SCOTTISH FURNITURE WOODS.

By Dr Bernard Cotton

INTRODUCTION.

This article is intended to discuss the wide range of hard and softwoods which were available to those Scottish 'wrights' or furniture makers who made furniture for crofters, fishermen, artisans, farmers, shopkeepers and all those who formed the majority of the working population during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For this reason I have excluded mahogany and other expensive exotic woods used in furniture made for the wealthy. Not all of these woods have been identified in Scottish furniture as yet, but examples of a range of those most commonly found are illustrated below.

The native and introduced trees of Scotland constituted an impressive array of hardwoods, including Oak (Quercus pedunculata and Q. Sessiliflora); Ash (Fraxinus excelsior); Mountain Ash (Pyrus aucuparia); Elm, Wych (Ulmus glabra) and Common English (Ulmus procera); Beech (Fagus sylvatica); Sycamore ('Plane')(Acer pseudoplatanus); Holly (Ilex aquifolium); Yew (Taxus baccata); Birch(Betula alba) ; Alder (Alnus glutinosa); Cherry ('Gean') (Prunus avium); Hazel (Corylus avellana); Hawthorn (Crataegus oxyacantha); Aspen (Populus tremula); Willow (Salix vitellina); Laburnum (Cytisus alpinum); Horse Chestnut (Aesculus hippocastanum); Walnut (Juglans regia); and Lime (Tilia vulgaris). Softwoods abounded too, with many imported species being planted over time, but the native Scots Pine (Scots Fir) (Pinus sylvestris) was often considered by landowners to be the tree most likely to thrive, particularly in the high country and to the north; and for this reason, this species often predominated.

In addition to the indigenous Scots Pine, many other species of conifer were both grown in Scotland or simply imported as timber. Those which were planted in plantations during the second half of the 18th century included Larch, Silver Fir, Norway Spruce, White American Spruce, Black American Spruce, and Weymouth or White Pine, and many estates grew mixed softwood and hardwood plantations. The Earls of Airlie at Cortachy and Clova, Forfar in 1842 illustrate a typical estate plan in this way. 'The kinds of trees generally planted are larch, Scots fir, white and black American spruce, silver fir, Weymouth pine, pinasters, (maritime Pine) oak, elm, ash, mountain ash, plane, beech, chestnuts, birch, alder, and shrubs. [i] All of the softwoods on this list were grown as commercial timbers, and were available to have been used in Scottish vernacular furniture in both the Lowlands and the Highlands, especially in furniture which was painted and perhaps simulated as more expensive hardwoods, or with imaginative decorative designs. **See Illustration 1** for an example of furniture made in softwoods, with painted finishes.

IMPORTED TIMBERS. In addition to home grown timbers, many others were imported from overseas to augment the native woods, and the ledgers of one general merchant on Shetland, Hay and Co.,[ii] show that during the 19th century, they brought woods from Danzig, Norway, America, Canada Sweden, Russia, Stettin, Archangel, Memel, Drontheim, Stathelle, Hamburgh, Christiansand, Arendal and Skein. The reason for this extensive importation of timber was related to the competitive prices at which it was offered, as well as the over-all straight grain and wide planks of timber which could be obtained from these countries.

Amongst those woods which were imported, furniture makers often bought North American or Canadian Birch for use in chair frames and as the show wood in case furniture where the wood was often stained and polished to imitate Mahogany or Satinwood. American Ash was imported from North America and Canada for use as a secondary wood too, particularly for use as drawer linings, backs of chests of drawers, and wardrobes. In addition, Russian and European Oaks were also imported for their straight grain and light even colour for use in case furniture particularly, and was both less expensive and of better quality than either the Scottish or English counterparts. American Tulip Poplar, (Liriodendron tulipiflora), a member of the magnolia family, was extensively imported too in the 19th century. This tree produces a fine grained wood, with wide planks of grey-green heartwood and light sapwood, and is known by several other names including Canary wood, Canary Whitewood, or Yellow Poplar. It was widely used in cabinet work, particularly as wide boards for drawer bottoms, or stained as a show-wood to resemble Walnut or Satinwood.

As well as being home grown, Scots Pine was imported from Baltic, Finnish, Swedish and Polish sources under the trade names of Red Deal, or simply 'Red' (in Northern Britain), Yellow Deal, or 'Yellow' (in Southern Britain); and straight trunks of it were used extensively for house and furniture joinery.

