GOTHIC FORMS
APPLIED TO DOMESTIC FURNITURE
AND DECORATION BY
BRUCE J. TALBERT

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BRVCE · J · TALBERT ·

#666

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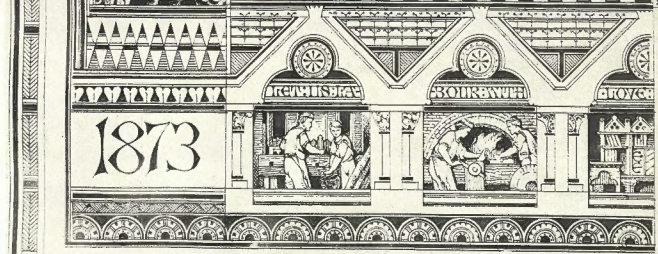
GOTHIC FORMS

APPLIED TO FURNITURE METAL WORK AND DECORATION FOR DOMESTIC PURPOSES BY B. J. TALBERT ARCHT LONDON

JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY
LATE TICKNOR & FIELDS AND FIELDS OSGOOD & CO.
BOSTON
1873



FLAT
FOLIO
NK
1840
.T3
1873

CONTENTS.

GOTHIC FORMS,

APPLIED TO

FURNITURE DECORATION, &c.

INTRODUCTION.

IN the following Remarks on Gothic Woodwork, there must necessarily be a repetition of opinions already known and acknowledged by many; but this may be excused when applied in reference to Furniture only, the subject being a difficult one, and rendered still more so by the varied personal tastes existing among those who have given it attention. It is true that there are a few examples of the later period of Gothic Furniture to which we can refer, yet it is impossible to find precedents for Domestic Work of early date. The few specimens that remain may serve to point out the path to be taken, but demand a certain amount of invention before they could either fulfil the purpose, or give the comfort now necessary to us. Where a repetition of 15th or 16th Century work is desired, it is easy to obtain Furniture corresponding; but it is more difficult to procure that which shall be in keeping with the purer early styles. An attempt has therefore been made in this series of designs and sketches from existing work, to be of some help in supplying this want; but as each building has its own peculiarities, requiring a distinct treatment, it is considered that the principal use of the work may be of a suggestive nature. If it fulfils this, the purpose is served; for the Furniture of any room requires to be in unison with the Architectural Fittings; and, to attain this, it is necessary to have the designs made expressly for the apartment.

Work executed so far back as the 12th and 13th Centuries is distinguished by great breadth and simplicity; but these qualities gradually give place to a lavish display of ornament, which is usually but a repetition of the tracery, buttresses, and crocketting used in stone work; and, though this may not so objectionable in Church requirements, the use of these forms gives a monumental character quite undesirable for Cabinet Work. In those old works the wood is solid, the construction honestly shown, and fastened by tenons, pegs, iron clamps, nails, &c. It is to the use of glue that we are indebted for the false construction modern work indulges in: the glue leads to veneering, and veneering to polish. There is the use as well as abuse of all things; and, though the Ancients did not understand the mysteries of the glue-pot, it would now be folly to ignore it because so often

basely employed. The arch is noble construction; but still one does not despise the mortar, and it is in this light that glue should be used; for, if our furniture be designed as constructively as possible, the addition of glue to the tenons and other parts seems to be right and justifiable. In regard to veneer, its abuse has been so great, that it is difficult to say any thing in favor of its use. The natural flow of fibre in all woods is very beautiful; but, unfortunately, this is too often the chief consideration both with the buyers and manufacturers of present furniture; and consequently we have thin films of the choicest-grained woods thoughtlessly spread over a deal carcass composed of pilasters, cornices, panels, and mouldings; the whole being brilliantly polished, such treatment rendering any design vulgarly pretentious. If it is impossible in choice woods to have it solid, and essential that the rich grain be made prominent by polish, why not use such precious articles sparingly? inserting them in small panels as ornament, and leaving the constructive parts of plainer wood, with dead surfaces, thus allowing the plain parts to give contrast and value to the other. Polished or not, the smallest and richest pieces of every choice wood might be used advantageously in this manner. But there must be an honest discretion in these things; for the indiscriminate employment of veneer, glue, sand-paper, polish, and the cutting of straight-grained wood into wanton curves, is opposed to the common-sense as well as the spirit of all Gothic Work. We have in old carpentry work such construction as on plate 26 A, where a simple cross-stretcher on the back of a few boards forms a door; or there are cases where the putting-together is on the same principle as packing boxes: in the first instance it would likely be strengthened by wrought-iron straps — and in both cases it is carpenter's work; but, for cabinet makers, the principle of framing every part is obviously the proper method; and large thick pieces forming the principal part, or the complete side, of such articles as Cabinets, Bookcases, &c., is to be avoided. If it is desirable to mould or chamfer the edges of framing, the rails may be moulded by the plane, and stopped against the stiles; stiles will then require to have the chamfer chiselled with stops (or *vice versa*). In old work, both are usually stopped: yet it seems desirable that the plane should have the preference, for it is exactly to wood what the chisel is to stone.

Inlays of different woods should be designed in geometrical patterns; the large pieces being put in with the vertical grain, and the smaller as pegs showing the cross-grain. They should be of a good thickness, so that they may be hammered in; and any design that has flowing lines, intersections, or any great minuteness, becomes at once more applicable to Marquetry Work, — viz., veneers cut with the saw. In how far this class of work may be used, it would be difficult to determine, most modern efforts at Gothic Cabinet Work indulging in it largely, as it is the very thing for prettiness and elegance. Marquetry, therefore, may be admissible in the panels of a delicate drawing-room article: if color is wanted, there is the choice between the tiny, flowing lines and conventional flowers of marquetry, or paint; but it should not be used in any of the constructive

framing; and where the furniture is massive, or of coarse-grained wood, as oak, geometrical inlays are a preferable mode of decoration, the flowing lines being left to the gouge and parting-tool of the carver.

The finishing of oak furniture should be according to circumstances: where simply oiled, and placed in a clear country atmosphere, it may be kept clean with care; but in the murky air of large towns there is no effectual manner of preventing articles that require to be often handled from being smeared, except by polish. There is a dead polish used (receipt is appended) which answers this purpose without the glitter of French polish, or destroying the natural tone of the wood. Oak is sometimes stained before polishing, — an operation that gives the wood an unpleasant appearance, and retards the natural, rich, mellow tone from being developed.

When metal work is used, it should never be, as often done in common work, viz., as a piece of decoration, but performing some purpose, — either strengthening, or as hinges or bands: for a wooden panel, covered with very rich wrought iron work, as ornament merely, even though decorated with gold and color, must prove disagreeable: on the other hand, placed as a grille in an opening, or to act as a guard, the result is pleasing; for it then assumes the office of protector to articles inside. When wrought iron is used, it may be finished by being galvanized, or picked out with color, the one of the background governing the same. In the event of color being intended, the leaves should be flat, both the color and form being conventionalized; for if the leaves be natural, and colored green, it will have a weakly appearance, and the imitation will surely be a burlesque of the real flower, the material being more suited to express strength with good form than the tender manipulations of nature.

Before making any comment on the following sketches, it may be as well to go separately over the principal portions of a modern house. In the Entrance Hall there is a good opportunity for the display of massive work; and, if any part of the interior should have a feeling akin to carpentry, it is here. The Hall Table, however plain, should have mass; and, instead of chairs, benches are preferable, having loose seats covered with leather. All the furniture should be kept plainer than the principal object, viz., the Staircase, which should also determine the material and the whole surroundings. The Dining Room and Library are also well adapted to give scope to the Gothic style: it can dispense with the amount of florid decoration that is needful with Elizabethan or French work; and whatever amount of severity, size, and dignity may be obtained in these rooms, will but serve to give greater value to the elegance and lightness necessary for the Drawing Room. If it is not convenient to have the Dining Table in one piece, such a design as in sheet No. 11 is equally applicable to receive the movable slides to shorten and lengthen it, as in any other class of design; or, instead, there might be two or three tables of equal size to go together as required. The

sideboard, being the chief piece of furniture, should receive the greatest attention; and if it is desirable to raise it up for the purpose of keeping and displaying plate, china, or porcelain, metal work and tapestry can be used to advantage. The sideboards in sheets Nos. 10 and 17 dispense with the high back, and the only question of expense are the inlays.

The greatest difficulty to deal with is the Drawing Room: there has been little attention paid to the subject, and the requirements are directly opposed to what is generally considered to be in the spirit of Gothic design. A massive feeling for the Dining Room and Hall seems right; but, for the Ladies' Room, lightness and grace ought to be aimed at: to attain this without an expression of feebleness or wanton curvature is not easily done, and to leave the framing of the woodwork light enough leaves little scope for any characteristic treatment. But, after all, the most important part of the appointments in a Modern Drawing Room are the textile fabrics that cover the frames; and they afford every opportunity both for color and design. Perhaps manufacturers will some day see the necessity of paying more attention to upholstery required for this purpose: at present, with the exception of a few good carpets, there is nothing suitable to be had but the inevitable fleurs-de-lis. Woven furniture stuffs with very small diapers or geometrical patterns are a great want, even at present; for, when embroidery is used, it is costly, deserving a better position, and one less liable to be destroyed by the friction of wear. In this room it is better to use close-grained woods, such as Satin, Walnut, or Amboyna, &c., as they admit of a delicacy which Oak or Teak hardly agrees with. In such apartments as the Morning Room or Business Room, Mahogany, Hungarian Ash, or Ebonized Wood may be used.

It is of the greatest importance that these matters should be clearly understood, as the best isolated efforts of the Architectural Profession can do little to render this class of furniture popular, until the cabinet-maker and his workmen take some interest in their work; and this is not to be obtained by a general condemnation of their present attempts, even though unsatisfactory. Co-operation from them cannot be expected without a liberal concession to whatever is good in their present habits of working; for, as far as workmanship merely is concerned, nothing of the past was so perfect. It is not Mediæval Furniture, confined to the antiquarian knowledge of the past, that is wanted, but a recognition of the more honest principles that governed them, substantial work, and ornament, not at war, but having some fellowship, with the Gothic Architecture of the present day.

Polish for Oak Furniture.—½ gallon of Methylated Spirit; ½ lb. of Shellac, bleached; 1 oz. of Gum Benzoin, and ¼ oz. of Gum Mastic. This to be bruised well, and allowed to stand till it is dissolved.

