

**An Account by Erwin Ulrix, current owner of the 'Weddington Castle' William IV Bookcase, previously owned by Mr Henry Kay. 21<sup>st</sup> April 2012.**

The story behind my acquisition is the following. I am buying interesting furniture with Christie's and other auctioneers since two decades and have a profound interest in quality George III, Regency and William IV furniture. I had noticed this library bookcase in their catalogue but regrettably I was still in Court (I am a solicitor) when Christie's called me for the usual telephone bidding.

Thus I missed it and regretted that very much indeed knowing Christie's would never reveal the identity of the buyer. One year later my wife called me from Antwerp with her mobile pointing out she had just passed the showroom of an Antwerp Antiques dealer not very far from one of my offices and she believed that this very bookcase was in his showroom... She gave me his telephone number as it figured on his shop window.

I nervously called the man and simply asked whether he had bought it in this very Christie's auction. As he was (reluctantly) affirmative I bought it over the phone and had him bring it to a house I had just finished in Knokke, Belgium. The price he asked is something I am still wanting to forget and the price I paid is something I shall never be able to forget, but for some reason he had sensed I REALLY wanted this splendid piece of furniture and the idea of finally having it came as a great relief.

Regrettably though the panel under the (sliding) writing section is not supportive but merely decorative.

The rest of the unusual construction did not take this into account and that meant that when I bought the bookcase the central doors were literally falling from the piece because the whole central part was seriously and fatally bending through as well as other problems in accordance with age and wear.

This did not show in the Christie's catalogue as they had chosen not to put books (and their weight) into the bookcase... In those conditions it looked alright, although structurally it remained rather hazardous...

The solution has been studied by my father-in-law who is a civil engineer and who designed a totally invisible and reversible steel structure that supports this central part while being totally hidden. I went to great lengths both in time and money to have this then executed by my usual and very able restorers but it still was quite an endeavour as it was not something they were invited to do every day. Two earlier "specialists" had finally abandoned the project before I could ultimately have it executed. But there was no other solution as the bookcase could no longer be used without this intervention as, with any weight put in it (and books can be heavy), the doors simply fell out and the central drawer with a writing slope and pigeon holes blocked before showing signs of further damages...

The whole work has now been done since a year and the bookcase is now perfectly functional and holds an important collection of books on gastronomy as it is gracing a property of a Belgian aparthotel company on the Belgian coast owned by my British holding company.

I have now also acquired another piece of William IV furniture, a rather imposing twin-pillar extending dining table that reputedly has been in the same auction as the aforementioned bookcase, albeit more than a century earlier and that would have been in Weddington Castle also.

The dining table is equally fascinating as it is clearly the same quality as the library bookcase with a rather spectacular extending mechanism. The untouched condition of it makes it a reference for anyone with an interest in early 19<sup>th</sup> century furniture. The current provenance is “by repute” and regrettably the expert in the know (who works for Christie’s), refers to his professional obligation of discretion when I pointed out that more precision, after his slip of the tongue that put me on the Weddington trail, would be greatly appreciated. The first thing that struck me when I saw the table after having bought it, was that it is in exactly the same untouched condition as the bookcase was when I bought it.

As the William IV period was very short indeed, the starting date of any wear and tear of any object of that period is rather precise, and I can tell whether a piece has been touched since its manufacture or not, and, just as the bookcase, this piece had clearly not been touched either and carried very much the same patina.

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