

# British Antique Furniture Restorers' Association



A Glossary of Terms Relating to English Furniture  
by Christopher Claxton Stevens

Acanthus	A Classical fleshy leaf decoration of the acanthus mollis, used for example on capitals (qv) of the Corinthian order (qv).
Acroteria	The finials (qv) or pedestals (qv) flanking a pediment (qv) and at its apex. Used for statues, urns etc. and sometimes for Regency bracket feet.
Annulet	A narrow flat band or collar (qv) encircling a Gothic column.
Anthemion	A Classical stylised honeysuckle ornament, the petals curving inwards (cf palmette).
Apron	A shaped and often decorated length of wood applied beneath the bottom framing of a drawer, table top, chair seat etc.
Arabesque	A decoration of flowers, fruit, trophies (qv) and figures in symmetrical foliate scrolls or strapwork (qv), derived from the Middle East. When human figures are incorporated properly known as Grottesque work.
Arcading	A series of arches, generally supported on columns.
Arc en arbalète (Fr.= crossbow)	A complex cusped (qv) serpentine (qv) edge shaping of a table, tray or panel in the form of a bow.
Architrave	The lowest part of an entablature (qv), the moulding beneath the frieze (qv); also used of mouldings round a doorway, window, mirror or picture frame, sometimes shouldered or eared with projections at the corners.
Astragal	A narrow moulding of semi-circular form, sometimes carved, used particularly for glazing bars and the closing edges of doors (cf beading).
Bail handle	An iron or brass loop handle suspended from a pommel (qv) at either end.
Ball and claw	A common carved decoration of the feet of cabriole legged (qv) furniture from the early 18th century, inspired by the Oriental Pearl of Wisdom gripped in a dragon's or eagle's talons.
Baluster	A turned column in a balustrade or the stem of a table, shaped to swell out in the lower half. Known as an Inverted baluster when the swelling is in the upper half.
Banding	An ornamental inlay, generally in contrasting wood, laid cross-grain or diagonally, or in other materials such as ivory or brass. Herringbone banding of mitred (qv) form was used on walnut from the early 18th century.

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- Baroque** An architectural and decorative style originating in Italy and spreading through Europe in the 17th century; characterised by its exuberant grandeur and bold curvaceous forms, sometimes tending towards heaviness and pomposity.
- Beading** See Astragal Also used of moulding of small repeated roundels (qv) (ie beads). properly called Pearling. Bearer A horizontal member used constructionally to support another part, eg the leaves of a dining table.
- Bellflower** A Classical motif of bell-shaped flowerheads similar to husk. (qv), generally used in chains (qv) or swags (qv).
- Bevel** The angled cutting of an edge, particularly of a panel or mirror plate (cf chamfer).
- Birdcage** Device on four columns used to mount a table top on to a tripod base, allowing circular movement.
- Block foot** A cube-shaped foot, generally used with a square untapered leg.
- Bobbin-turning** Repeated bell-turning, much used on 17th century legs and stretchers (qv). Clay of varying colour according to period, which was mixed with glue size and applied over gesso (qv) to prepare a ground for gilding.
- Bolection moulding** A bold convex moulding, often used to cover a joint between two surfaces.
- Bombé (Fr.)** The vertical swelling shape of concave and convex curves found on the front or sides of commodes or other cabinet furniture of the Rococo period (qv) (cf serpentine).
- Boss** An ornament, generally carved and often circular, applied over joints or decoratively at the top of legs etc.
- Bouille** Foliate and figural marquetry (qv) of turtle ('tortoise')-shell and brass (and sometimes pewter, mother-of-pearl and ivory) made fashionable in France by André-Charles Bouille (1642-1732). The term Première-partie is used when the ground is brass, and Contra-partie when it is turtle-shell.
- Bow-front** The shaping of the front of a cabinet or chest of slightly convex or segmental shape often called 'sweep-front' in the 18th century.
- Bracket-foot** A flat two-piece symmetrical foot, set at a corner and shaped like a bracket on the outer edges.

