Furniture History Society Newsletter*, February 2023, p. 34

The Patron and the House

George Proctor (d. 1744), originally from Epsom, Surrey returned to his native England from Venice in 1742 and bought the estate at Langley of some four thousand acres, situated to the east of Norwich, in the county of Norfolk. Proctor asked the Norwich-born architect Matthew Brettingham to build him a country house in the latest fashion, perhaps encouraged by the Brettingham's close involvement in early developments at Holkham Hall, the very large house built near the north Norfolk coast by his fellow grand tourist, Thomas Coke, later 1st earl of Leicester (1697–1759). Although Holkham was not finished until 1765, one of the pavilions was completed by 1741. Langley Park was constructed in brick as a compact seven bay three-storey central block with two-storey pavilions connected by curving corridors. The neo-Palladian concept continued into the interior, decorated with classical low relief sculpted panels inserted into overmantel frames – as at Kensington Palace, Houghton Hall and elsewhere – and ceilings with elaborate stucco work, depicting scenes from classical mythology, including Diana and Actaeon.

Sir George Proctor died in 1744 just two years after purchasing the estate at Langley, and the estate passed to his nephew, William Beauchamp. In accordance with his uncle's will, he appended the surname Proctor to his father's surname, and took over his uncle's Norfolk estate. In 1746 he married Jane Tower. From 1747 until 1768 he was Member of Parliament for Middlesex.



PROVENANCE

Almost certainly supplied to Sir William Beauchamp-Proctor, 1st Bt. (1722–1773), for Langley Park, Norfolk, after he had inherited the newly built house in 1744–45; by family descent until sold by Sir Christopher Proctor-Beauchamp, Bt, Christie's London, 6 July 1995, lot 100.
US Private Collection.

LITERATURE

O. Brackett, 'Langley Park, Norfolk. The Seat of Mrs Barker-Hahlo', *Country Life*, 2 July 1927, p. 18, fig. 4 (illustrated in situ in The Dining Room)
O. Brackett, 'Furniture of Langley Park, Norfolk – I', *Country Life*, 15 October 1927, p. 568, fig. 2
P. Macquoid and R. Edwards, *The Dictionary of English Furniture*, London, rev. ed. 1954, vol. III, p. 290, fig. 46
R. Edwards, *The Shorter Dictionary of English Furniture*, London, 1964, p. 587, fig. 37

IMAGES

Dining Room, Langley Park showing tables: Country Life Picture Library ID:1000680530
https://www.futurecontenthub.com/product/1000680530
Tables: Country Life Picture Library ID:1000680842
https://www.futurecontenthub.com/product/1000680842
Langley Park: Country Life Picture Library ID:1000680864
https://www.futurecontenthub.com/product/1000680864