In the following designs, the aim of the author has been to keep the construction as simple and true as possible. In many instances, such as the Dining Room Sideboard, the massiveness of the design depends entirely on the thickness of the wood employed in its construction: one thickness of wood being used throughout, the scale of its mass (so to speak) may thus be made larger or smaller, as the pleasure or taste of the, maker may dictate, according as the scantling is thicker or thinner.

Economy of material is characteristic of all good art, and furniture curved in its construction, or having lines which require a piece of wood, much too strong and heavy for the purpose, to be sawn or turned till an expression of weak elegance is attained, and which, though not uncommon, is obviously absurd, inasmuch as it is always at variance with the natural strength of the fibre of the wood. It is true, that, in consequence of the numberless repetitions required in ordinary work the cabinet-maker has been enabled in many cases to mould the one curve to suit the other; but still it is antagonistic to the natural strength of the material, unless where the fibre accidentally runs into the curve required. The recognition of this principle of economy combined with strength at once demands the adoption of a mode of framing more horizontal and vertical than at present in general use: it is directly opposed to wanton curvature in chair legs or supports, excessive hollows in turning or moulding, or the round, unmeaning scrolls that so vulgarly decorate the backs of modern cabinet work.

If the designer's first conception of his idea is in the spirit here advocated, there still remains a fair field for the display of flowing forms in the panels and ornamental incisions, where a little good work of this kind will be better than any architectural or monumental construction whatever; and there is not usually such lack of flowing lines in a furnished room as to necessitate the solid framing being twisted into fantastic shapes, more suitable for iron or brass. We are too apt to judge of a piece of furniture for itself alone; indeed, all Exhibition Articles tend to this: they are overdone (perhaps necessarily so for the purpose), and in a room demand that every thing around them should be subordinate; in fact, they render it very difficult to get suitable surroundings, and nearly impossible to procure articles to put inside, worthy the costliness of the outside framework which protects them. This, however, is the natural result of exhibitions; yet it ought to be remembered that the pictures, proportions, and decorations of a room are usually of more importance than the wood-work. When the pictures are valuable, the quieter and more horizontal the furniture is, the better. The subtle undulations of drapery, the elegancies of pottery and illumination, not to mention the ever-changing curves of those for whose use the rooms are intended, will supply a sufficiency of graceful lines, rendered more valuable and pleasing by the contrast. Still, though advocating a more severe treatment of outline, wherever form is conducive to comfort, let it be secured in a straightforward manner; and the foregoing remarks are not intended to bear on wood that has been

artificially rendered strong and curved for movable articles, which specially demand curvature and lightness: at the same time the principal features in the furniture of a room are considered to be the fixed rather than the movable articles.

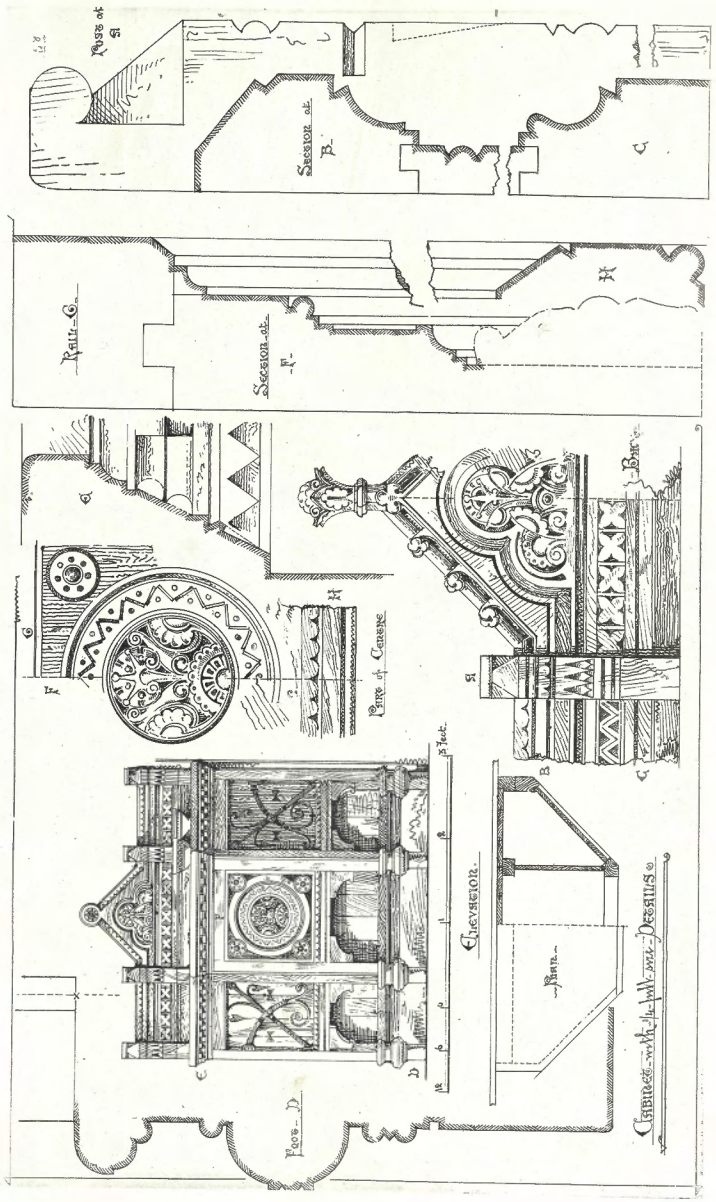
In the designs for Drawing-Room Furniture, turning, as a means of lightness, has been resorted to, though it is difficult to express this in geometrical drawings. On sheet No. 19, for example, the principal features in the construction are all turned; and here, too (in the Drawing Room), enamels might be used to a considerable extent as a means of decoration. Their color and durability seem to recommend them to our notice; and the ease with which the various processes are now worked makes the question of cost one of less importance than formerly. Durability in the decoration of all furniture liable to be often handled is one of the chief considerations of the subject; any thing that is easily rubbed off being always more or less of a temporary nature. In this view of the matter, many objections seem to offer themselves to the easy medium of paint, either in oil or temper: so that painting should only be resorted to in such positions as are out of reach, or in more or less sheltered panels and sinkings.

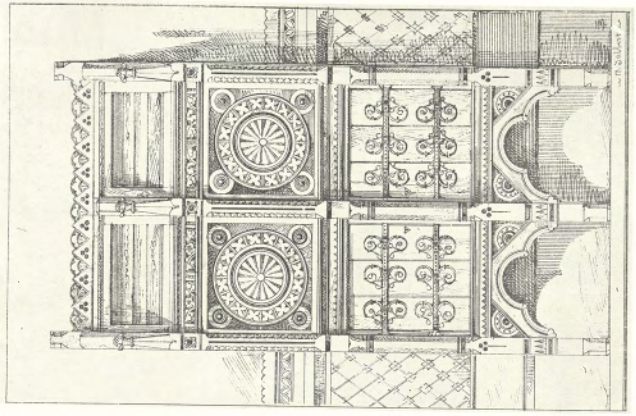
Figure subjects in metal deposits might also play an important part in our richer furniture, especially in that of the Drawing Room. A copper deposit of this nature was used by the author in a cabinet exhibited in the last Paris Exhibition, supported on each side by panels filled in with enamels; and the effect was one of great richness and delicacy. It is a decorative feature of which much might be made, and at a comparatively small cost, if often repeated: of course, there are many difficulties to be got over at the outset in work of this kind; but, with a little care and attention, these ought not to stand in the way, if it is a valuable acquisition to our decorative materials.

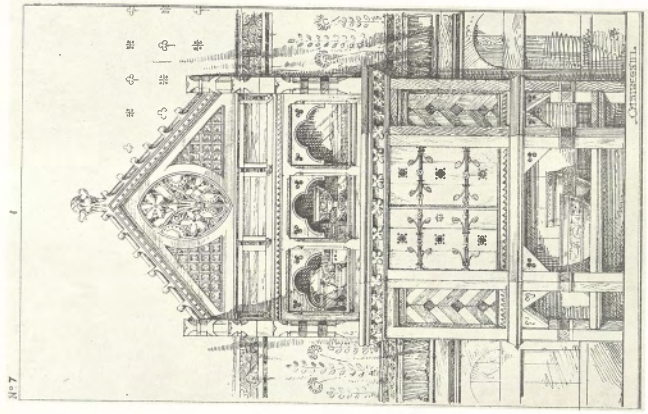
The employment of mirrors and textile fabrics are well-known and recognized modes of decorating our rooms: they only want the guidance of a more severe taste in their employment and design in order to do away with the flimsy appearance they impart to many of our houses, and to give that richness of tone, which, from their nature, they are so well adapted to produce, besides contributing to that air of elegance and refinement so much sought after in the Drawing Rooms of our modern dwellings.

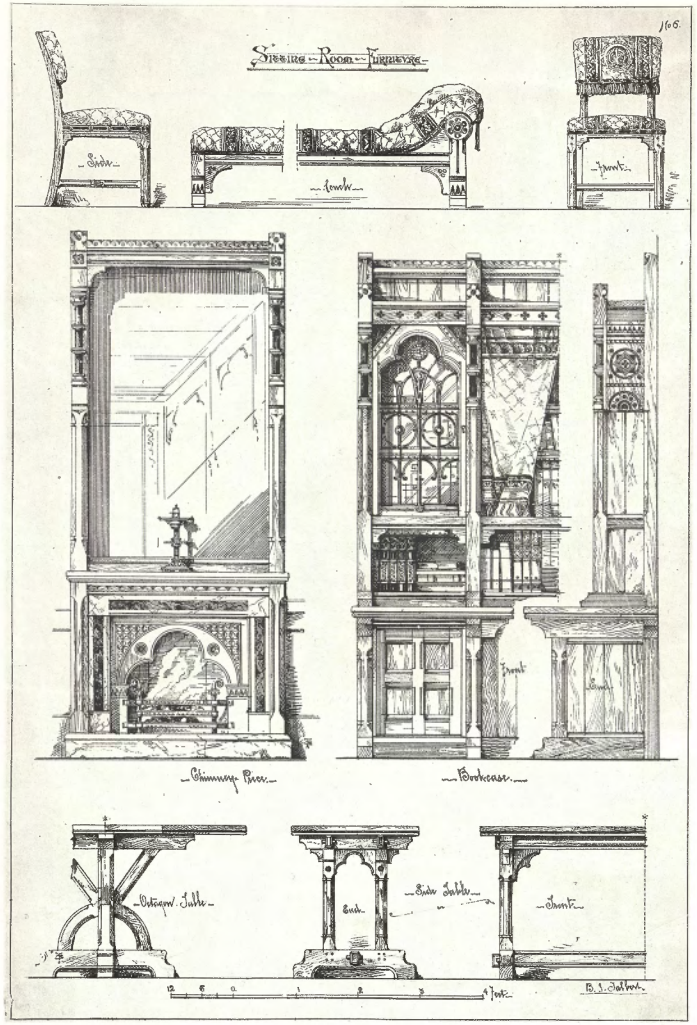
The author desires to take this opportunity of thanking his subscribers, and those Gentlemen who have kindly favored him with their suggestions and encouragement, and particularly to acknowledge his obligations to Messrs. John Crace, S. Harris, J. Hordern, W. A. Carter, and J. M. Brydon, for the assistance they have at all times so willingly afforded him.

