

A RECENTLY IDENTIFIED THOMAS HOPE CHANDELIER IN NEW ORLEANS

By MARTIN LEVY

Since the publication of David Watkin's *Thomas Hope and the Neo-Classical Idea* (1968), which included an appendix of 'Surviving objects designed by Thomas Hope',¹ more furniture and works of art, either securely from Hope's collection, or following designs published in his pioneering and influential *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (London, 1807),² have come to light. However, by the time of the 2008 exhibition 'Thomas Hope: Regency Designer', mounted jointly by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London and the Bard Graduate Center, New York, much still remained lost.

Wandering the charming streets of New Orleans, Sazeracs and jazz are among the more likely distractions. But one quiet afternoon, in an '... in all the towns, in all the world ...' coincidence,³ chance and curiosity brought to attention a lost chandelier (Figure 1) made to a design conceived by Thomas Hope (1769–1831) for Duchess Street, his London residence (Figure 2). The chandelier, probably dating to *circa* 1802, now

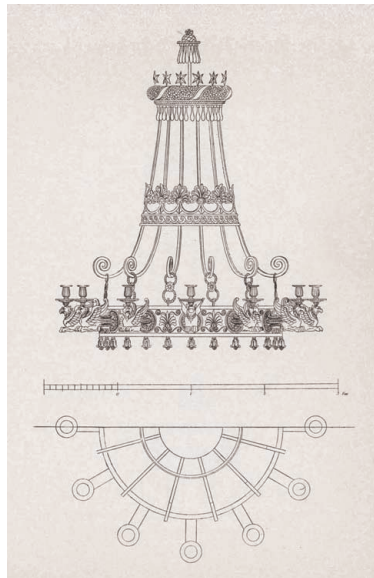


FIGURE 1 (left). Chandelier, English, probably *c.* 1802. Painted and gilded wood, gilded iron, and gilded and patinated bronze (Private collection, New Orleans)

FIGURE 2 (above). Thomas Hope, *Household Furniture*, 1807, pl. XXX



FIGURE 3 (above). The United Fruit Company building entrance, St Charles Street, New Orleans



FIGURE 4 (right). United Fruit Company Building (Times-Picayune archive, New Orleans)

hangs behind the entrance in the 'elevator' lobby of the United Fruit Company Building on St Charles Street, New Orleans (Figure 3), today leased to the Fidelity Homestead Savings Bank.

The United Fruit Company owes its origins to Minor Keith (1848–1929) in the 1870s. The Company was incorporated in 1899, when it combined its operation with that of the Boston Fruit Company; it went on to have a troubled and controversial history.⁴ In 1970 United Fruit merged to become the United Brand Company and, having been taken over again in 1984, five years later was renamed Chiquita Brands International.⁵ But in 1920, at the height of its powers and influence, the United Fruit Company commissioned a prestigious new building from the New Orleans architect General Allison Owen (1869–1951)⁶ of the partnership Diboll and Owen Architects (founded 1895, and under this name 1914–34).⁷

This 'skyscraper' (Figure 4) was praised at the time as 'One of the Most Modern and Beautiful Buildings of this Year' and described as '... a million dollar structure that rears eleven stories of architectural beauty, high up into the skyline ...'⁸ One of the outstanding features was reported to be '... in the panel of the elevator lobby ... the painting by Professor William Woodward, of Tulane University — a West Indian harbor scene, typical of the tropics, symbolic of the company's aims in their particular field of effort.'⁹ The ceiling painting¹⁰ was taken down at an unknown date and, by then cut into strips, restored in the early 1980s; it is now in a private collection.¹¹

The date of the building, just three years after the 1917 Hope sales,¹² and the way the chandelier, in a wonderfully original state of preservation, now blends perfectly into its 'Empire-inspired' architectural setting, would make it seem likely that it was

Owen who made the selection and was responsible for the installation. There is, however, no evidence to indicate that this is the case, and in fact such evidence as can be gleaned suggests that the chandelier may have arrived at a later date.