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Breakfront	The front of a cabinet or chest etc. whose ends are recessed. A recessed centre is known as a Reverse breakfront. The term Wing bookcase is also used.
Bun foot	A 17th century type of depressed ball shape, attached with a dowel (qv).
Butt Joint	A simple glue joint between two surfaces.
Cabochon (Fr.)	An ornament generally carved on the knees of cabriole legs (qv) and popular in the mid–18th century, based on a round or oval convex polished stone, usually with rocaille (qv) or foliate surround.
Cabriole leg (It. capro=goat)	An elegant leg, most popular in the first half of the 18th century, formed of a convex curve above a concave one and resembling an animal's leg.
Camel back (or hump back)	A settee with a serpentine–shaped top rail to the back.
Candle–slide	A thin slide to support a candlestick, extending from a slot and found particularly beneath the mirrored doors of 18th century cabinets where reflection would enhance the light; or a circular support swiveling from beneath a drawing–table etc.
Capital	The top of a column or pilaster (qv), frequently carved following a Classical order.
Cartouche	An ornately–edged tablet, properly in the form of a scroll unrolled to bear an heraldic coat of arms.
Caryatid	A Classical female figure supporting an entablature (qv). The male equivalent is called an Atlantis. (cf term)
Cavetto moulding	A moulding of concave or 'hollow' quarter–circular section, used on cornices (qv) etc.
Chain	A pendant (qv) of flowers and fruit suspended vertically from one end (cf festoon).
Chamfer	A bevelled (qv) edge, usually at 45° and applied to solid members such as legs. Sometimes 'stopped' with another bevel.
Chequered inlay	Lines of inlay with alternating light and dark wooden squares.
Cleat	Properly a nautical wedge, but used of the framing joint across the ends of a table top to secure and stabilise the boards.

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Club foot	A foot popular in early to mid 18th century and generally used on a cabriole (qv) or turned tapered leg which swells to a depressed circular pad, often resting on a wooden disc, when properly termed Pad foot.
Cockbead	A small half-round moulding often applied to the edges of drawer fronts and doors.
Collar	A thin banding or moulding applied round a leg etc.
Composition	A mixture of resin, whiting and glue size, used to make mouldings such as picture frames.
Console	A scrolled bracket or Truss; or a table attached to a wall, the top supported by one.
Corinthian order	An elaborate Classical order with a moulded base, fluted (qv) column, carved acanthus (qv) capital (qv) with volute (qv) scrolls and a decorated frieze (qv).
Cornice	A projecting moulded ledge finishing off the top of a piece of case furniture, sometimes embellished with dentils (qv) etc. See entablature.
Coved top	A flat top generally on a lid, with a cavetto (qv) moulded edge.
Crenellation	A repeated geometric decoration based on the battlements of a fortified building (in Heraldry called 'embattled').
Cresting	An ornamental decoration set in the centre of the top of a mirror, cabinet or chairback, etc.
Cross-tongued	A slither of wood let in along the grain to join two pieces of wood together, often used as a mitre joint (qv). The slither may be dovetailed (qv).
Curvilinear	Originating from Gothic window tracery, shaping which is marked by continuous flowing lines.
Cusp	From Gothic window tracery, a re-entrant meeting point of two arcs or foils.
Dentil	A small rectangular block used in an equidistant series along a cornice. Taken from the Ionic and Corinthian orders (qv).
Diaper	Repeated geometric decoration of diamond shapes, sometimes as a pierced trellis or lattice.

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Dishing	Making a turned depression in the top of the table, candlestand etc. with a view to saving objects from slipping off; or the shaping of the wooden seat of a Windsor chair for comfort.
Domed top	Properly a three-dimensional vault, but also used of the arched top of a late 17th/early 18th century cabinet, or of a box etc.
Doric order	The earliest of the Greek orders of architecture, initially the columns without bases, with fluting (qv), plain moulded capitals (qv) and decorated frieze (qv).
Dovetail	In jointing two pieces of wood together at right angles, one of a series of wedge-shaped projections on one piece which fit into corresponding slots on the other. A Half-dovetail has one side angled and the other straight; a Lapped-dovetail does not extend all the way through on one surface.
Dowel	A small wooden peg used in joinery for securing a mortice and tenon (qv) or other joint.
Drop-leaf	A hinged extension flap to a table, dropping vertically when not in use, which can be supported horizontally by a swing leg, a fly bracket (qv) or a loper (qv).
Dustboard	A thin board, generally of softwood, fixed to the rails (qv) between the drawers of a chest.
Egg and dart or Echinus	A Classical decorative carving, repeating these motifs usually applied to an ovolo moulding (qv).
Engaged column	A column which is partially attached rather than free standing.
Entablature	In Classical architecture, the beam supported on top of columns, which is divided up into the architrave (qv), frieze (qv) and cornice (qv). Used at the top of cabinet furniture, mirrors etc. where different elements were adapted by furniture makers.
Escutcheon	An heraldic shield for a coat of arms, extended through its shape to the pivoting metal guard over a keyhole, and the keyhole surround itself. A metal-edged keyhole surround is known as a Thread escutcheon.
Fall-front	The vertical or sloped front or flap of a cabinet or bureau, hinged at the bottom edge to form a horizontal surface when lowered, generally as a writing surface.
Festoon	A Garland or swag (qv), of flowers and foliage, suspended from both ends (cf chain).

