

The Strahan Suite



The Strahan Suite Circa 1840
By Robert Strahan
Henry Street
Dublin

Doneraile Court
Co. Cork



Exhibited London International Exhibition 1862

A Victorian Walnut and Marquetry Centre Table by
Strahan and Co of Dublin c1860.

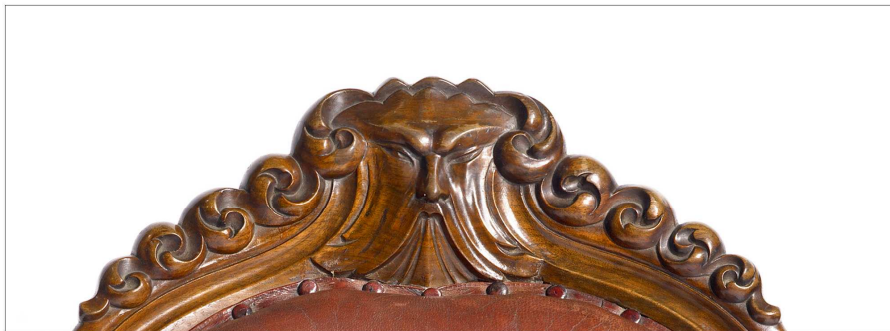
The lobed circular top with a marquetry border filled with cartouches and scrolling foliage, the frieze carved with masks, strapwork and foliage, on a circular stem and tri-form base carved chimerae, on scroll feet, stamped Strahan and bearing registration number.



This table is almost certainly the example shown at the London International Exhibition of 1862. An identical design is illustrated in the Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue of exhibition, p 110 reproduced in Jonathan Meyer, Great Exhibitions 1851 – 1900, London, New York, Paris and Philadelphia, Antique Collectors' Club, London, 2006, p 156. It is recorded, as being in oak but this is likely to be an error as the design is rather more intricate than one would expect for an oak table. Errors in contemporary exhibition literature are not uncommon and indeed the Official Catalogue only lists Strahan as having shown a sideboard, which is clearly an incomplete record.

The International Exhibition of 1862 was the second and last to take place in London. The massive buildings by Captain Fowke extended 1200 ft along the Cromwell Road on the present site of the Natural History Museum, which was erected soon after its demolition. It attracted exhibitors from all over the world and would have been an excellent showcase for distinguished makers such as R Strahan and Co of Dublin founded in 1776 and by the mid-nineteenth century trading from several premises in the city. At this stage Strahan who had exhibited first at the Dublin exhibition of 1853, appear to have been influenced stylistically both by the robust classicism of Thomas Hope and by neo Elizabethanism of designers like Richard Bridgens. In the latter respect, the present table owes something to the by then celebrated 'sea dogs' table acquired by Bess of Hardwick by 1601 and still at Hardwick Hall Derbyshire

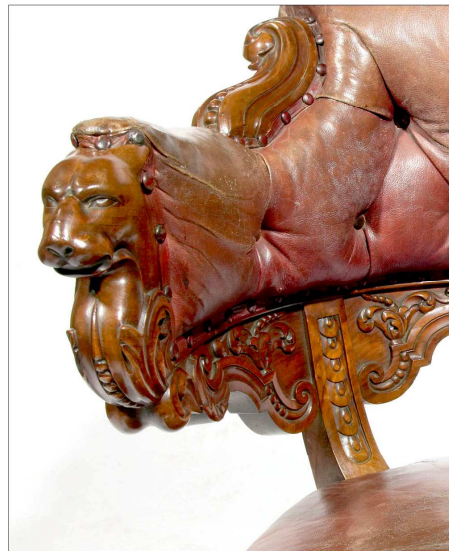
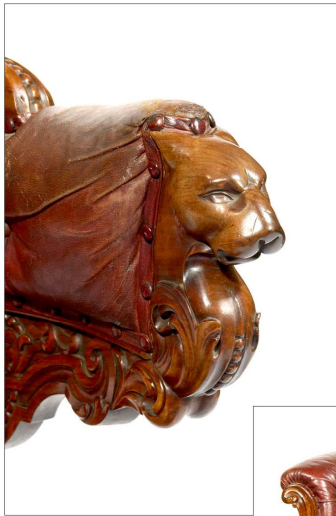