Despite the chandelier not being identified in either the Christie's or the Humbert & Flint 1917 sales, this is not conclusive evidence that it was not sold at around that date. Both Sir Albert Richardson (1880–1964) and Lord Gerald Wellesley (1885–1972), for example, acquired apparently Hope-provenanced items at this period, but for which there is no definitive documentation.¹³ Although there is scant commentary on the interiors of the United Fruit Company building, the *Illustrated News* did note, in relation to the lobby: 'Your feet slither over a mosaic design, done in imported Italian marbles, then you pass on, through a wide, inviting doorway and gasp, just a trifle in genuine admiration over the rare taste and superb richness of the main office.'¹⁴ Had the chandelier been hanging when the article was written, might it not have garnered a brief mention? But, critically, there is apparently no evidence that there was ever a hole through the centre of the highly praised picture, in the area of the funnel.¹⁵ Had the chandelier been suspended while the ceiling was in place, surely then there would be physical evidence? It is not known when the ceiling was taken down, but it was perhaps at that moment the chandelier was installed? At the time of writing, despite extensive enquiries in New Orleans, no evidence has been found to conclude how long the chandelier has been in place.¹⁶

In 1899 a twelve-branch chandelier that is, beyond reasonable doubt, the one now in New Orleans, hung in the 'Vase Room' at the Deepdene (Figure 5), which had been Thomas Hope's country house.¹⁷ This room, which contained many other items from Duchess Street, London, appears to have been something of a memorial to Hope. In addition to shelves of Greek vases, other pieces that can be seen are three of the four



FIGURE 5. The 'Vase Room' at the Deepdene, photographed for *Country Life*, 1899 (Country Life Picture Library)



FIGURE 6 (top left). New Orleans chandelier: inside of lower rim

FIGURE 7 (above). New Orleans chandelier: lighting fixtures

FIGURE 8 (left). New Orleans chandelier: Vitruvian scrolls and screw

'Egyptian Room' armchairs,¹⁸ a pair of Egyptian-figure candlesticks¹⁹ and a pair of mounted 'Blue John' vases,²⁰ as well as many assembled carved elements. Close comparison between the surviving chandelier (see below) and the 1899 photograph identify specific details that surely confirm that they are one and the same object.

In *Household Furniture* the description accompanying plate XXX (here Figure 2) describes a 'Chandelier of bronze and gold; ornamented with a crown of stars over a wreath of night-shade.'²¹ The New Orleans chandelier matches the description 'bronze and gold', which clearly refers to the finish, not the materials. The protruding griffins, here supporting later double lighting nozzles, are separately depicted in *Household Furniture* in plate LIII, no. 3: 'Griffins of the chandelier, pl. 30.'²² In writing about plate XXX in *Household Furniture*, David Watkin commented on the 'thick wreath of Deadly Nightshade ... surmounted by a diadem of stars — a visual pun suggesting the victory of light over dark.'²³ Despite being an unprecedented visual record of Hope's significant early nineteenth-century London interior, *Household Furniture* does not indicate where the chandelier was hung at Duchess Street, nor indeed if more than one was used.

The first thing to observe in the 1899 photograph is that the inside of the ring supporting the griffins is embellished with applied symmetrical elements between rosettes. This feature does not appear in *Household Furniture*, but is visually complementary to the anthemion decoration on the outside of the rim, between the griffins. The rosettes are a practical addition and presumably mask screws fixing the griffins in place. (Figure 6).

Secondly, the (by then electric) light fittings, with leaves inserted into the candle-shaped sleeves, are two per griffin, and differ from Hope's published design. It is also clear that the principle ring is hung from a double 'rope twist ring and rosette' suspension, corresponding with the published design. At the very top of the chandelier is, evidently upside down, the uppermost element shown in *Household Furniture*, pl. XXX.

Detailed images of the New Orleans chandelier (Figures 6–8) reveal that all the same details seen in the 1899 photograph are, or were, evident. Critically, the inner rim shows the shadow of the applied decoration that was once present and which does not appear in *Household Furniture*; this reinforces the proposition that the chandelier in New Orleans is the one from the Deepdene, and thus almost certainly from Duchess Street. The inner rim decoration, which is a distinguishing feature of the Deepdene/New Orleans chandelier, could not have been created by reference to *Household Furniture*. The double light fittings, which sit on top of what appear to be the original gilt metal 'drip pans', were probably changed when the chandelier was electrified. Given the relatively low strength of early bulbs, it would have been an advantage to double to twenty-four the number of light sources.

The clay, gilding, and painted and bronzed finishes (Figures 9–12), the gilt iron (?) supports (Figure 11) and one revealed screw (Figure 8) are all clear indications that



FIGURE 9. New Orleans chandelier: outer lower rim



FIGURE 10. New Orleans chandelier: griffin



FIGURE 11. New Orleans chandelier: gilt iron supports



FIGURE 12. New Orleans chandelier: crown



FIGURE 13 (ABOVE). New Orleans chandelier: dust on hanging flowers



FIGURE 14 (RIGHT). Metropolitan Museum of Art chandelier

the chandelier is of early nineteenth-century manufacture. The visual evidence suggests that the chandelier has retained its original decoration, which adds to the mystery of where it might have been between leaving the Deepdene and arriving in New Orleans. Had this passed through many hands, the chances are far greater that it would, at some stage, have been brutally restored, as would have been the likelihood at any time during the 1920s to 1980s.

