



School: School of Design

Researcher: Andrew Southall

Project Title: Formal Legacies

UOA: 32 - Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

Research Timeline

Date	Rationale of research activities and decisions undertaken
June 2015	<p>Research and preparations made for fabrication</p> <p>The pieces were made having studied typical shaker furniture from a range of sources; in museums including the V&A in London and the <i>American Museum</i> in Bath; a range of archives available online; and using published works including:</p> <p><i>A Place in Time: The Shakers at Sabbathday Lake</i>, Maine Guion Williams, 2006; <i>How to build Shaker Furniture</i>, Thos Moser, 1980; <i>Making Authentic Shaker Furniture: with measured drawings of museum classics</i>, John G Shea, 1971 <i>Making Shaker Furniture</i>; Barry Jackson; 1990; <i>Shaker furniture: The craftsmanship of an American Communal Sect</i>, Edward Andrews, 1937; <i>Shaker: life, Work and Art</i>, June Sprigg and David Larkin 1988 (reprint 1992) <i>Shop Drawings of furniture and woodenware</i>, Ejner Hanberg 1973. <i>The Book of Shaker Furniture</i>, John Kassay, 1980</p>

The key text for this project is John Kassay's *The Book of Shaker Furniture*. Kassay studied original Shaker furniture in collections in the USA and visited *The American Museum* in Bath to make drawings of the *Occasional Table*. His construction drawings and commentary form a detailed analytical documentation of the typological distinctions of Shaker furniture. This is underpinned by an interest in the English working class roots of the founder Anne Lee in the 1750's, the influence of her first marriage and her loss of four children in child birth. Kassay recognises the significance of this trauma in her subsequent emigration from the UK, the founding of the Shaker community and the primacy of its strongly held religious beliefs. The unique communal and formal traditions of the Shaker community are closely aligned with this history.

The Shakers devoted much of their energy to preparing for the imminent second coming of Christ. It was this that led them to create objects with great aesthetic finesse but without celebration of the individuals responsible for their creation. They designed their built environment to be ready for the moment of welcoming. *The Spindle back settee* seems an ideal embodiment of the preparation. It's form combines elegance with discrete practicality and thrift. It was designed to be light enough to be lifted and moved by children and to be sat on with humility and reverence - and a straight back: it is difficult to slouch on this seat.

For this project, the joinery was achieved using hand tools similar to those used in the 1820s. Electric power tools were employed in place of water powered equivalents in Shaker workshops.

The materials used are American Maple & American Southern Pine, imported from America and supplied by *Clarks Wood Co* (now trading as *Premier Forest* <https://premierforest.co.uk/>), Bristol.

Sept' 2015 to
April 2016

Wood preparation, cutting and turning.

The wood turning began with construction of a specially designed "steady rest" (see accompanying photographs), to allow narrow gauge spindles to be produced. For this I utilised my son's cast off skateboard wheels, which I think might have been smiled upon by the 19th Century Shakers, who loved responsive innovation and making use of what's around.

The photographs were made using a plate camera with black and

white negative film, an evolved version of the Calotype process available in the 1840's and concurrent with many Shaker communities.

Progress photographs were made in daylight, in a naturally top lit studio. The kind of environment and with a quality of light that's reminiscent of a Shaker workshop - many of these spaces were beautifully designed and constructed.

April 2016	Photography of finished Spindle Back Settee at Westonbirt Arboretum before (newly in leaf) Maple and Southern Pine trees. Both species are indigenous to North America and were used by the Shakers for many of their joinery projects - The Westonbirt seedlings may well have come from forests used by the Shakers.
------------	--

July to November 2016	Exhibition at the American Museum in the 17th Century gallery, on the main route through the museum. The accompanying diagram describes the installation.
-----------------------	---

Once the exhibition was open, I had time to concentrate on the museum's Shaker furniture and noticed the *Occasional Table* in their collection. Later when looking at *The Book of Shaker Furniture*, I noticed that their table was *the* table photographed for Kassay's book. This serendipity prompted the decision to base my next part of the project on this example.

I wanted to concentrate on exploring the vernacular and anecdotal effects of the Shaker aesthetic and its ethos on contemporary UK practitioners. This object seemed an ideal, easily transportable item for this purpose.