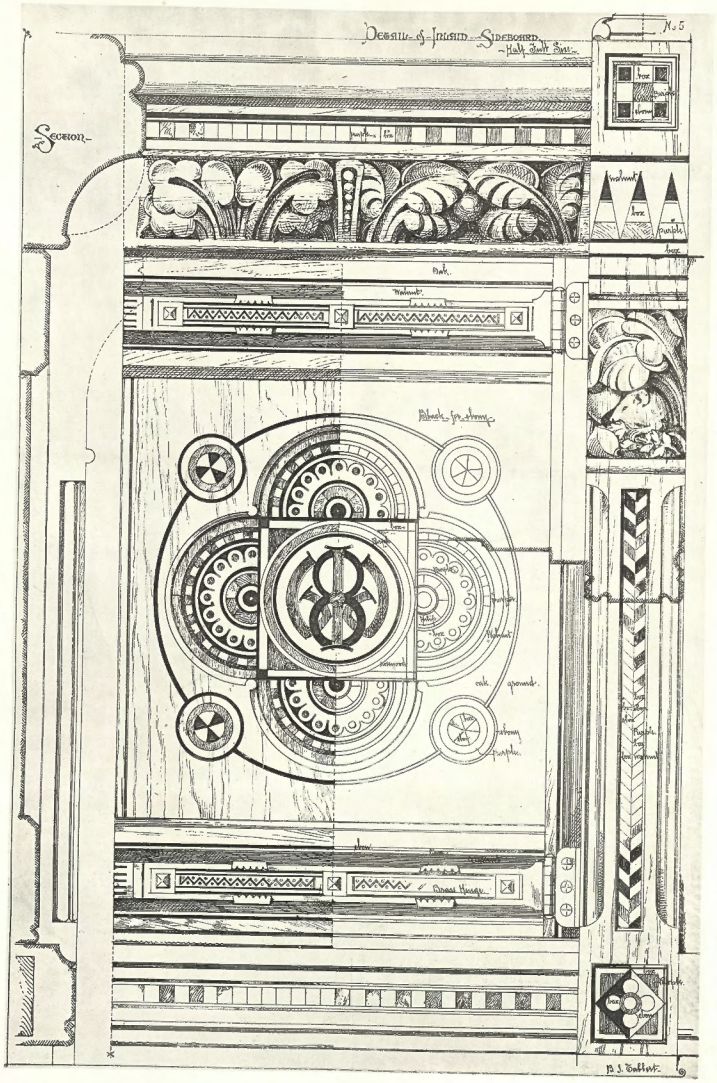
B. J. T.

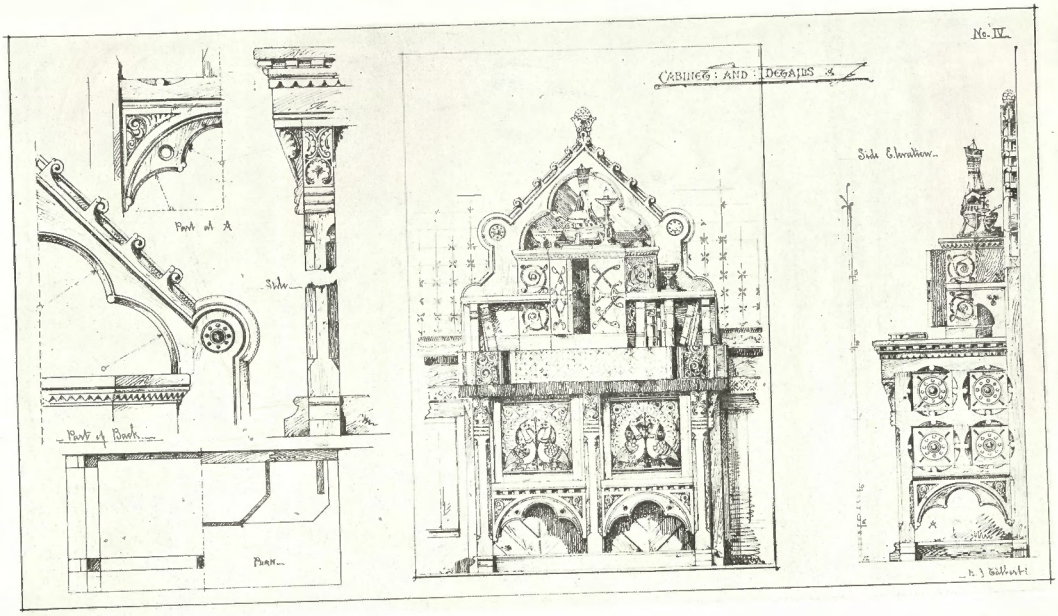




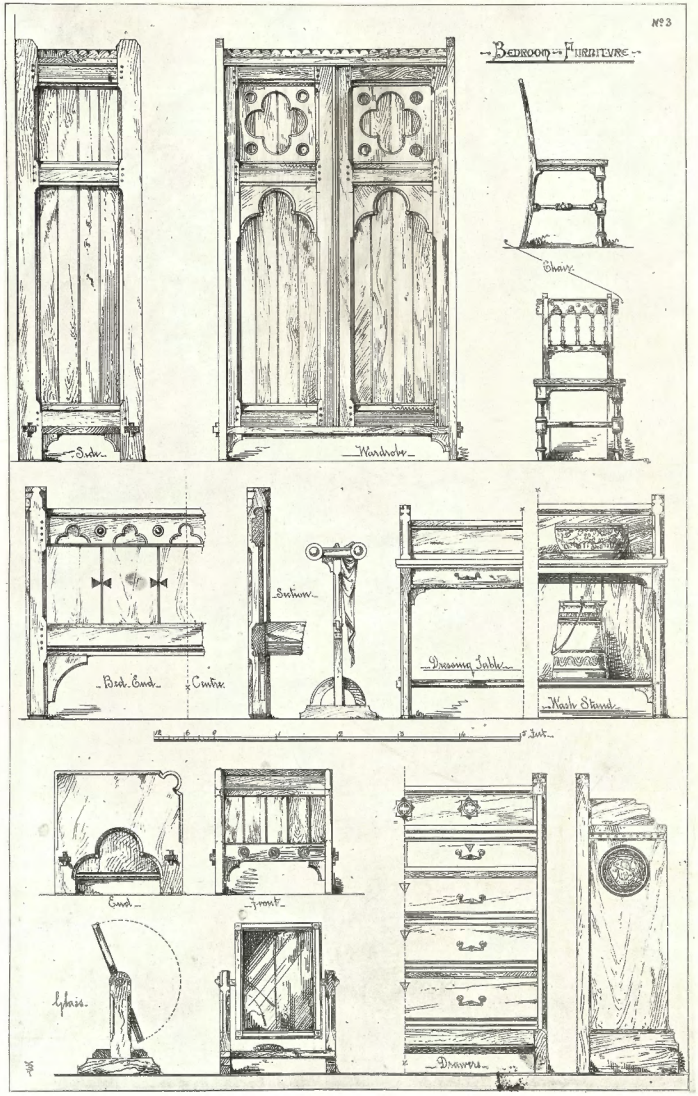

N° 7

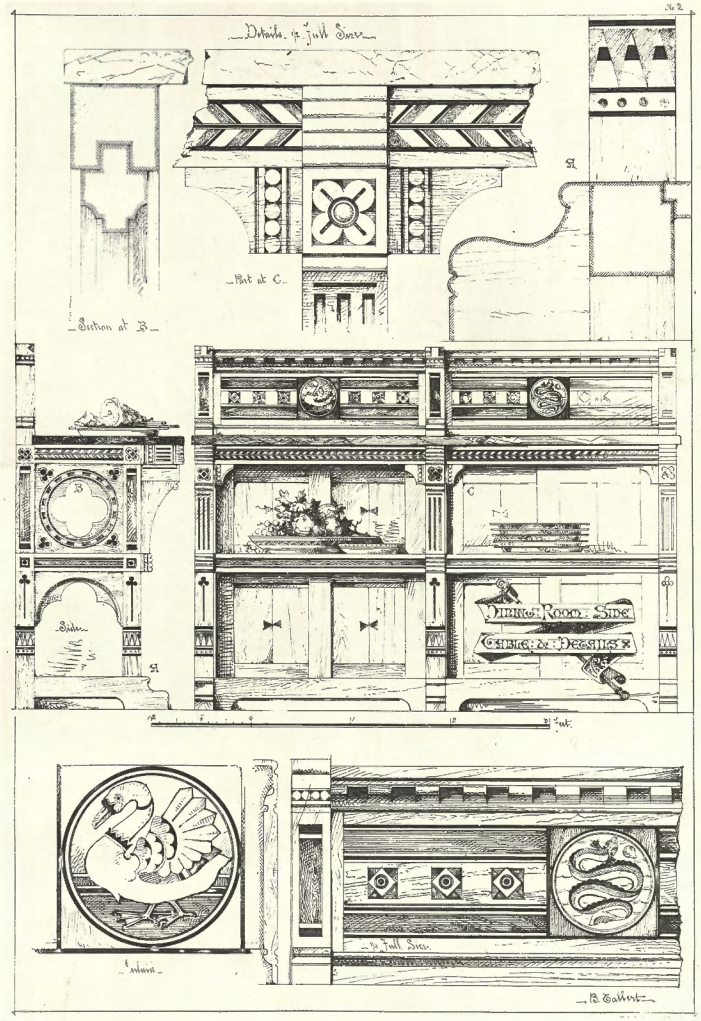

Sitting Room Furniture
Side
Settee
Front
Chimney Piece
Bookcase
Front
Octagon Table
Side
Side Table
Front
12 6 0 1 2 3 4 Feet
B. J. Talbert