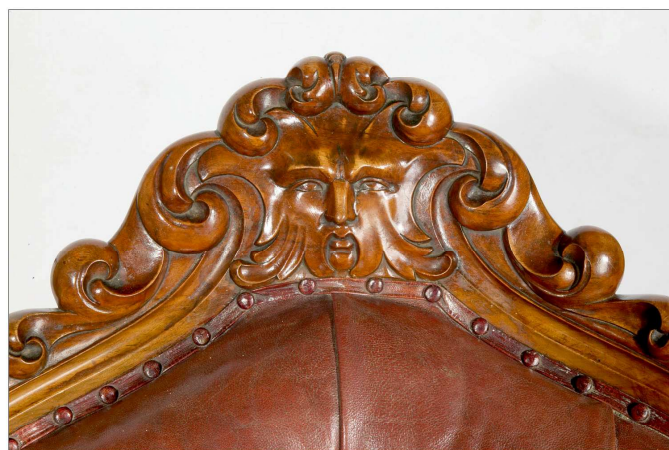
Pair of Library Chairs from The Doneraile Suite

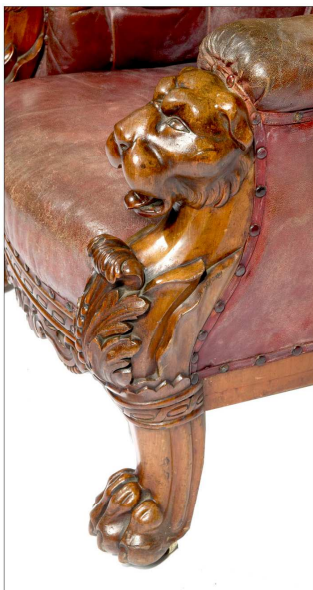
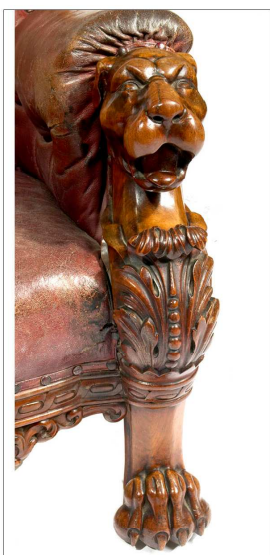






Pair of tub shaped armchairs upholstered in original Moroccan hide







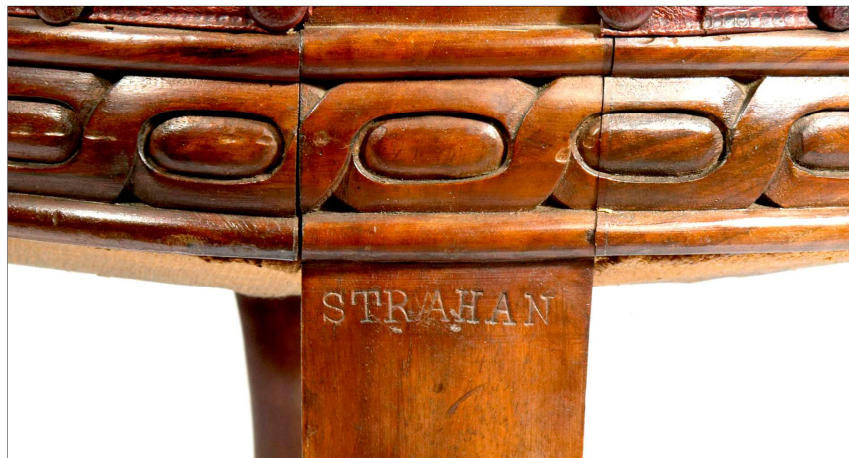


Strahan and Company, Dublin

Robert Strahan's firm was founded in 1776. By 1845 they had opened two workshops at Henry St., and 5 Leinster Street. They exhibited at Dublin's great industrial exhibition of 1853. This exhibition was modelled on the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace (London) in 1851, which was a showcase for the best design and manufactured goods from Britain and its empire.

Strahan provided furniture for some of the great country houses of Ireland such as Doneraile Court, Co. Cork, the seat of Viscount Doneraile.

Made relatively plain but good quality furniture, most of which was stamped. Around 1870 they moved to Abbey Street. Strahan was patronized by the Board of Works who employed him to make plain high quality furniture.



The St Ledgers and Doneraile Court

The St. Leger family is an old Anglo-Irish family with Norman and German roots going back over a thousand years, and whose name has appeared more than a few times in history. The St. Ledgers first appeared in Ireland to oversee the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII in 1537 to become the Lord Deputy of Ireland. The St Ledgers became synonymous with Muster and particularly Doneraile from about 1620 although there is some documentary evidence to suggest it may have been before this.