Other softwoods including White or Weymouth Pine (Pinus strobus), although grown in Scotland since the first half of the 18th century, was also brought from Eastern North America, often as wide boards, by furniture makers. It is a straight grained and even textured wood which was easily worked, and was used in furniture making, especially where it was to have a stained or painted exterior finish, or to form the clean, continuous surfaces, inside a kist, for example.

Two other imported species of softwood, Silver Fir (Abies alba) and Norway Spruce (Picea abies) which were both imported as well as grown as plantation woods in Scotland were also used extensively in vernacular furniture, where the finished item was either painted or stained, or where they were used for tables or dressers which were washed or cleaned with sand. These woods are jointly known in the timber trade as Whitewood, (not to be confused with Canary Whitewood, which is the trade term for Tulip Poplar).

In addition to these common furniture woods, Scottish furniture makers also used home grown timbers, including the lustrous Scottish Laburnum, (Citisus laburnum) whose dark heartwood was used in both chairs and other furniture, as well as for the turned parts of bagpipes. Sycamore (Plane) was also used as a furniture wood, particularly for items used in food preparation such as dairies and butcheries, for blocks, bowls, and preparation tables. It was also used as decorative elements in staved vessels and commemorative ware. Holly, while extensively grown was of limited use in furniture except as an inlay wood. Perhaps the rarest of all native woods used in the cabinet trade was Broom, which, when cut as veneers, was used to decorate a suite of furniture at Blair Castle. Yew was grown widely in Scotland, too, but unlike its counterpart in England which found favour with furniture and Windsor chair makers, was little used as a furniture wood in Scotland.

Records show that the Scots used White or 'Huntingdon' Willow (Salix alba) as a furniture wood as well, when it was left to grow to its full height, and sawn into boards. However its attraction to the wood boring beetle is such that little historic furniture made of Willow exists today.

Both the native Wych Elm (U.glabra) and to a lesser extent, English Elm (U.procera) were used in Scottish furniture, with the lighter

colour and texture of Wych Elm often distinguishing it from the deeper brown colour and courser grain of the English variety. Alder, that most ubiquitous of Scottish trees, is found growing in inhospitable places, including boggy ground, or on the edges of streams and rivers. This wood oxidises to a brown colour and when buried in peat its colour further changes to a deeper Mahogany colour, and it became known as 'Scots Mahogany' when used as a furniture wood. Hedgerow and wild fruitwoods were also occasionally used, particularly in chair making, and an example in the collection of the National Museums of Scotland is made from Blackthorn.

In addition to both home-grown and imported timbers, those who lived on the off-shore islands or near to the mainland shore often found timber on the foreshore. Sometimes this was in the form of round trunks which could be split with a mallet and wedges to create planks. Such wood has often been in the sea for a long time, and had attracted the attention of the Teredo Worm, (Teredo navalis), a marine mollusc which bores large holes into wood. Timber from this source, when made into furniture, often displays these tunnels, and this indicates the coastal origins of the furniture. Large quantities of wood were also salvaged from the sea when cargo ships were wrecked in the dangerous northern coastal waters. In other cases, the Receiver of Wrecks would impound cargoes of found timber, and hold a collective sale. Second hand or reclaimed wood was sold as the result of ships breaking up. The accounts of wreck timber constantly refer to 'deals', 'battens', and 'boards', as a measure of their size. The trade received timber planks in these ways, and 'deal' was 3-4 inches thick and 9 inches and 11 inches wide , and this was graded into five qualities. The 'battens' were 2 ½ and 3 inches thick and range from 6 to 8 inches wide. Larger planks were known as 'boards' and these could vary in size, depending on the tree from which they were cut.[iii]

The following descriptions and photographs of woods and furniture include those which were most commonly used in vernacular furniture making in Scotland.

HARDWOODS.

ALDER. (Alnus Glutinosa)

Alder, often called 'aller' in Scotland, is one of the most enduring and widespread of Scottish trees, often persisting in areas now denuded of other timbers. It prefers boggy ground and can be found along the edges of many rivers where its mass of red roots helps

to consolidate the banks, and also to hold the tree in place during floods. It has a diffuse porous grain and is a fairly soft wood, which when freshly cut, is greenish white in colour. It is finely grained when tangentially sawn, and with a speckling caused by its medullary rays when quarter sawn. It quickly oxidises to a red-brown colour and it was sometimes buried in peat (moss) or immersed in peat water and lime, which both preserved it, and gave the wood a mahogany colour, which when used in furniture was called 'Scots' Mahogany'. In addition to being used in furniture making, alder had many uses, and in coastal areas, particularly, it was 'well adapted for herring barrel staves'[iv]; and in another form, decorative coopered domestic utensils, bickers and coggs, also often used Alder to form the dark staves, which alternated with those of light coloured sycamore. **See Illustration 2.**

ASH (Fraxinus excelsior) WO2

Ash is a European native timber. Historically, it grew, and still grows widely in Scotland, both as a hedgerow and plantation tree, where it flourishes best in moist soils, producing a creamy off-white and odorless wood which does not significantly change colour

(oxidise) when exposed to air or sunlight. There is usually little distinction in appearance between the heartwood and the predominant sapwood, and for this reason, it is prone to furniture beetle attack.