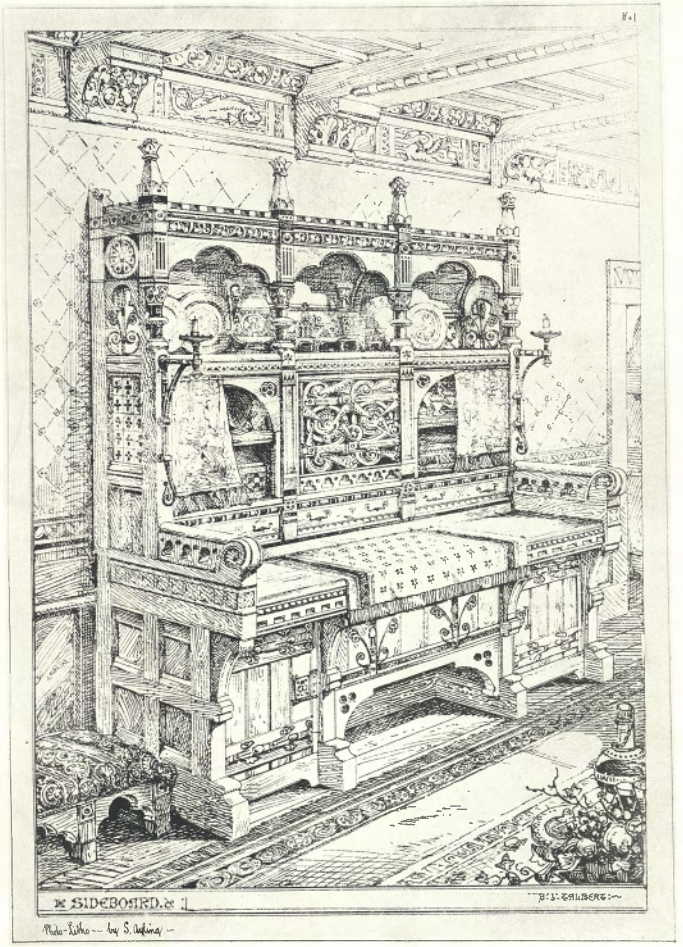

Design of Inlaid Sideboard
Half Scale Size
No 5
Section
Walnut
Pine
Maple
Rosewood
Ebony
Boxwood
Pollard's Patent
B. J. Talbert

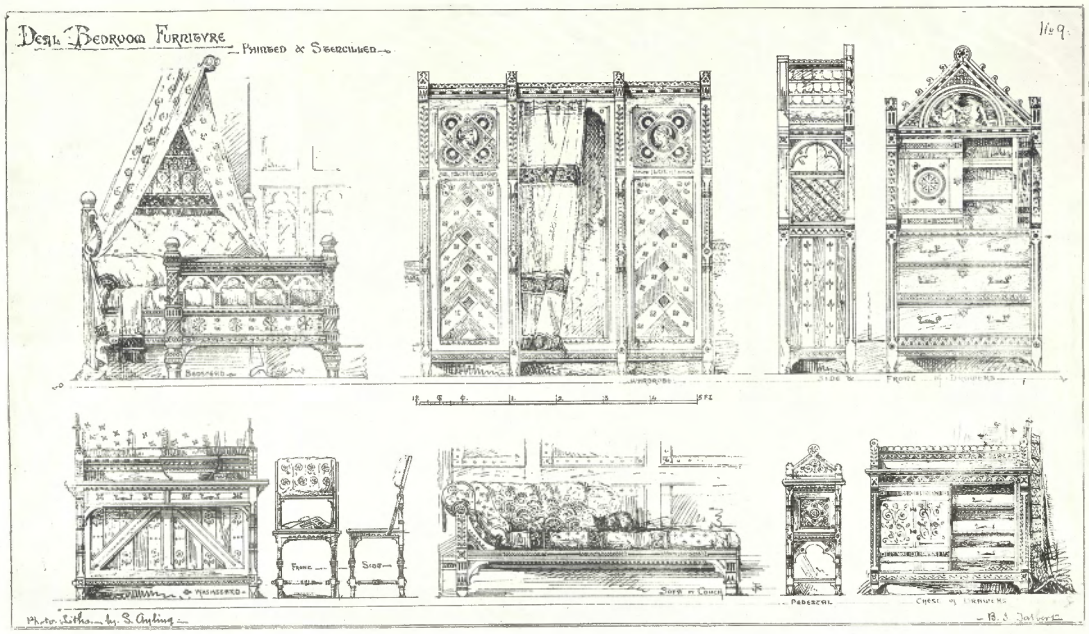

No. IV.
CABINETS AND DESKS &c
Part of A
Side
Part of Back
Plan
Side Elevation

Bedroom Furniture

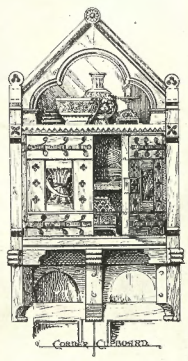



Details. 1/2 Full Size.
Part at C.
Section at B.
Dining Room Side
Sideboard Drawings
1/2 Full Size.
Antwerp.
B. Talbert.

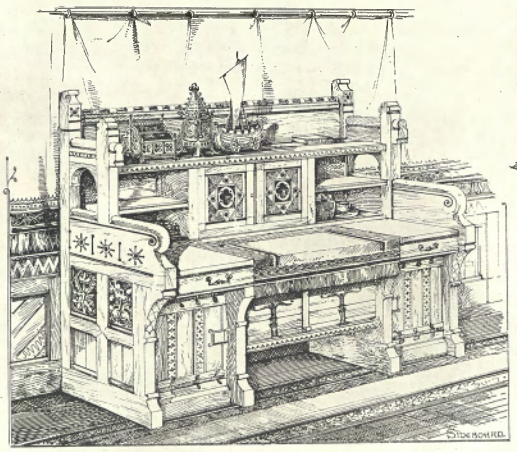

№1
SIDEBOARD.


Deal Bedroom Furniture
Painted & Stencilled
No 9.
Bedstead
Washstand
Chest of Drawers
Photo-Litho by S. Angling