The first residence of the St. Legers was Doneraile Castle but this was ruined in the rebellion of 1645 and it was then the St. Ledgers apparently removed to Doneraile Court. It has not been firmly established when the St. Legers moved house, and information on them between 1645 and 1727 is very scanty. The date 1725 on the front of Doneraile Court has led to the belief that it was built on that date, but this is challenged on two fronts. First we have the story of the Lady Freemason. This relates that a daughter of the first Viscount overheard a meeting of the Freemason Lodge No. 44 being held in Doneraile Court. On being discovered, it was considered necessary to induct her into the Freemasons to secure her secrecy. The room in which this event is said to have taken place is traditionally pointed out as being on the right hand side of the present entrance hall of Doneraile Court. The Lady Freemason's tombstone records this event as having taken place in 1712. Secondly it is the opinion of some people that the architectural features of the basement area put the building back into the late 17th Century at least.

The most likely theory then, is that the original house on the site of Doneraile Court was the home of some of the St. Legers from the 1690's at least, and that 1725 is a date of major renovation. At this time Arthur, first Viscount Doneraile, employed Isaac Rothery to redesign the house, and the facade that we see today dates from that time. The town also went through a major facelift, and is today an excellent example of a formally planned early eighteenth-century settlement. In 1750 Dr Smith records in his 'Ancient and Present State of the City and County of Cork' :

that 'Doneraile [is] one of the most pleasant and beautiful villages in this kingdom ... [and] is indebted for the greatest part of its beauty to the fine house and extensive improvements of Hayes St Leger esq.'

Today Doneraile Court is in the hands of the OPW and is currently under restoration with the help of the Irish Georgian Society. The house shall be open to the public shortly. The landscaped parklands – after the Capability Brown movement - are now considered a national park and can be accessed by the public.

Hon. Elizabeth St. Leger

(1693-1772)

The 1st Lady Freemason



In or about the year 1710, long before the foundation of the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1729-30, a Lodge was being held at Doneraile Court, Co. Cork - where Miss St. Leger, then a young girl, being by accident or design, a witness, from an adjoining apartment, of some portion of the mysterious ceremonies, took alarm, and made an attempt to withdraw, which attracted the attention of the Tyler, and the brethren were warned of the presence of an intruder.

The Lodge, presided over by her father, Lord Doneraile, and her brother, his successor, and Mr. Aldworth, afterwards her husband being also, it is said, present, determined to carry out the only possible course under the circumstances, and initiate the lady, who afterwards attained eminence in the Craft, and was a well-known figure in Masonic Ceremonies, and processions on public occasions.

Note - On the male line failing by the death of her two brothers and nephew, Mrs. Aldworth's second son, St. Leger Aldworth inherited, and, assuming his mothers' surname of St. Leger, was created Lord Doneraile in 1776. From him the present Viscount Doneraile is descended, from her eldest son, Boyle Aldworth, the present Major John Aldworth, of Newmarket, Co. Cork, is descended.

Published by John McMaster, 17 Panton Street, London, SW1 (after January 1895)

The following account, derived from a memoir of her life, published in Cork in 1811, describes the dramatic development, which ensued . . .

"Part of the wall dividing the Lodge Room from the library was being removed for the purpose of making an arch and thus connecting the two room; some of the bricks in the dividing wall had been removed and only loosely replaced. While the alterations were in progress, Viscount Doneraile and others met in the Lodge Room for Masonic purposes and to confer degrees. On this particular afternoon, Miss St. Leger had been reading at the library window and the light of the winter afternoon having failed, fell asleep. The sound of voices in the next room restored her to consciousness and from her position behind the loosely placed bricks of the dividing wall she easily realised that something unusual was taking place in the next room. The light shining through the unfilled spaces in the temporary wall attracted her attention and, prompted by a not un-natural curiosity, Miss St. Leger appears to have removed one or more of the loose bricks, and thus was easily enabled to watch the proceedings of the Lodge.

Later, Brother Millikins wrote due to Elizabeth St. Ledger and a malpractice suit had been lodged against her fathers lodge as they had initiated a female.

"...the Grand Secretary, John Calder,... laid before the committee, a charge against Lodge 95, for malpractices, and also to prove the validity of the Warrant of that Lodge. It is supposed that the malpractices had reference to the initiation of the Hon. Mrs. Aldworth, who became a Mason in that Lodge."

Millikins, Br. Historico – *Masonic Tracts* Cork 1848