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Furnishing a city : The design and production of furniture in nineteenth century Sheffield.

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BANHAM, Julie P. (1999). *Furnishing a city : The design and production of furniture in nineteenth century Sheffield* Masters, Sheffield Hallam University (United Kingdom)..



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Abstract

Throughout the nineteenth century furniture was a means of indirect communication. Its style, setting and quality, the ease and manner with which it was displayed all revealed much about the owner, their background and taste. In this respect, this study seeks to discover how furniture was deployed in Sheffield and how such deployment was viewed by the outside world. The thesis will examine the form and development of the Sheffield furniture industry during the nineteenth century as it adapted to the needs and demands of a rapidly growing industrial society and the relationship between client and manufacturer in the light of the social, cultural and economic environment in which they functioned. Chapters One and Three outline the principal factors which I consider influenced the development of the Sheffield furniture industry during this period. An important consideration was to see if the perceived pursuit for novelty and variety - The Battle of the Styles - was sustained in Sheffield or whether other criteria determined how homes in an industrialised but provincial and isolated community were furnished. It will be demonstrated that the Sheffield furniture industry received three consecutive yet overlapping forms of patronage during the nineteenth century which I have labelled Gentlemanly taste, the Sheffield code and Cosmopolitan taste. Evidence for the nature and strength of the Sheffield code will be provided by examining three case studies which demonstrate the furnishing policies of corporate display and personal aggrandisement. It is intended to demonstrate how the local community applied the circumstances of its heritage to contemporary furnishing schemes as tangible manifestations of success. These chapters illustrate the Sheffield code by looking at the use of furniture as a cultural illustration of interacting group interests. The question of radicalism in the furnishing schemes of nouveaux riches industrialists is also considered. In the second chapter the form and development of the Sheffield furniture industry is examined in relation to the environment in which it operated. The size, location, lifespan and services of the various Sheffield furniture trades are reviewed. It will be seen that the majority of firms were small, family orientated, flexible in the number and variety of services they offered, sensitive to the needs of their market and willing to secure some form of training. Many appear to have closely followed changes in fashion but deployed them with care aware of the conservative and parochial nature of their clientele. The final chapter examines the history of one of Sheffield's leading furniture manufacturers, Johnson & Appleyards, and its role in replacing the tenets of the Sheffield code with cosmopolitan furnishing tastes.

Item Type: Thesis (Masters)

Additional Information: Thesis (M.Phil.)--Sheffield Hallam University (United Kingdom), 1999.

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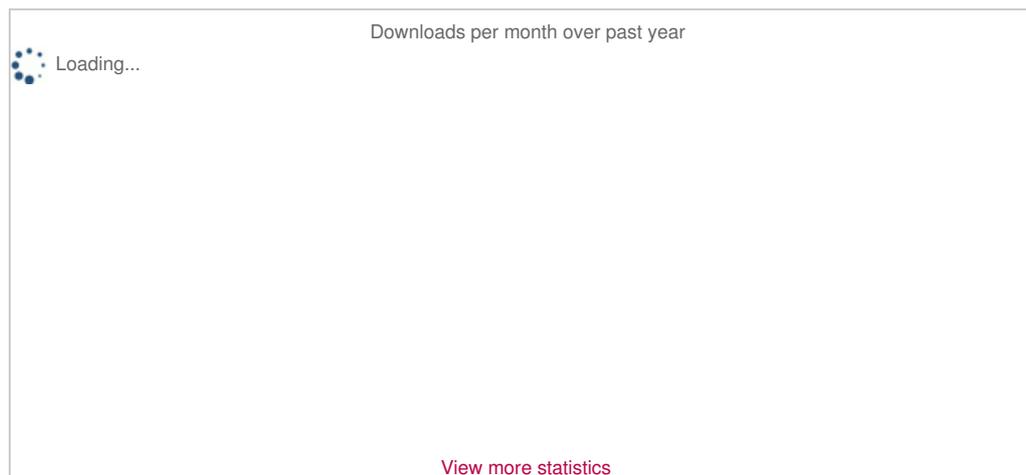
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The most colorful furniture in the country came from Baltimore, Maryland and Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where in the early nineteenth century it was discovered that the ground was littered with chromium, nondescript black rocks whose compounds create vivid greens, yellows, oranges, and reds. The first federal mail carriages—bright green coach bodies trimmed in vermillion, black, and patent yellow—deliver