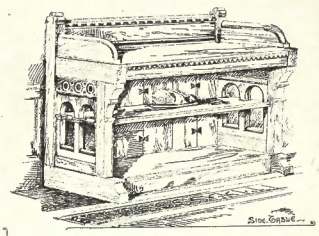
Furniture for Dining Room XI



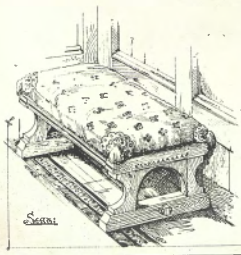
Corner Cupboard



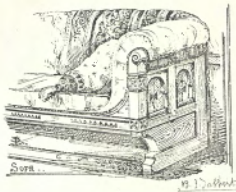
Side Board



Side Table

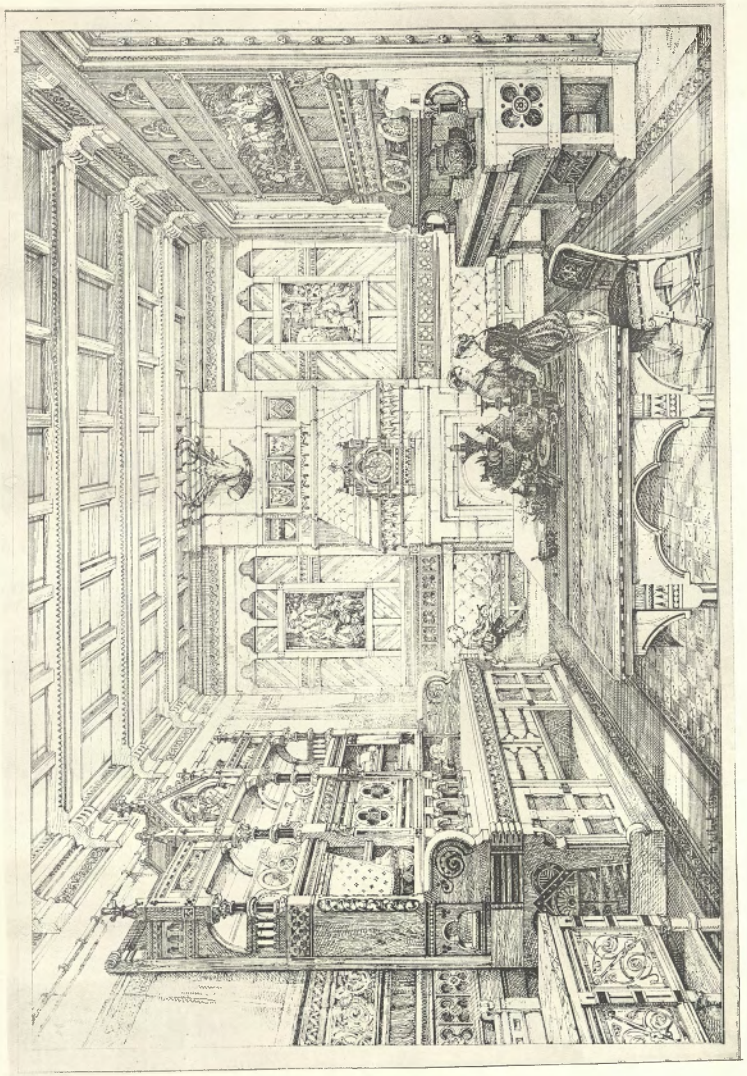


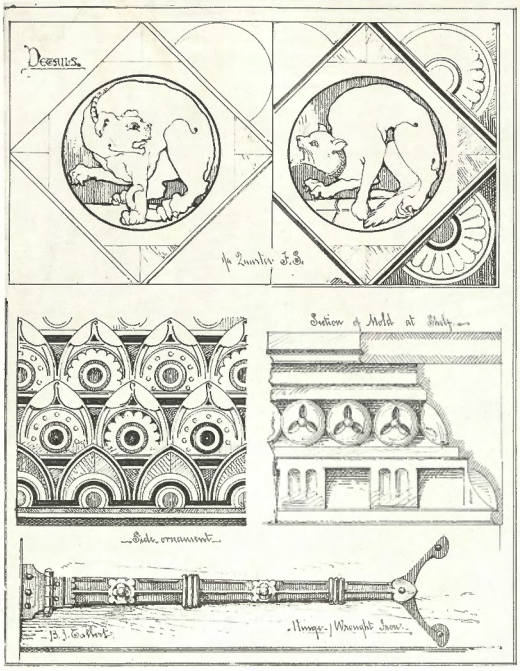
Settee

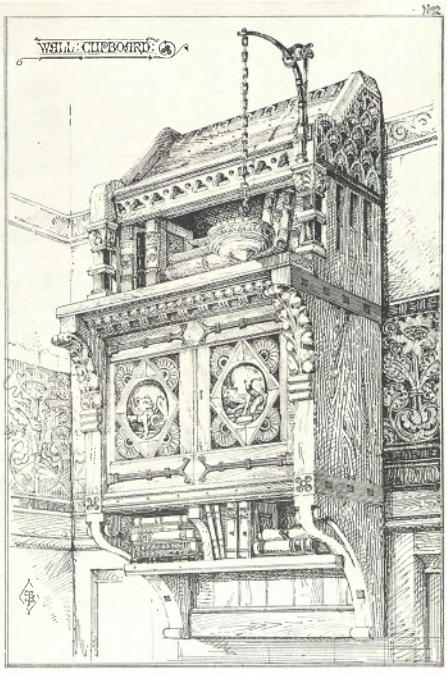


Sofa

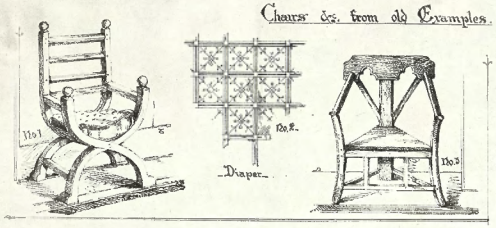
M. J. Talbert




Designs.
Section of Mould at Shelf
Side ornament
Upper Wrought Iron


WALL CUPBOARD

Chairs &c. from old Examples.



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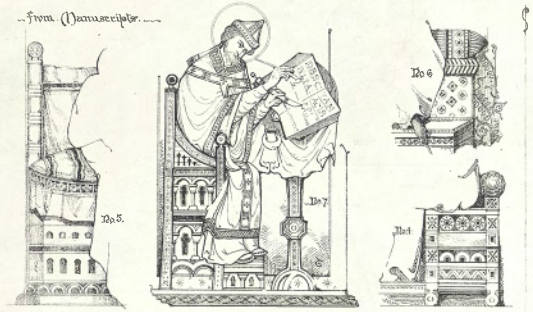
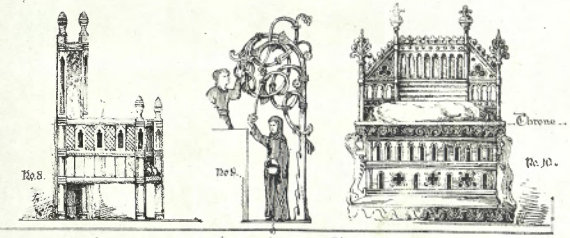
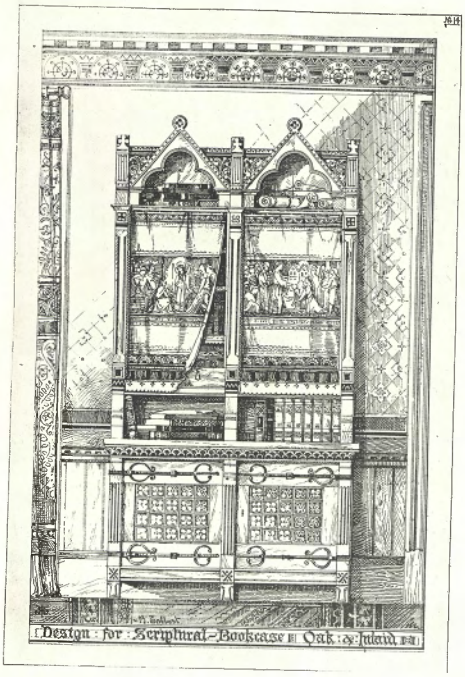
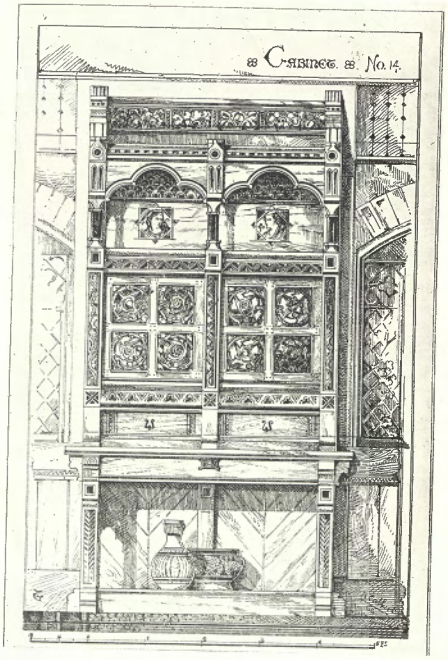