January 2017	Selection and order for English Cherry from <i>Interesting Timbers</i> (https://www.interestingtimbers.co.uk/)
--------------	--

The original *Occasional Table* was made of American Cherry. I decided that for this project I would introduce this design to its European roots by using materials sourced in the UK, instead of using imported American timber. Shakers were keen on using locally available materials, so this decision seemed in keeping with their ethos, whilst at the same time re-grounding the table with its antecedent UK / European design heritage.

Jan' 2017 to July 2018	Construction of the table, using (mostly) hand tools. Design and construction of bespoke packing case with CNC routed foam insert.
------------------------	--

I designed and constructed the case primarily as a means for presentation but also for transportation. By assembling and then deconstructing the components, the object's status as a complete

table is always (and unexpectedly) provisional. The *Occasional Table* is assembled for each discussion and is then separated once more into its component parts.

When viewed in its case, the table has a vaguely unsettling air of a more contemporary hi tech object - like the components of a camera, or a gun... This impression is designed to encourage the viewer to question the object's status. The viewer has to work at understanding the forms more quizzically than they would if it were permanently fixed and finished.

I decided to use the status of the table and case - as adapted cultural artifacts - to promote discourse with a selected range of participants. I chose not to pursue pre-prepared questions but instead to allow associations to arise through the course of discussion. I want these - as yet unknown - associations to form the viewing context for a final exhibition in which the table will be displayed in its presentation box, surrounded by photographs of it in the context of the places where discussions took place.

The discourses take place with a range of people who work in art and design related, or visual disciplines and whose work may have been influenced - in a small or in large part - by the Shaker tradition. I did not start with a list of participants. I have allowed spontaneity and suggestion to guide my choice as I went along, beginning with friends or acquaintances with whom I have worked.

In the exhibition, the location photographs will be accompanied by mounted, printed texts, derived from each of the discussions. Image and text will contextualise and re-present the table to the viewer, whilst the table, presented in its presentation case, remains visible only in its constituent parts.

December
2018

Visit to photographer Paul Hill at the village of Tissington, near Ashbourne in Derbyshire.

Paul was particularly interested in the *Occasional table's* connection to vernacular histories. We talked about the custom of well dressing (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Well_dressing).

The *Occasional Table* was photographed before the well at Tissington.

February 2019

Visit to writer & journalist Jonathon Bastable in Brighton, Sussex.

I was interested in Jonathan's extensive experience of travel in Europe and his knowledge of contemporary art and artists.

July 2019	<p>Visit to artist Angela Cockayne (https://www.angelacockayne.co.uk/) in Falmouth, Cornwall,</p> <p>I spoke with Angela on her landed boat / studio / gallery near Falmouth. I wanted to talk about the <i>Occasional Table</i> in relation to her views and work on environmental issues.</p> <p>The <i>Occasional Table</i> was photographed before her boat <i>Embrace</i> -----</p> <p>Discussion with environmental designer, Ella Fearn (https://uk.linkedin.com/in/raphaella-fearns-6470361a8)</p> <p>My talk with Ella touched on the link between the values imbued in the Shaker tradition and its antecedence in the English Quaker tradition.</p> <p>The <i>Occasional Table</i> was photographed at the <i>Come to Good Meeting House</i>, near Truro in Cornwall.</p>
August 2019	<p>Visit to the Holburne Museum, Bath. Discussion as part of <i>Up Late</i> event with ceramicist Dr Conor Wilson. (https://www.rca.ac.uk/students/conor-wilson/) (https://www.holburne.org/events/up-late-friday-collecting-craft/)</p> <p>I was particularly interested in Connor's views on making and touch, in relation to the fabrication of objects.</p> <p>The <i>Occasional Table</i> was photographed, placed before permanent exhibits and at the Holburne.</p>
October 2019	<p>Visit to Swansea College of Art. Discussion with artist & lecturer Dr Catrin Webster, with an audience of MA students.</p> <p>Catrin is painter and has particular interest in what she calls</p> <p>The <i>Occasional Table</i> was photographed in a lecture theatre at Swansea College of Art.</p>