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Fielded panel	A wooden panel with a raised central area and bevelled (qv) or moulded surround.
Fillet	A narrow flat band or moulding between two larger mouldings or flutes (qv).
Finger joint or Knuckle joint	A wooden hinge with a metal pintle used to support the flybracket (qv) of a drop leaf (qv) table or the swing leg of a card table.
Finial	A knob or ornamental projection at the top of an upright member or on a pediment (see acroteria). A downward-pointing finial is called a pendant (qv)
Flare	The outward concave curve of a leg etc. The general term for a flared rim is Everted (cf splay)
Fly bracket	A shaped vertical bracket hinged with a finger joint (qv) to support a flap on a table etc.
Fluting	Repeated half-round concave channels used on Classical orders and found particularly on columns, pilasters (qv), friezes (qv) and legs. Counter or Stop-fluting: where part of each channel is filled with a reed (qv) of wood or brass. Fret Pierced or applied (Blind fret) decoration repeated, often used in bands, with Chinoiserie, Gothic or Greek key (qv) designs.
Frieze	A horizontal band, flat or convex (Pulvinated) and often decorated, properly between an architrave (qv) and cornice (qv), but also used of the framing beneath a refectory or side table etc.
Gadrooning (Fr. godron=ruffle)	A carved decorative edge moulding of repeated convex tapered ribs, generally diverging obliquely either side of a central point. When set square to the edge, may be differentiated by the term Nulling.
Gesso (It.=chalk)	A mixture of whiting and glue size applied to wood to provide a smooth or low-relief carved surface before painting, gilding or lacquering (qv).
Gouging	Decoration of a surface, especially oak, with repeated small carved-out semi-circular depressions.
Greek key	A Classical interlocking geometric decoration repeated in bands.
Grisaille (Fr.)	Monochrome painting, generally in stone colour, to give a trompe l'oeil effect or relief.
Guilloche	A Classical decoration of repeated interlaced circles, properly formed of plaited

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- ribbons. Sometimes in the form of overlapping disc.
- Hipped** Architecturally, a roof with sloping instead of gabled ends, used of some lids (see pitched); also an extension at the top of a cabriole leg (qv) which clasps the rail (qv) above; also used of the protuberance at the top of the flared (qv) legs of a 19th century centre support table.
- Ho-ho Bird** A carved and gilded Chinoiserie bird based on a crane, often found on Rococo (qv) mirrors or crestings (qv).
- Husk** A Classical motif, properly the catkin of the *garrya eliptica*, but often similar in appearance to the bellflower (qv). Imbrication a decorative carved motif resembling overlapping fish scales.
- Inlay** Decorative patterns or figural designs made up of pieces of different coloured woods etc. set into cut-out sections of the ground wood (cf marquetry).
- Inscrolled foot** A carved foot (especially of the late 17th/early 18th century) which curls under and inwards (also known more fancifully as Braganza, Spanish or knurled foot), as opposed to the later and more elegant Outscrolled (or French) foot.
- Ionic Order** A Greek order with a moulded base, fluted column, volute (qv) capital (qv), and plain frieze (qv).
- Japanning** The European imitation of Oriental lacquer (qv), using spirit and oil varnishes, from the late 17th century.
- Keeled** The sharp edge found especially on the corner of some cabriole legs, having the profile of the keel of a boat.
- Kerfing** The cutting of one side of a piece wood with a number of deep close-set parallel slits so as to bend it.
- Kicker** A strip or block of wood fixed on the carcass either side just above a drawer (generally a top drawer) to prevent it from tipping downwards when open.
- Lacquer** A Chinese or Japanese decorative finish of figures in landscape etc. on a ground built up with the sap of the lac tree in black or more rarely in other colours.
- Lappet** In clothing, a rounded flap, the shape of which is found in decorative carving. Similar to a Lambrequin (Fr.=pelmet).
- Linenfold** A relief carved motif popular on panelling from the 16th century, depicting ver-