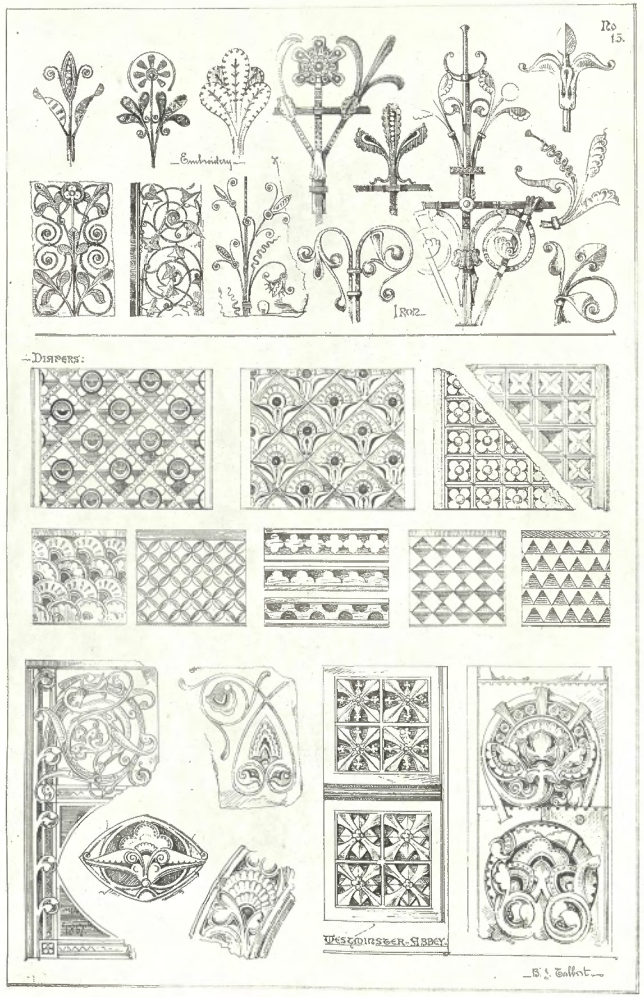


Conventional Vine Tree

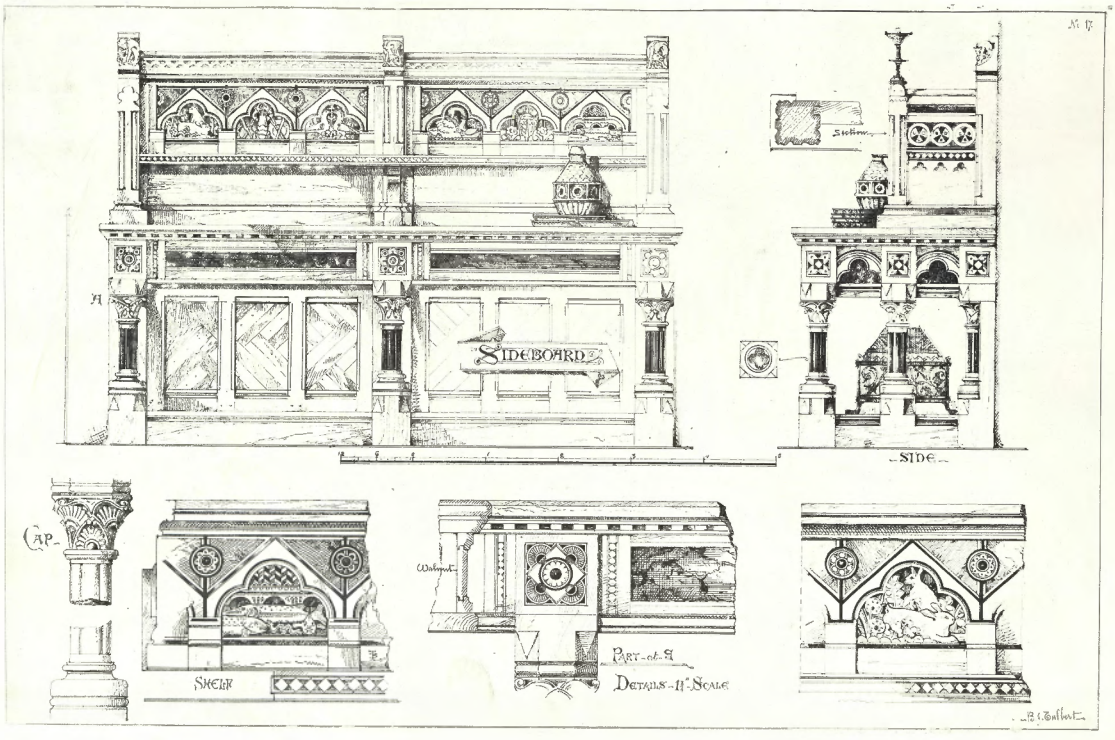
B. J. Talbert

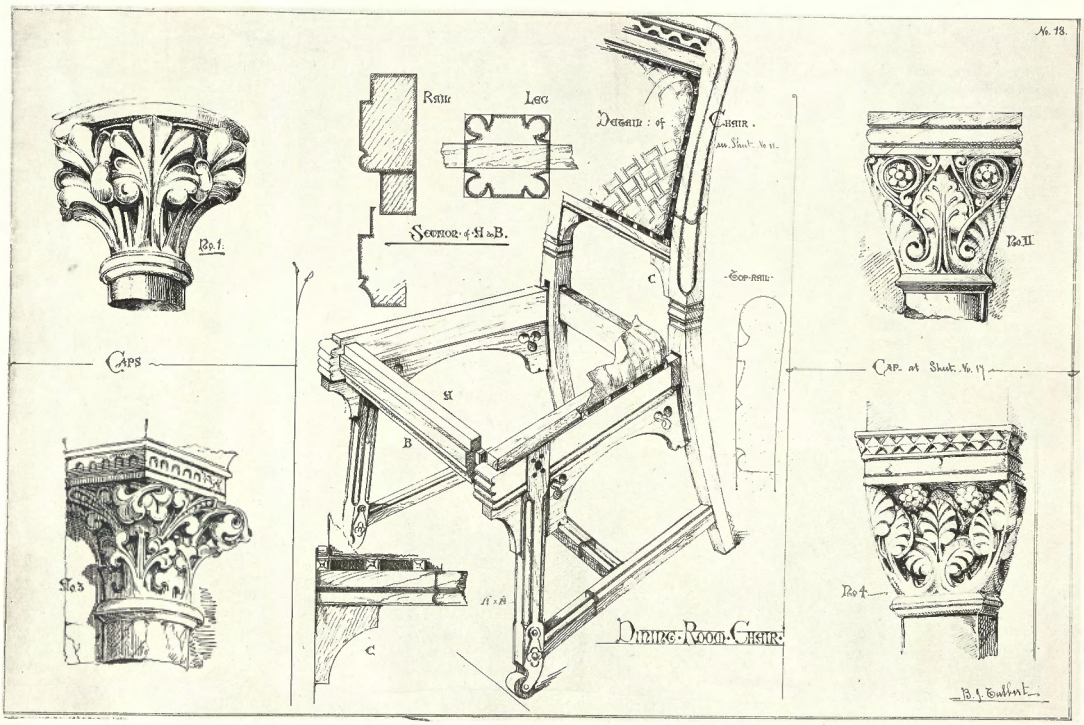

Design for Scriptural Bookcase in Oak for Ireland

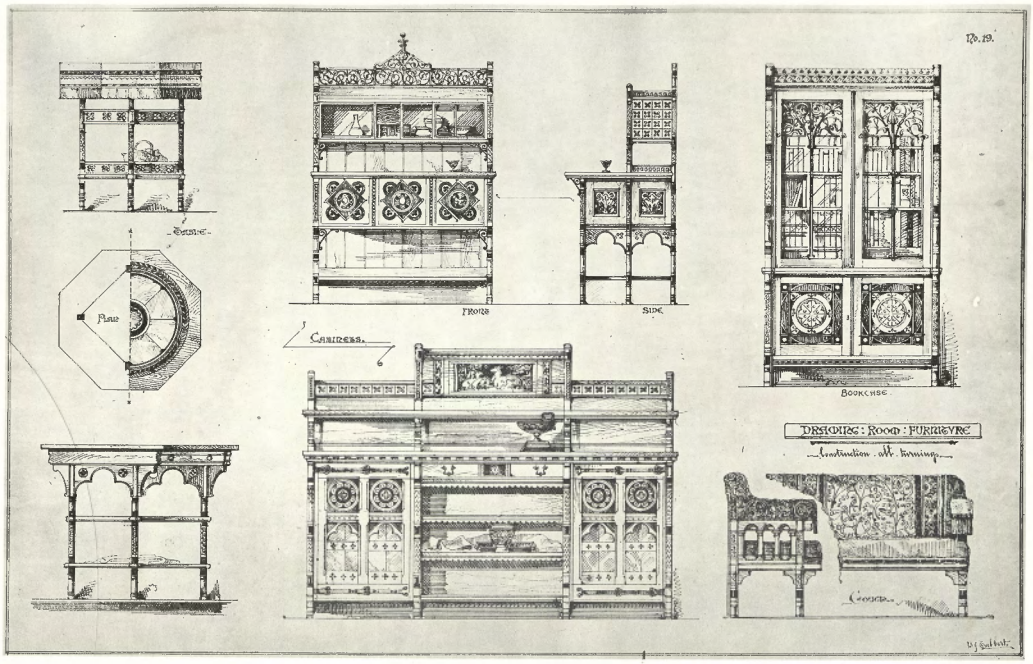

Cabinet. No. 14.


No. 15.
Embroidery
Iron
Diapers:
Westminster Abbey
B. J. Talbot

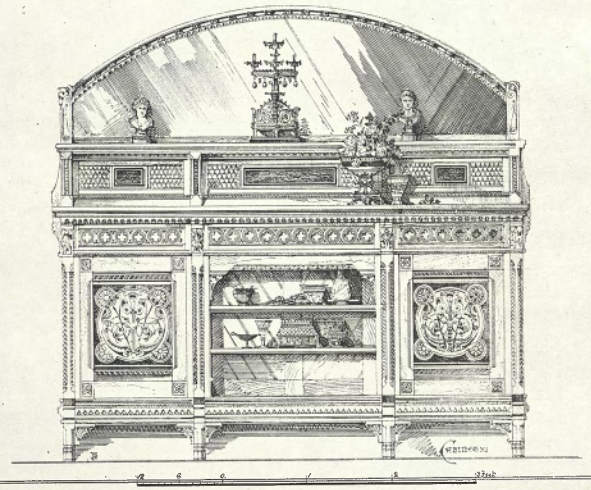
No 16.
No 4
No 5
No 6
No 7
No 8
No 1
No 2
No 3
No 4
No 5
ABC
DEF
GHI
KLM
NOP
QRS
TUV
XYZ
Ancient English Characters

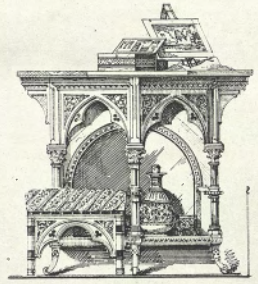

SIDEBOARD
SIDE
CAP
SHELF
PART of A
DETAILS 4" SCALE


No. 13.
Rail
Leg
Section of H & B.
Design of Chair.
as Sheet No 11.
Top-Rail
No I
No II
Caps
Cap. as Sheet No 13
No 3
No 4
A
B
C
Dining-Room-Chair
B. J. Talbert.

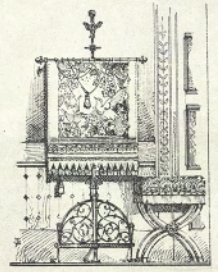

No. 19.
Base
Plan
Front
Side
Bookcase
Cabinets
Dressing: Room: Furniture
Construction · Art · Turning
Couch

Drawings of Room Furniture.



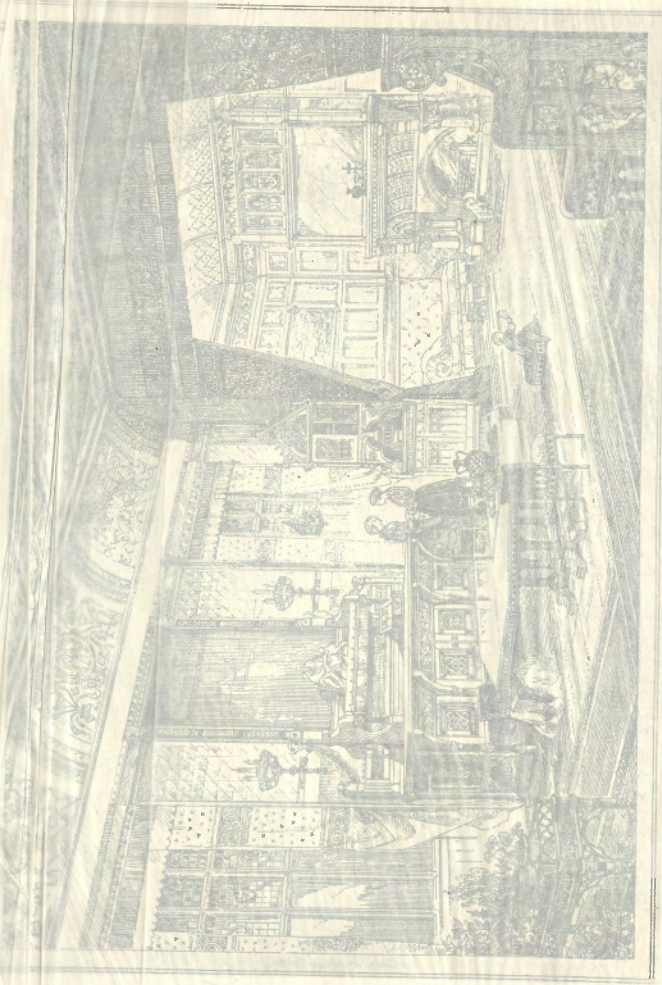


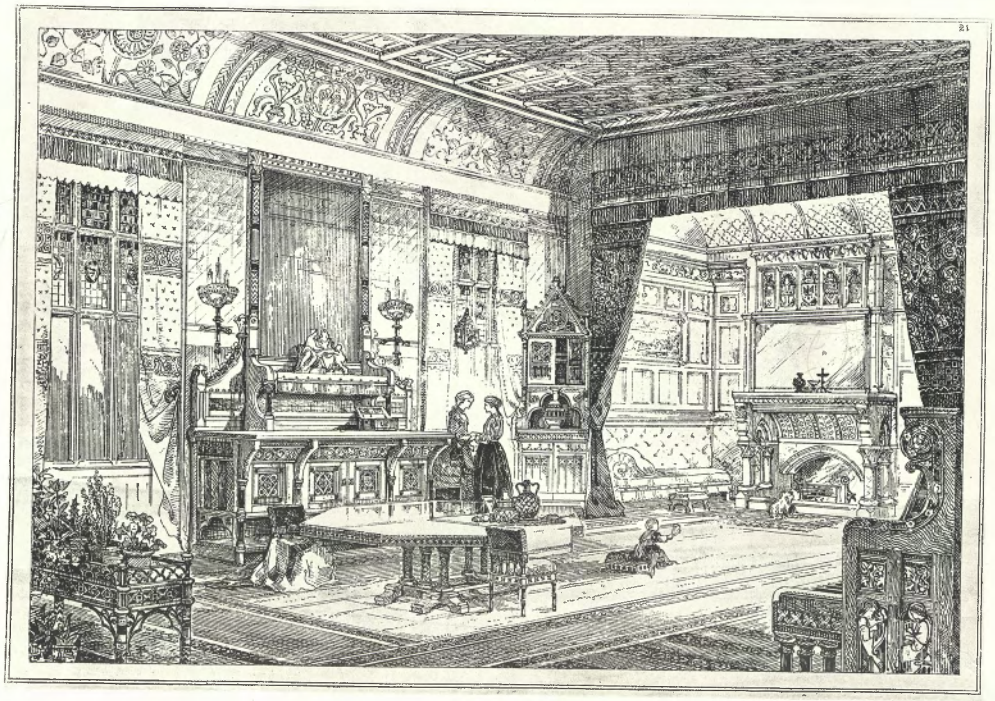
Cabinet & Stool.