As it survives, the chandelier is now in urgent need of careful and thoughtful attention. The surface is thick with dust that has come in off the street and is eating into the decorative surfaces (Figure 13). There are remarkably few losses to the carving, but the gilding in particular is showing advanced signs of instability and decay (Figure 10); there are many areas where the original water gilding is flaking and in risk of further deterioration. However, given the 'original' status of the surface, the chandelier would certainly benefit from a responsible campaign of conservation.

The discovery of the New Orleans chandelier raises questions about a second chandelier, hanging in the Lehman Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Figure 14), and which has hitherto been considered likely to be the chandelier from the Deepdene.²⁴

It proved hard to measure the New Orleans chandelier accurately, but the overall dimensions appear to be marginally greater than those for the second chandelier. For example, the length of the griffins from the ends of their beaks to the back of their supports is 17.5 cm, whereas on the Metropolitan chandelier this dimension is 13.9 cm. An approximate measurement for the overall width of the New Orleans chandelier is 111.5 cm; this is just less than 44" and seems to approximate to the measurement indicated on the plate in *Household Furniture* (Figure 2).



FIGURE 15 (top left). Metropolitan Museum of Art chandelier: chain

FIGURE 16 (above). Metropolitan Museum of Art chandelier: nozzle

FIGURE 17 (left). Metropolitan Museum of Art chandelier: upper rim

The gilding on the Metropolitan chandelier 'is not entirely original' with work having been undertaken probably in the 1950s, and again in 1992.²⁵ The earlier suggestion, based on comparison with the 1899 photograph, that the chain (Figure 15) and nozzles (Figure 16) are later replacements is incorrect: both appear original.²⁶ Despite clearly modern gilding, the second chandelier can be seen to be of early nineteenth-century manufacture. There are differences in small details between the two: the Metropolitan chandelier, for example, lacks the Vitruvian scrolls within the upper circular rim and the scrolling motifs behind the lower. It is notable, nonetheless, that similarly conceived rosettes behind the griffin supports are present. While, as was noted above, these serve a practical purpose, this is not a feature that the maker could have gleaned from the pages of *Household Furniture*. Thus, it seems likely that the maker of the Metropolitan chandelier had seen the one now in New Orleans. This cannot, in the absence of further evidence, be taken to confirm that both were once in the same collection.

In terms of execution, there are distinct differences between the two chandeliers suggesting that a different hand carved each one. These variations are evident in every detail: for example, the carving of the flowers at the top; the rope-twist band below (Figure 17); the shape of the anthemias; the carving of the griffin wings and their supports; the anthemias around the lower rim, and the shape of the inner rosettes (Figures 18–20). The uppermost element of the New Orleans chandelier (Figure 12) is absent on the Metropolitan chandelier. Close comparison between the two chandeliers



FIGURE 18 (above). Metropolitan Museum of Art chandelier: inner rosettes



FIGURE 19 (top right). Metropolitan Museum of Art chandelier: outer lower rim

FIGURE 20 (right). Metropolitan Museum of Art chandelier: griffins



suggests that the New Orleans version is more lively in its execution, although this is naturally emphasised by the originality of its finish.

There is no evidence to suggest who might have manufactured these chandeliers, although the virtuosic carving on the New Orleans version makes Bogaert at least a candidate. Hope refers to 'two men, to whose industry and talent I could in some measure confide the execution of the more complicate [*sic*] and more enriched portion of my designs; namely Decaix and Bogaert: the first a bronzist, and a native of France; the other a carver, and born in the Low Counties.'²⁷ By the same token, Decaix might have been responsible for the chains and drip pans; certainly the drip pans and nozzles on the Metropolitan chandelier are of the highest order. Based on the system of dating adopted for objects included in the 2008 Hope exhibition, the New Orleans chandelier, if it was made for Duchess Street, should be dated *circa* 1802.²⁸

Mindful of earlier errors in relation to the Metropolitan chandelier, it would be wise to be cautious. Nonetheless, it seems beyond reasonable doubt that the chandelier now in New Orleans, and which dates from the beginning of the nineteenth century, was once at the Deepdene. Thus it seems reasonable to suggest that it might originally have been a part of Thomas Hope's famous Duchess Street interiors.

