



## Early 19th Century London Gaming Room

Some notes on two English, Sienna marble chimney-pieces in the French Italian manner, dating to 1827, from the First Floor main room of a large London gaming house.

Research Report  
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*Plate 1: The Italian, Sienna marble chimney-piece on the 1st floor, prior to restoration and re-fitting onto a new Statuary marble slab.*

The decision to remove, for cleaning and restoration, a pair of Sienna marble chimney-pieces carved for the principal front room of a late 1820s London Club, has brought to light a number of features which provide an indication of the complexities of carving large sections of Sienna marble in early 19th century London.

Prior to restoration it was apparent that the nature of the Sienna marble and the availability of such large blocks, with good even veining and few vents, had been a governing feature of their production. The evidence for this could be seen on the chimney-piece from the North West side of the room, where the right hand side of the cornice had been extended, as detailed on the image on **Plate 8**. The extension at the top of the cornice on the right hand side would have been clearly visible to anyone warming themselves by the fire and the addition of an extension can only have resulted from either the block being not long enough or perhaps there may have been a large area of either weakness, faults or uneven colouring. Such is the rarity of finding large, evenly colour and un-fractured blocks of Sienna marble that it is remarkable that the cornice of the chimney-piece in the Southern end of the room did not require a similar extension.

The ensuing dismantling and cleaning of these two chimney-pieces illustrate the nature of Sienna marble and the means by which they were carved by the sculptural studio that carved them, possibly that of Matthew Coates Wyatt (1778-1862).



Plate 2: Detail of a late 18th century statuary and Sienna marble chimney-piece, illustrating the decorative nature of the combination of Sienna and Statuary marbles, that was in fashion from the 1730s through to the end of the Georgian era.

The material they are carved from, Sienna marble, is detailed by Emanuel Mendes Da Costa in his 1757, ‘A Natural History of Fossils VI, Part 1 1757’

*“the moft general colour of this marble is a beautiful yellow, quite plain and uniform, and free from variegations of any other colours; but the yellow of it, in different blocks, is found to be fometimes much deeper, at other times much paler, and near to a fraw colour, and fometimes it is alfo found variegated, in a very beautiful manner, with deep purple, blackifh, and white veins and fpots”*

*“It is a moft beautiful and valuable marble, and capable of an elegant polifh; its texture is extremely fine, compact, clofe and folid, gloffy and fsmooth, but not bright or glittering when broken; it is confiderably heavy and hard, ...The principal quarries of this marble are near Sienna in Tufcany, where it is dug in great quantities; there are alfo feveral quarries of it near Verona”*

(p196-7)

Sienna marble was extensively used, from the 1730s/1740s, within ornamental marble chimney-pieces, the yellow colour of the marble and its deep rich purple veining provided a pleasing contrast with the white statuary marble used to form the chimney-pieces produced during the period. It was particularly used to form columns, such as that shown below.



Plate 3: The Sienna marble chimney-piece in the Elizabeth Salon at Belvoir Castle. The Louis XIV style interior was designed by Elizabeth Duchess of Belvoir in conjunction with Benjamin Dean Wyatt in circa 1825 using elements removed from Chateau of Madame de Mainenon, possibly including this chimney-piece. (Google image sited from [trulymadlydottieblog.com](http://trulymadlydottieblog.com))

However the bulk of the Sienna used for chimney-pieces during the 18th century was veneered, a thin slice, attached usually to a stone liner by the means of shellac (as shown above where the frieze and blocking panels were all constructed from sections of veneer, only the columns being formed from solid sections). Examples of its use are extensive, such as Joseph Wilton, whose account for the provision of marble for the chimney-pieces for the building adjacent to the Strand at Somerset House, between 1779-80, records the

*“Finest strong Sienna Vanner on solid Portland Stone in mantle & jambs the Portland included at £1. 2s. 0d. £44. 7s. 4d.”*

(RIBA CHA 3/3)

Whilst according to William Pain’s 1781 ‘The Builder’s Golden Rule’ Sienna cost between 15 and eighteen shillings “per foot superficial”.

Although extensively used in veneered form for fascia’s, inlaying into white marble, and as a ground with carving applied on to it, the material was occasionally used in solid form, such as for columns as again shown above. Some examples of its use in solid block form are the frieze of one of the rococo chimney-pieces within Isaac Ware’s now demolished Norfolk House or in the closet room at Holkham Hall which has an architrave carved from a single piece, and for the internal plinth blocks of the chimney-piece in the bed room at Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire.