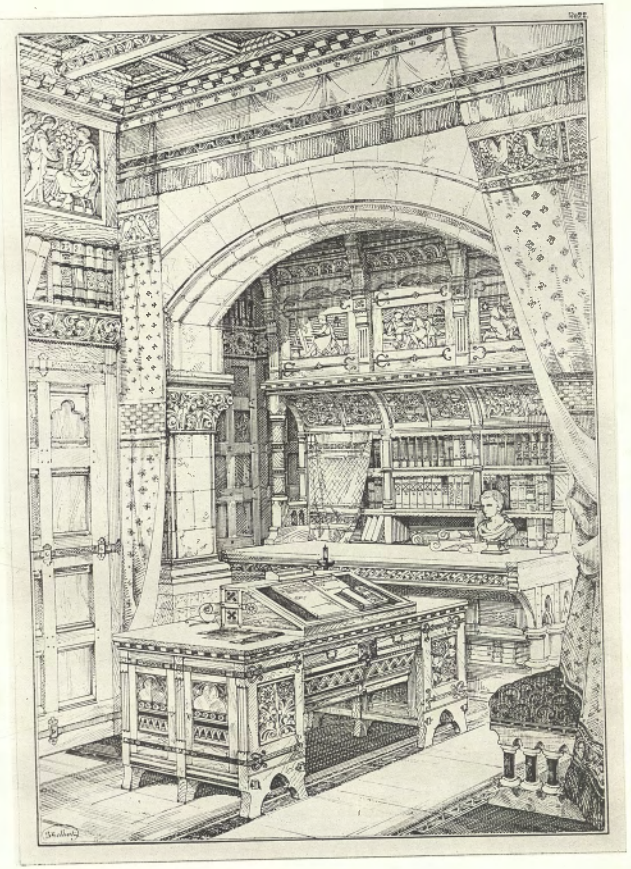


Screen &c.

B. J. Talbert.

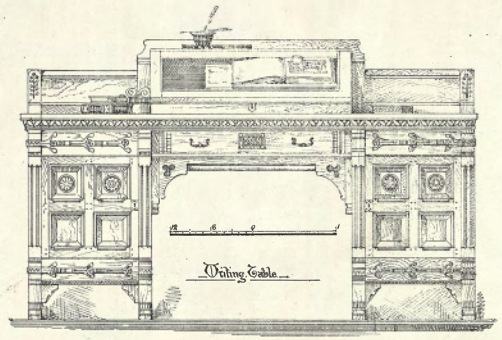


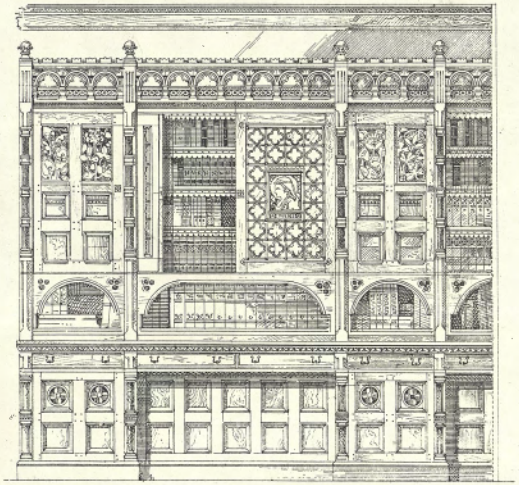




Library.

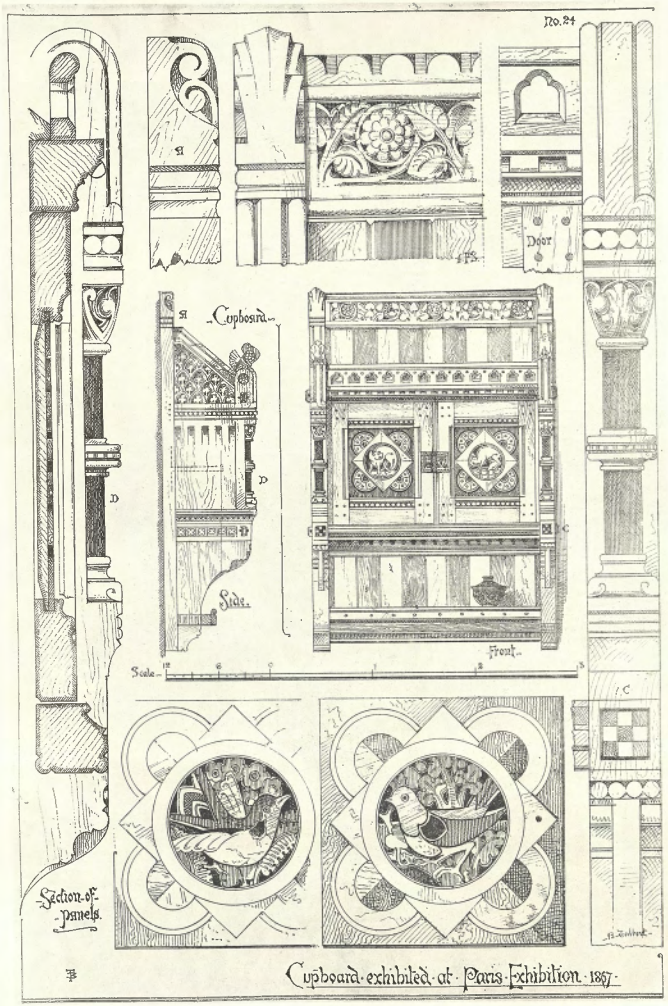
No. 23.





Large Bookcase.

B. Talbert.

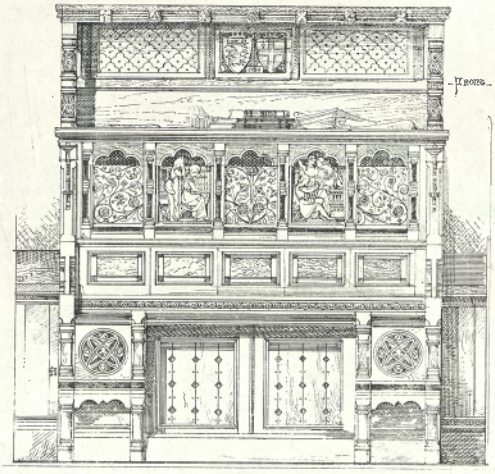


Cupboard exhibited at Paris Exhibition 1867

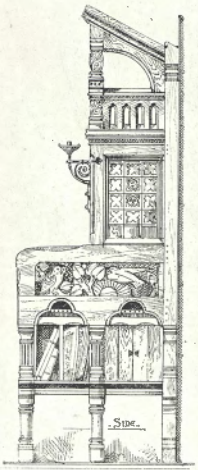
Piano-forte &c:

Pedestal.

Stool.

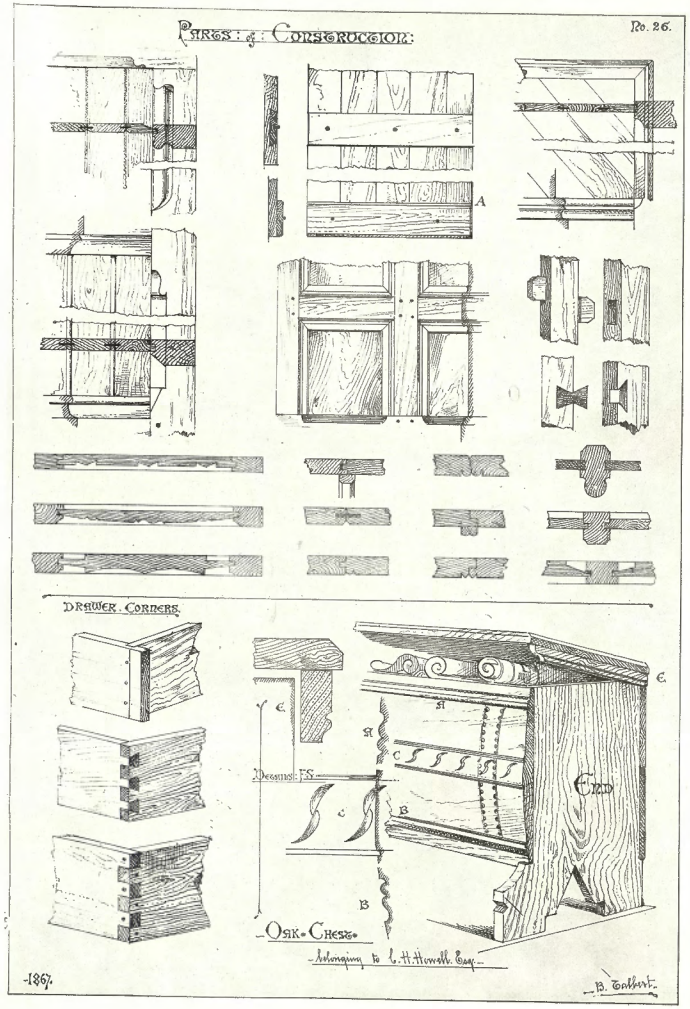


Front.



Side.