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REFERENCES

- ¹ David Watkin, *Thomas Hope and the Neo-Classical Idea* (London, 1968), Appendix E, pp. 256–58.
- ² See David Watkin and Philip Hewat-Jaboor (eds), *Thomas Hope: Regency Designer*, exhibition catalogue (New Haven and London, 1988), cat. no. 113 (entry by David Watkin), for a brief commentary on *Household Furniture*.
- ³ Rick's (Humphrey Bogart's) memorable greeting to Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) in *Casablanca* (1942).
- ⁴ See Peter Chapman, *Bananas: How United Fruit Company Shaped the World* (Edinburgh, 2008).
- ⁵ <http://www.unitedfruit.org/chron.htm>.
- ⁶ Owen was an architect, soldier, and civic and religious leader. He attended Tulane University (1885–88), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1892–94), and the United States War College in Washington, D.C., in 1924. Important examples of Owen's work include the New Orleans Public Library, Criminal Court, Milne Home, St Francis of Assisi, Canal-Louisiana Bank and Office Building, Municipal Office Building, Metropolitan Bank and Office Building, Prytania Street Presbyterian Church, Notre Dame Seminary at New Orleans, Westminster Congregational Church at Kansas City; St Joseph's Church at Mobile, and many other church and school structures in New Orleans and other cities of the South. For more on Owen see <http://specialcollections.tulane.edu/archon/?p=collections/findingaid&id=452&q=&rootcontentid=89565>
- ⁷ http://seaa.tulane.edu/sites/all/themes/Howard_Tilton/docs/finding_aids/Diboll%20and%20Owen,%20Ltd.%20Office%20Records.pdf
- ⁸ *Illustrated News*, July 1921, p. 20.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ¹⁰ See Robert C. Hinkley, *William Woodward American Impressionist* (New Orleans, 2009), pl. 129.
- ¹¹ Joelle Hirabayashi, who undertook the restoration, confirmed to Rachel Weathers that it had been cut into eight strips, and had a section missing from the edge.
- ¹² Notably: Christie, Manson & Woods, 18–19 July 1917, *Catalogue of Objects of Art, Porcelain, Old English and Other Furniture Being a Portion of the Heirlooms Removed from Deepdene, Dorking the Property of Lord Francis Pelham Clinton Hope*, and Humbert & Flint, 12–14, 17–19 September 1917, *The Property of Lord Francis Pelham Clinton Hope. The Deepdene, Dorking, Surrey ... The contents of the Mansion Embracing the Costly Appointments of 40 Bed Rooms, Billiard Room, Statue Gallery, Nine Reception rooms, Halls and numerous Offices*. For a fuller selection of Hope family sale catalogues, see Watkin & Hewat-Jaboor, op. cit. (see n. 2), p. 508.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, nos 96 (Wellesley) and 97 (Richardson).
- ¹⁴ Loc. cit. (see n. 7)
- ¹⁵ The author is grateful to Joelle Hirabayashi for this information, transmitted by Rachel Weathers (e-mail dated 3 November 2014).
- ¹⁶ The chandelier is not the only major Hope-provenanced piece to have emerged in the southern United States. A painted and gilded table was given in 1949, unrecognized, to Hickory Museum of Art; see Watkin & Hewat-Jaboor, op. cit. (see n. 2), no. 78.
- ¹⁷ Photographed in 1899 by *Country Life*, but not published at the time; reproduced in John Martin Robinson, *The Regency Country House* (London, 2005), p. 188.
- ¹⁸ Watkin & Hewat-Jaboor, op. cit. (see n. 2), no. 77.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 72.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 70.
- ²¹ *Household Furniture*, p. 38. The influence on the design of Percier and Fontaine is discussed in Watkin and Hewat-Jaboor, op. cit. (see n. 2), under no. 94. For a note on the extent to which Hope was himself fully responsible for the designs that he published as his in *Household Furniture*, see Watkin and Hewat-Jaboor, p. 371.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- ²³ Watkin, op. cit. (see n. 1), p. 195

²⁴ Watkin and Hewat-Jaboor, op. cit. (see n.2), no.94, and Wolfram Koeppe, Clare Le Corbeiller, William Rieder, et al., *The Robert Lehman Collection XV Decorative Arts* (New York, 2012), no.258. On both occasions, the lack of finite evidence led the present author to be cautious in ascribing absolute certainty to the chandelier's Duchess Street and Deepdene provenance, although this was thought likely. It is regrettable that neither entry was written following a close, first-hand inspection of the chandelier.

²⁵ Koeppe, et al., *ibid.*, p.288.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

²⁷ *Household Furniture*, p.10.

²⁸ Watkin and Hewat-Jaboor, op. cit. (see n.2), p.371.