In addition to home-grown Ash, American White Ash (Fraxinus Americana) was also extensively imported from both North America and Canada during the 19th century, and although not as durable or strong as European Ash, it could be purchased as wide boards, and was easily worked. For these reasons it was used widely in the cabinet making trade during the 19th century to provide the interior and secondary woods in wardrobes and chests of drawers, where its clean appearance and smooth splinter-free surface found favour as drawer linings, back panels, and shelves. **See Illustration 3.** Such was its popularity that Blackie noted that 'The attraction (of imported Ash) was the absence of smell .... and the ease it is wrought compared with cedar etc formerly in use for the purpose to which Ash is now applied.' [v] Because of its lack of natural colour change through oxidation, Ash is relatively uncommon as a primary or show wood, and when used in this way, would normally have a stain or staining varnish applied to it to heighten its colour. Alternatively, a clear varnish applied to it refracts the light to create a clear yellowish hue to the surface.

BIRCH (Betula pendula)

Above all the trees which grow in Scotland, Birch is the most widely distributed and hardy. It grows in a range of environments including amongst heather, and the rocky sides of river valleys. Although often grouped under the single term 'Birch', there are two distinct species which grow in Scotland; Silver Birch (Betula pendulata) and Downy Birch (Betula pubescens); as well as hybrids of these two which are also widespread and intermediate. The two distinct species vary somewhat in their preference for different soils, with Silver Birch adapted best to sandy soils, and Downy Birch preferring poor, damp non-chalky acidic soils.

The appearance of these trees varies, with Silver Birch having 'weeping' twigs, and Downy Birch having twigs which scarcely 'weep'. The wood of these birches is straight grained with a fine texture, being grey/white to brown in colour, and with characteristic brown streaks in it, which is often a diagnostic clue in its identification. Since the colour of Birch timber alters very little by oxidation when it is used for furniture, it usually has a staining varnish applied to it to simulate Mahogany or Satinwood, and when polished, it is often difficult to distinguish it from those woods.

Birch has had a long history throughout Northern Europe as a furniture wood, and at the end of the 19th century, it was also cut to make veneers which, when glued together, formed plywood, which, too, had a major role to play in furniture making from that time onwards. Birch was a widely utilised wood in furniture making in Scotland, where, with Ash and Elm, it was used to make joined chairs particularly; **See Illustration 4** as well as being used extensively in making chests and other cabinet furniture, as well as turned ware. Such was the usefulness of Birch to the Scots that Loudon, writing in 1844 commented; 'The Highlanders of Scotland make everything of it; they build their houses, make their beds, chairs, tables, dishes, and spoons; construct their mills; make their carts, ploughs, harrows, gates and fences, and even manufacture ropes of it.

However, by no means all the Birch used in Scottish furniture making originated there, and three other species of Birch were imported

from North America and Canada during the 19th century. Of these, Black or River Birch (B. Nigra) which grows in Eastern America, from Massachusetts to Florida; and in Canada, (where it is said to have been imported in large quantities from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Cape Breton Island,)[vi] and was the first and most common species of Birch to be introduced into Britain. It was also known as 'black' or 'cherry' Birch and has a light or medium tan colour. A sense of the high value given to this wood is given in an 1840 list of prices on the Isle of Skye in which Oak is listed at two shillings and sixpence (12 ½ p) per cubic foot, and Black Birch at three shillings (15p) per cubic foot, placing it at the expensive end of the scale of wood values, costing more than Oak and of equal value to (imported) Ash. [vii]

The second imported Birch was Canadian or Yellow Birch, (B. Alleghaniensis), which grows in a wide belt from Manitoba in Canada, to Georgia, in the southern USA. The wood of this tree has a fine, even texture, with a yellow or reddish heartwood and whitish sapwood. Large quantities of this species were brought into the United Kingdom in the second half of the 19th century for making into Windsor chair seats in both England and Scotland, where the broad planks of timber were ideal for this purpose, as well as for bedroom suites and chests of drawers particularly, when it was either stained red and polished to simulate Mahogany, or stained brown to simulate Walnut, or treated with a yellow stain to simulate Satinwood.