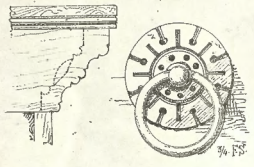
B. J. Talbert.


Parts of Construction:
No. 26.
A
Drawer Corners
Dessmal: FS
B
B
C
C
C
Oak Chest.
Belonging to L. H. Haworth Esq.
B. Talbert.
-186-

No 27.

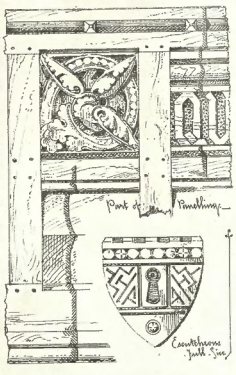
Bric-a-brac Cabinet.

— de Details —



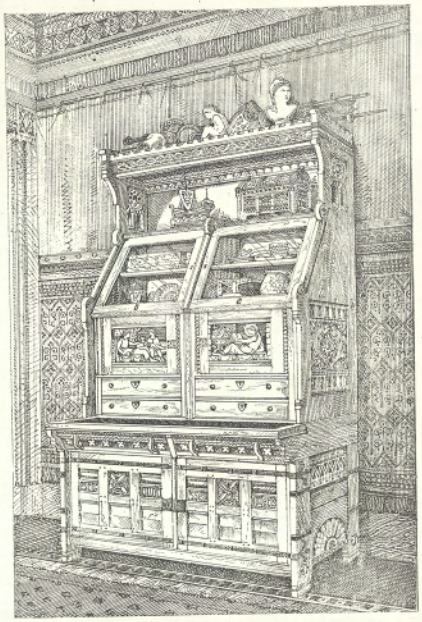
¾ Full Size

Scale 2½"



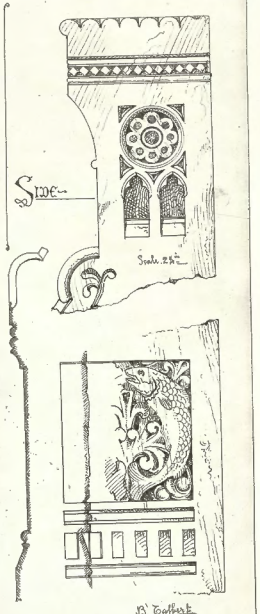
Part of Panelling

Countersunk Full Size



Side

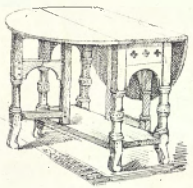
Scale 2½"

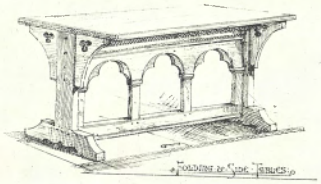


B. Cotterill

No. 28.

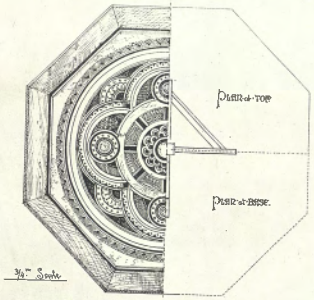
Tables



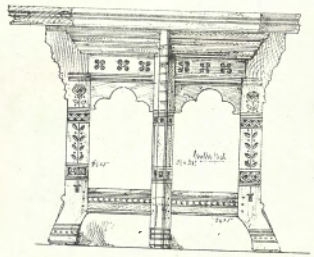


Folding & Side Tables

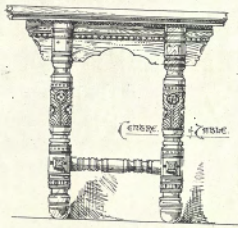
Drawing Room Table & Ocmeon Top



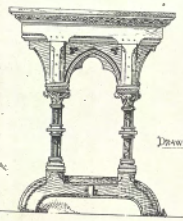
3/4" Scale

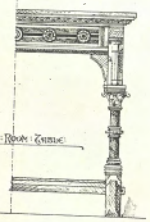


Scale for Centre of Table



Centre Table

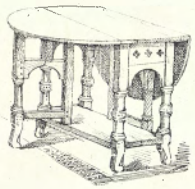


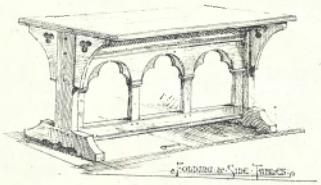


Drawing Room Table

E. Balfour.

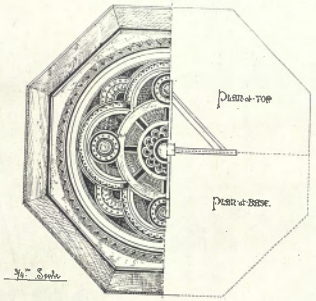
Tables



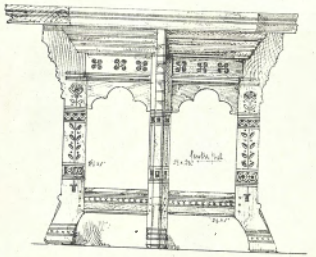


Folding & Side Tables

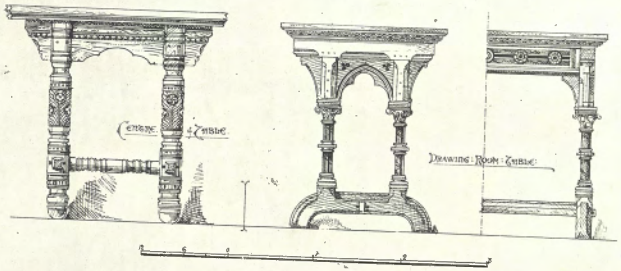
Drawing Room Table & Ottoman Top



¾" Scale

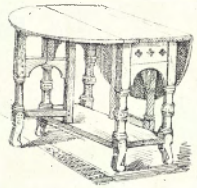


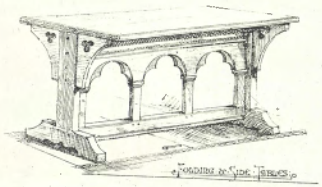
Scale for Centre of Table



Mr. Talbert.

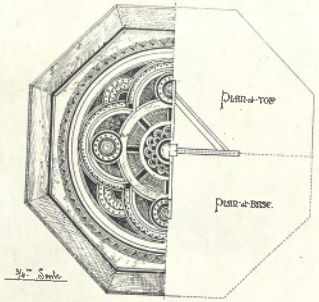
Tables



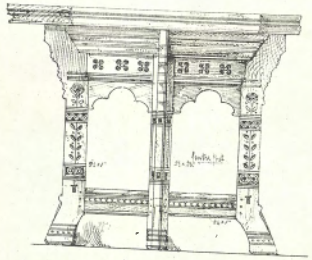


Folding or Side Tables

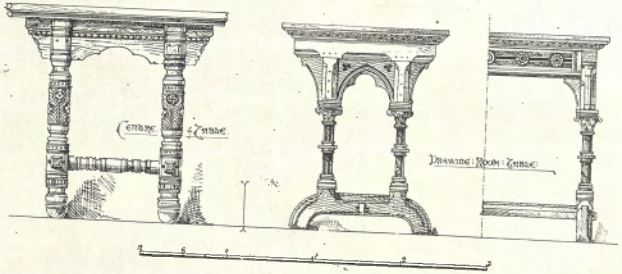
Drawing Room Table & Ocasion Top



½" Scale.

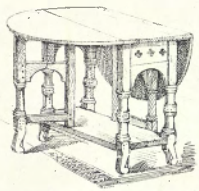


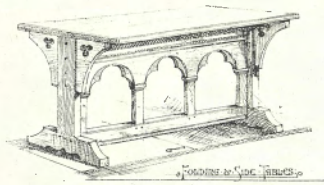
Scale for Centre of Table.



Rt Talbot.

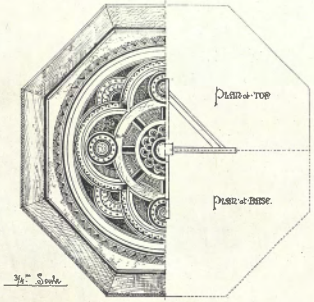
Tables



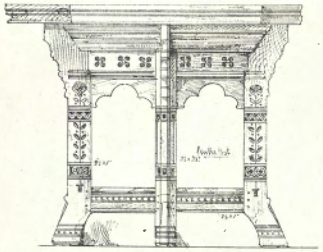


Folding Side Table

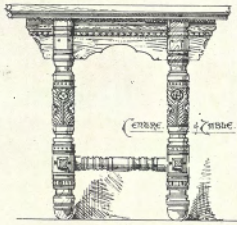
Drawing Room Table & Octagon Top



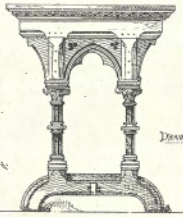
3/4" Scale

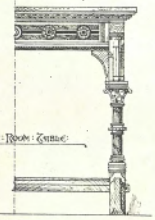


Scale for Centre of Table



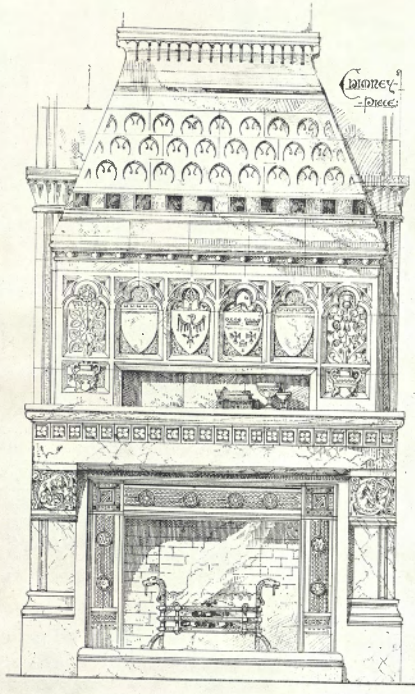
Centre Frieze

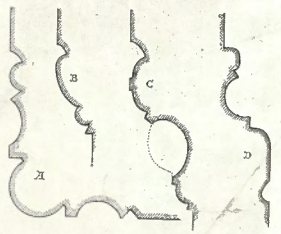




Drawing Room Frieze

Wm. Talbert.


Chimney
Piece.
Side.


A
B
C
D
E
Mouldings
Panels