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	tical folds of cloth.
Lipping	A strip of superior timber added to a board, such as a dustboard (qv) of inferior timber, where it is most visible.
Loper	A bar extending out of a slot to support a table leaf or bureau fall etc.
Lotus	A decorative motif of a stylised waterlily flower, originally Egyptian but popular circa 1810–1840.
Lunette	A decorative semicircle, especially found in carving on oak furniture, used in repeated bands or intersected.
Marquetry	Architectural, figural or foliate surface decoration made of veneers of different coloured woods laid on to a wooden ground (cf inlay and parquetry). Seaweed marquetry was a type depicting feathery fronds, popular circa 1700.
Mitre	The oblique bisecting line at the joint of two pieces of wood, generally set at right angles.
Mortice and tenon	A joint of two pieces of wood where a square or rectangular projection cut on the end grain of one (tenon) fits into a socket of identical size cut into the other (mortice). Through-tenon: where the mortice is cut right through a piece of wood.
Muntin	A main vertical framing member in joinery (cf stile) .
Neo-classicism	An architectural and decorative style derived from a new interest in the Classical world which spread through Europe in the second half of the 18th century. Made popular in Britain particularly by Robert Adam (1728–1792) .
Octangular	An elongated octagonal shape, similar to a rectangle with chamfered (qv) corners.
Ogee	A double-curved Gothic moulding consisting of a concave above a convex arc. Also used of bracket feet (qv) of this three-dimensional profile on mid-18th century cabinet furniture and clock cases.
Ormolu	Cast brass or bronze ornaments or mounts with fire (mercury) gilt surfaces.
Outset corner	A circular or square projection beyond the line of the sides of a table top etc. See also architrave.
Ovolo moulding	A sunk convex moulding of quadrant profile, used especially at the corners of panels etc.

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Oysters	Veneers cut across the grain of small branches of trees such as walnut, olive and laburnum, and laid decoratively. Popular circa 1700.
Palmette	A Classical ornament based on a stylised palm leaf with outcurved fronds (cf anthemion).
Papier mâché (Fr.)	A durable and malleable material made from paper or cardboard and glue, popular in the 18th and 19th centuries for architectural mouldings, boxes and smaller items of furniture. Also known as Carton pierre (Fr.)
Parcel gilt	A surface which is partially gilded to highlight features.
Parchemin	A relief carved motif on panelling from the 16th century, based on two adjoined ogee-shaped (qv) mouldings.
Parquetry	Geometric veneered surface decoration of various coloured woods (cf marquetry).
Patera (Lat.=shallow dish)	A circular or oval Classical disc ornament, sometimes containing a flowerhead or fan motif.
Pedestal	A tall block, sometimes with a stepped base, used to support a statue or vase (cf plinth). Also used for the cupboards flanking a serving table in a dining room.
Pediment	A Classical gable of low pitch, used as a cresting (qv) on mirrors or cabinets (triangular, segmental, open, broken, scrolled or swan neck).
Peg foot (Fr.toupie=top)	A slender turned foot used on cabinet furniture in the late 18th/early 19th century.
Pendant or drop-finial.	See finial. Repeated pendants beneath a rail (qv) may form an apron (qv). Also another term for a chain (qv).
Piecrust	The usual term for the shaped moulded edge of a circular tripod table top or tray from the mid 18th century, with alternating serpentine, curved and incurved sections, copying the shape of the early silver salvers.
Pilaster	A flat column, usually of a classical order, used decoratively in low relief.
Pitched top	Generally of a lid, where four sloping or hipped (qv) sides rise to a ridge or flat centre. Called Pyramidal where the slopes meet at a point.

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Plinth	Properly the low square block supporting a Classical column, but also used of the solid board on which some case furniture rests instead of feet (cf pedestal).
Pommel	A bolt with a rounded or decorative head which passes through a drawer front etc. and secures a bail handle (qv) etc.
Pot-board	A low shelf under a dresser or buffet on which flagons and pots were kept.
Pounced	A granular or sanded ground found on early 18th century gesso (qv) furniture, in contrast to a Punched or Pitted ground also used for texture at the time.
Putto (It.– pl.putti)	A winged cherub. Amorini (It.) is also used.
Quadrant stay	A sliding piece of metal of quarter circle circumference, used to support a fallfront (qv) or secretaire drawer.
Quadrant hinge	A hinge with two long arms rotating on a short pintle, often used at the top and bottom of a cabinet door, or in similar form on a card table flap or fall-front (qv).
Quartering	Four matching figured sheets of veneer laid to produce a symmetrical design. Found particularly on early 18th century walnut furniture.
Quarter-sawn	The cutting of a log radially to achieve maximum figure and stability.
Rail	A horizontal framing member in joinery, such as a seat-rail, back rail etc.
Rake	The inclination or slope from vertical, for example of a chair back (cf splay).
Rebate (pron. rabbit)	A right-angled recess cut in the edge of a piece of wood, or formed by two pieces, to house another piece such as a panel or drop-in seat.
Reeding	Repeated half-round convex mouldings used especially round pillars or legs and sometimes in flutes (qv).
Renaissance	A revival of Classical architecture and decoration etc. in 15th century Italy which spread to Northern Europe during the 16th century and brought a new naturalism.
Ribbing	A repeated decoration of small-scale reeds (qv), often used in flat panels or bands.
Rinceaux	A repeated Classical decoration composed of a band of acanthus scrolls, curling in opposing directions.