The third species of American Birch (B.lenta), a sub-species of yellow Birch, was imported in large quantities into Britain from Canada, too, although it grew from Maine to Delaware in the USA as well. It was known as Mahogany Birch, or Mountain Mahogany, and has a light yellowish red to tan coloured heartwood, with an off-white sapwood. It is close grained in texture and has prominent ray flecks when cut on the quarter. [viii] It was used for making bedroom suites, when it was known as 'Sweet' or 'Mahogany' Birch, and sometimes'Colonial Mahogany'

BROOM. (Cytisus scoparius)

This woody shrub grows abundantly in Scotland to some four to six feet high, with stems two to three inches in diameter, and in most agricultural areas, it is regarded as an intrusive weed. Although not immediately obvious as a native cabinet wood, the stems of broom nevertheless provided the veneers for one of the most remarkable suites of furniture made in Scotland, for the Duke of Atholl in 1758 - 1759, by George Sandeman, cabinet maker, of Perth. (1724 - 1803). The original bills, with a description of how the veneers were achieved, and describe how the stems of Broom were glued together and then sawn to provide veneers. Observation of the light and dark striated veneers indicates that the stems were quarter sawn to ensure their stability, and to resist any tendency to curl. **See Illustration 5 and Journal Cover.**

ELM. (Ulmus montana, & U. Procera)

There are sixty species of Elm world-wide, of which the Wych Elm or Scots Elm (Ulmus montana) is the one indisputably native species to Britain and Ireland. Historically, it grew abundantly in southern Scotland, often achieving massive size, and one Wych

Elm at Larbert near Stirling, for example, was reported to have attained a girth of nearly fourteen feet, in the 1830's. Wych Elm was also said to be resilient to high and even salty winds. The Statistical Account for Scotland for Inverary, Argyle in 1834 - 45 notes that 'Wherever the Wych Elm grows, it stretches its principal branches towards the prevailing wind, and even when growing on the shore, it seems to court and luxuriate in the breeze, thus pointing out the means of planting those bleak shore lands where every other tree perishes.' . [ix]

The timber from the Wych Elm was used particularly in Scottish Lowland furniture, in the 18th and 19th centuries, and it can often be distinguished from the wood of English Elm (Ulmus procera) by its oxidation to a lighter brown straw colour and its finer grain. It was a highly regarded timber, and it was said that 'No tree is so useful and valuable as the Scots Elm.'[x] For an example of Wych Elm used in Scottish chairmaking, **See Illustration 6.** Although Wych Elm was the native species to Scotland, English Elm (Ulmus procera) was also grown there, being planted at least as early as the second half of the 17th century as a plantation wood in Argyle.[xi]

In terms of its timber qualities, Elm is a course, resilient wood which has a distinctive anatomical feature, seen in the annual ring growth, where alternate layers of dark fibre and lighter vessels form the characteristic striations which readily identify Elm either on the end grain or in tangentially sawn boards. The anatomy of Elm results in distortion as it dries, however, and furniture makers sought to use the more stable quarter sawn central boards of tangentially sawn logs wherever possible. Common English Elm, unlike Wych Elm, oxidises readily to a warm brown colour, and this, combined with its attractive swirling grain and its wide availability as a common hedgerow tree, ensured its use as a furniture wood in England. It was used in Scottish furniture too, where it is often noticeably courser and darker in colour than the native Wych Elm.

LABURNUM. (Laburnum alpinum)

Amongst the native Scottish woods used in furniture making, none is more lustrous and attractive than Scottish Laburnum (L. alpinum). Sometimes called ScotchWalnut or Pease Cod, Scottish Laburnum is related to the ornamental tree which flowers in English gardens, Laburnum anagyroides, which has a smaller flower raceme, and a generally paler brown heartwood than the Scottish variety. The two species cross to produce a hybrid called Vosses Laburnum, which adopts the length of raceme of L. alpinum, and the close packed flowers of L. anagyroides to form the most common of the Laburnums planted in gardens, and is called 'Golden rain'.