THE MILITARY NAVAL, AND COUNTY SERVICE CLUB, ST. JAMES'S-STREET.—PRINCIPAL DRAWINGROOM.—(SEE NEXT PAGE.)

Plate 4: The gaming room in 1850, then the grand drawing-room of the Military, Naval and County Service Club. The Northern chimney-piece is visible on the left hand side. (Google images)

These are however quite rare examples, but after the peace following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, access to the quarries outside Sienna allowed British masons and sculptors to start importing and using the material again on a larger more monumental scale.

The reasons for this reflect a change in ornamental taste during the 1820s and of particular relevance to the two chimney-pieces discussed here, is the work undertaken at Belvoir Castle by Elizabeth, Duchess of Rutland. The architects involved in the alterations to Belvoir castle in the late 18th and early 19th century were members of the Wyatt family, James (1746-1813) and after his death Benjamin Dean Wyatt (1775-1855) and Matthew Coates Wyatt (1778-1862). The Elizabeth Saloon, created by the later in circa 1825 incorporated original elements from a “Chateau of Madame de Mainenon” including the carved and gilded panels and doorways (Hussey p137). The chimney-piece used within the room is carved from Sienna marble in the manner of Louis XV, as detailed in Plate 3.

The chimney-piece at Belvoir castle may well date to the 17th century and the reign of Louis XV, but the style was shortly to set the fashion for many London drawing rooms. Benjamin Dean Wyatt (1775–1852) is known to have been involved with the decoration, in 1827, of the interiors of the gaming house. Plate 4.



*Plate 5: The Waterloo Gallery on the West Front of Apsley House, which was constructed by Benjamin Dean Wyatt (1775–1852) and completed by 1830. The two chimney-pieces installed are also of Sienna marble and are very closely related to the two restored examples. They may have been designed by Wyatt in the French Italian manner, but were probably executed in England. (Photograph LMA).*

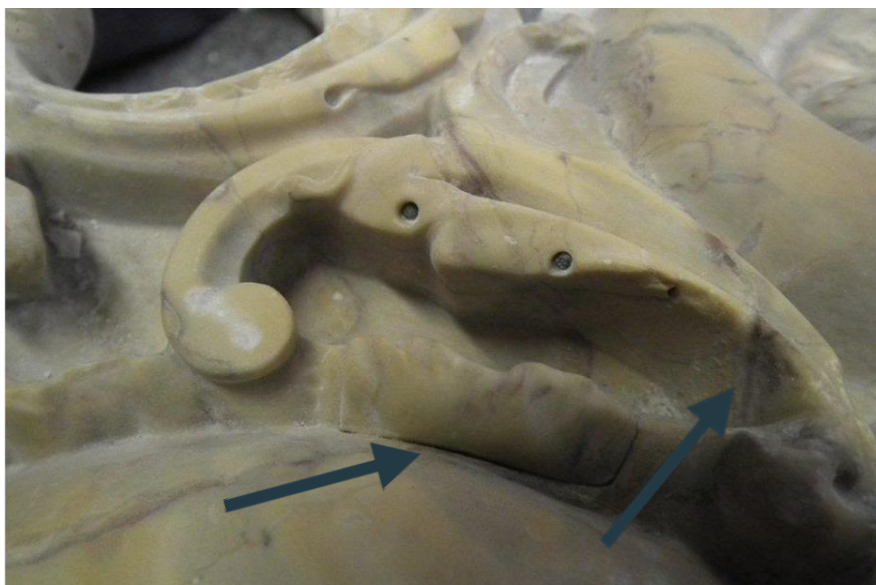
Benjamin Dean Wyatt is now renowned for his striking French Rococo style interiors and was almost certainly instrumental in the incorporation of these two chimney-pieces for he used a similar pair of chimney-pieces, within the Gallery he designed for the Duke of Wellington at Apsley House in 1828-9.