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Rococo	An architectural and decorative style developed in France in the early 18th century as a reaction against the heaviness and seriousness of Baroque (qv). Its essence was frivolity, lightness and asymmetry. The name derives from Rocaille (Fr. = rockwork).
Roundel	A circular applied or inlaid decorative motif (cf patera, boss)
Rule joint	A stopped hinged joint used on table leaves, press doors etc., involving a long ovolo moulding (qv) which leaves no gap.
Runner	The strips of wood fixed to the carcass either side on which a drawer runs.
Sabot (Fr.=hoof)	A cast brass or ormolu (qv) foot mount used on furniture in French taste.
Scagliola (It.)	A coloured composition of plaster and marble chips etc.used to imitate marble and sometimes pictorially, especially on table tops in 17th century Italy.
Scalloped	The shape of a scallop shell, with a lobed or foiled edge.
Serpentine	A convex curve flanked by two concave curves: the sinuous shape used in a horizontal plane on better furniture of the Rococo period (qv) (cf bombe)
Shoe or shoe-piece	A shaped horizontal bar used on many 18th century chairs, fitted round the bottom of the splat (qv) over the upholstery and tacked through into the back rail (qv).
Spade foot	A square tapered or 'thermed' foot, generally used in late 18th century on a tapered leg.
Spandrel	The triangle space formed between the curve of an arch and its square framing. Without the arch, the shape is that of a Bracket.
Spindle	A slender turned baluster (qv), often decoratively used in rows.
Spiral twist	The turning of a leg or column etc. in the form of a screw thread .
Splat	A vertical board, usually flat with shaped sides and often pierced or carved, used in the back of a chair between the top and seat rails (qv) .
Splay	Originally of a window recess or reveal: the angled taper of the sides. When curved, this is termed flared (qv).
Spoon back	A 19th century chair whose back resembles the bowl of a spoon.

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Stiff leaf	A Gothic carved motif or curled acanthus leaves (qv), used on capitals (qv) etc.
Stile	A subsidiary vertical framing member in joinery (cf muntin).
Straight-front	The front of a cabinet or chest that is flat and not recessed (cf breakfront)
Strapwork	A symmetrical ornament of flat interlaced bands or ribbons, of Northern Renaissance (qv) origin.
Stretcher	A horizontal member or rail (qv) which connects and braces legs, sometimes used decoratively, such as a cross-stretcher or arched stretcher.
Stringing	A thin decorative inlaid line of brass or contrasting wood, generally in veneer.
Swag	An ornamental garland or festoon (qv) of flowers and foliage, or of drapery, suspended from both ends (cf chain).
Table clip or 'fork'	A two-pronged, generally brass, clip which slides into sockets to link two table leaves. Other similar methods were patented.
Term	A pedestal (qv) or pilaster (qv) tapered to its base, the top formed as a human figure (cf caryatid).
Tester	A flat canopy, especially over a bed.
Tongue-and-groove	A joint in the same plane formed by cutting a groove along the centre of the edge of a board, usually along the grain, to house a corresponding tongue rebated (qv) in another board.
Tracery	Pierced or blind decoration with Gothic detail derived particularly from windows (cf fret).
Trefoil	A Gothic motif of three cusped (qv) arcs or lobes.
Trifid foot	A club foot (qv) generally found on a cabriole leg (qv) formed into three parts, sometimes with foliate decoration.
Trophy	A Classical motif of superimposed thematic emblems such as military or musical.
Tunbridge work	A small-scale mosaic of various coloured woods used geometrically or pictorially, popular in the 19th century.
Tuscan order	A simple Classical order, similar to Doric (qv) but with plain, unfluted column, a moulded base and plain frieze (qv).

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- Vernis Martin (Fr.) A form of translucent japanning (qv) developed in France in the first half of the 18th century by the Martin brothers.
- Vitruvian scroll A repeated Classical scrolled wave decoration named after the Roman architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio.
- Volute A scroll based on a ram's horn, as used on the capital (qv) of the Ionic order (qv) etc.
- Wainscot (Dutch–wagenschott) A type of fine straight-grained quarter cut (qv) oak imported from the Baltic and originally used for wagon shafts. Later synonymous with oak.
- Waterleaf A decorative motif based on waterlily foliage, popularly carved on mouldings circa 1810–1840.
- Wave moulding A convex curve between two concave curves (cf serpentine)