The close similarities between the two pairs of chimney-pieces, suggest that they were commissioned from the same source and from the way these two chimney-pieces were carved we are quietly confident that they were produced by the same London sculptural studio. We have been unable to locate any building accounts but it seems reasonable to speculate that the two chimney-pieces may have originated from the workshop of Matthew Coates Wyatt. He is known to have executed a life size statue of Elizabeth Duchess of Rutland for Belvoir Castle in 1826 and produced chimney-pieces for the Regent Gallery at Belvoir in the same year. His workshop is additionally known to have supplied chimney-pieces for Buckingham Palace in 1829 and was also involved with the bronze equestrian statue of Arthur Duke of Wellington, Constitution Arch, Hyde Park, opposite Apsley house. The status of his brother, Benjamin Dean Wyatt, designing the interiors of the gaming house would put him first in-line for the job of carving the chimney pieces and in the period it is hard not to see why Benjamin Dean Wyatt would not have secured the contract for the provision of the chimney piece for his brother.



Plate 6: Detail of the back of one of the chimney-pieces, showing the wrought iron cramp which has been leaded into the back of the frieze, to prevent a natural fracture line present, moving or separating. Numerous such cramps were required to re-enforce both the back of the frieze and underside of the shelf or cornice sections of both chimney-pieces.

Plate 7: Detail showing two of the pins and a third hole, used to secure a replacement section of Sienna marble set into the frieze section of one of the chimney-pieces. The joint line for part of the repair has been highlighted with arrows.



Whilst restoration work was in progress, a detailed examination of the problems of manufacturing chimney-pieces from Sienna marble became clear. Large blocks of Sienna marble, with even colouring and striations have always been difficult to locate, even in the 18th century when the demand for the finest possible marble for chimney-pieces produced in England was enormous. This appears to have still been the case in the third decade of the 18th century when these chimney-pieces were made. For structural reasons, the main body of the frieze required cutting from a single block, but these blocks were frequently vented and substantial re-enforcements were required. During the period this re-enforcement work was commonly done by inserting iron cramps, with ‘dogged ends’, which were let into rebates carefully cut into the marble and then secured with lead, a feature illustrated in the image on Plate 6, which show cramps let into the underside of the main shelf or Cornice as well as the main body of the frieze. However even with these in place the sculptural studio ran into some difficulties when carving. This is illustrated by the centre section of the carving of one of the chimney-pieces, the cartouche to the centre and the foliage and scroll work to either side required a number of new sections of marble to be let into the marble block, a process discernible during cleaning when the pins used to secure these sections into the main block became apparent (Plate 7).



*Plate 8: Detail of the right hand end of the shelf or cornice from the chimney-piece at the Northern end. The sculptural workshop that produced the chimney-pieces were obliged in this instance to attach an extension to the right hand end, the angled lines and the variations in both the colour of the Sienna marble and the striations passing through it, being clearly visible. The reason for this was probably due to the presence of an ungainly impurity within the original marble block or perhaps more likely the block was just not quite long enough to cut a single slice.*



*Plate 9: Detail of the outer edge of a left hand jamb. A new section of repair has been let into the original, the joint line only being visible during cleaning work, as indicated by the arrows on the image above. The process can be seen to illustrate the savings incurred by minimalizing wastage of the block.*

Construction of the jamb sections would have been less problematical because, due to the different parallels of the jamb (leg) and plinth block sections, these could be executed in a number of pieces, which were then joined together to form a complete unit, a standard process for British chimney-pieces at this date.

By forming these jamb sections from a number of different pieces, those better coloured and less vented sections could be used, but even this process required some splicing in of repairs, presumably either to hide mistakes in the carving process or blemishes within the marble uncovered as sections of the block were cut away to produce the finished form. The quality of craftsmanship is however very high, for the repairs are often difficult to identify, perhaps the best example, being the repair effected to the outer edge of the left hand jamb of the chimney-piece in the North room, where a particularly complicated section has been let in, worked on some five angles and one curve on the replacement section and an equivalent number within the jamb. The joint line is only just visible (see **detail in Plate 9**) The workshop also took to effecting some economies in the cutting away process. Each of the shells (and the section directly behind, as defined by the strap work border) to the centre top of the Truss of each jamb is deeply undercut and projects beyond the profile of the truss. Rather than use a larger block of marble to form the truss and projecting shell, and then cut a great volume away, the shells and strap work behind have been carved out of separate blocks and then joined by the means of a lug set into a recess, the shell held in place by plaster of Paris.



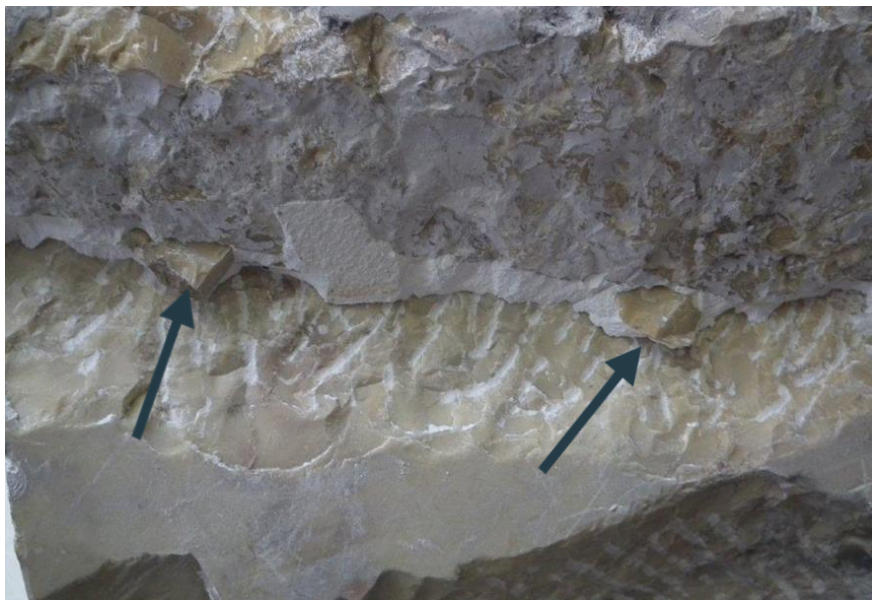
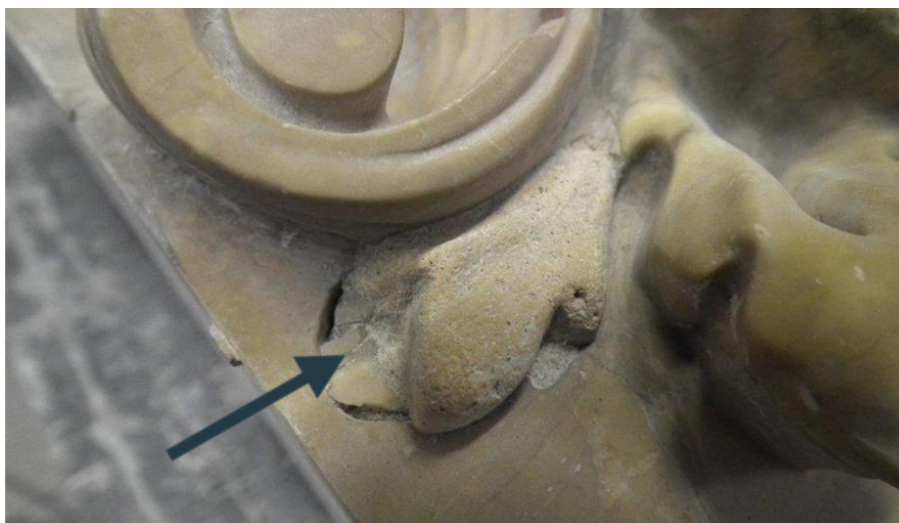


Plate 10: Detail showing how the various sections of marble forming the corner blockings were secured in place. Chippings of Sienna marble, as indicated by the arrows, have been used as an aggregate to re-enforce the plaster of Paris used to hold these elements together. Further re-enforcement was also required in the form of cramps set into holes cut into the top and underside

Plate 11: Detail of the tip of an acanthus leaf to the left of centre of one of the friezes. Much of the tip of the leaf has been replaced in composition. This later repair, probably resulting from the added element being dislodged, has been retained as the recess cut into the main body of the frieze, indicates how repair work, required and effected at the time of construction, was secured by letting lugs into recesses cut into the main body. Such holes would originally have been obscured or lost by a much larger leaf projection.



It would be presumptuous for us to assume that all of the work illustrated in Plates 6 to 11 was definitely effected when the chimney-pieces were made, for some could be later repair work resulting from mechanical damage. However the nature of the material and the high quality of the masonry work required to effect the bulk of the repair work is to such a high standard that it can be seen to indicate that much of this work was done before the chimney-pieces were installed. One element is probably not contemporary; for on one of the friezes one of the acanthus leaves to the centre of the frieze has been replaced in composition. This is almost certainly a later repair, and has been retained as the recess cut into the main body of the frieze, indicates how repair work, required and effected at the time of construction, was secured by letting lugs into recesses cut into the main body.

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