Scottish Laburnum was grown both as a decorative garden tree, and as a plantation timber from the early years of the 18th century, and it was used for furniture making by the mid 18th century, a tradition which continued until around the 1830's. Laburnum alpinum is native to Scotland, as it is in other parts of Europe, where it favours damp places and mountainous terrain. It has a tall funnel-shaped profile, and grows to a cone twelve metres high. Its trunk can grow to a considerable size, up to eighteen inches in diameter, and it is often characterised in having a wide, dark, almost black heartwood, and a light yellow sapwood. The heartwood no doubt simulated African ebony, and was used in making a range of musical instruments, including clarinets, oboes and recorders, and to make the turned parts of bagpipes, a tradition which continued until its decline probably due to the increased importation of Cocus wood and African Blackwood in the 19th century. [xii] In addition to furniture, the heartwood of Laburnum was used as an alternative

to bog Oak and Alder, as dark staves in making quaiches and other small vessels. The wood was also used on occasion to make spinning wheels, and it was commonly used for the turned knobs fitted down the sides of Scottish cradles to hold a protective tape to cross over the child.

However, not all Scots Laburnum produces dark heartwood, and it can naturally vary, producing a brown, widely grained heartwood in some trees, depending on the conditions under which it was grown. Loudon, writing in 1844 thought that it was lighter when grown in deep, fertile soil, but darkest when grown in poor alkaline soils. [xiii] However, it should be noted that lighter brown Laburnum can easily be turned deep black by fuming it with ammonia.

Historically, it has been thought that Perthshire, Angus, Fife, and other Eastern counties were exclusively the centres of laburnum furniture production, and one of the largest collections of Scottish Laburnum furniture was assembled by the Lord James Murray, later 9th Duke of Atholl before the first World War, and may be seen at Blair Castle. Other landowners, North of the Tay, also commissioned furniture in this wood in the 18th century, with Perth and Montrose also being centres of Manufacture, [xiv] and a set of brander back chairs made in this wood by George Sanderson of Perth (1724 - 1803) for his daughter's house in Edinburgh, was made around 1789. Laburnum was also used for furniture of more standard patterns, including chairs with both Chippendale and Regency influences. **See Illustration 7.**

Although there clearly exists strong evidence for the belief that Laburnum furniture was centred in the Eastern counties of Lowland Scotland, Laburnum certainly grew in areas other than Angus and Perth in the 18th century, and the Statistical Accounts for Scotland of 1791 - 99 and 1834 - 45, suggest a much wider range than the South East for the growth of this timber, with Elgin in Moray being the most northerly point mentioned, and with four records for nearby Aberdeenshire. In western Scotland, Laburnum grew in Inverary, Argyle, and on the Isle of Bute; and in the south, Kircudbrightshire, Dumfries, and Berwickshire, Laburnum was grown as a plantation wood, as it was in the counties of Lanark and Edinburgh.

OAK. (Quercus sp)

Some two hundred species of oak exist world-wide, including both deciduous and evergreen varieties. In Scotland and the British Isles generally , two species of 'White Oaks' are dominant as furniture woods. These are the common English or pedunculate Oak, (Quercus pedunculata or Q. robur) and sessile or durmast Oak (Quercus sessiliflora or Q. petraea), although many intermediate hybrids between these also occur. Although anatomically the differences between Q. pedunculata and Q. sessiliflora are small, pedunculate Oak is identified in the standing tree in having acorns held on a stem or peduncle and its leaves are stalkless; whereas the acorns from sessile Oaks are attached directly to the stem without stalks, and the leaves have long stalks.

Oak has played an important role in Scottish material life, as a prime timber in the construction of houses, ship-building, coopering, and domestic furniture making, as well as supplying bark for tanning leather. Both Pedunculate and Sessile Oaks grew in Scotland both as wild and cultivated trees, although numerous reports on Scottish woodlands confirm that common or Pedunculate English Oak was favoured more than Sessile Oak.

In addition to home-grown Oaks, imports of Oak from Russia and Scandinavia through the Baltic port of Danzig were an important

source of timber to Britain from at least the 16th. Century onwards. Other imports of Oak from America, Scandinavia, Poland, Prussia and Austria at various times throughout the 18th and 19th centuries all added to the Oak used in Scotland. It is therefore difficult to establish the origins of the Oak in furniture, although it can often be broadly determined by looking at the end grain of the wood through a hand lens. Oak from the colder, drier climates of Russia and Northern Europe tend to have consistent narrow annual rings, whereas British native Oaks tend to reflect the differences in climate from year to year, and to produce varying annual ring widths.

Historically, Oak was used in furniture as 'through and through' (tangentially cut) sawn boards, with a corresponding variability in distortion in other than the centre boards as they dried, and as the more stable 'quarter sawn' or riven woods, which were radially cut or split, along the lines of the medullary rays, and which, in turn, held the boards in a stable plane and also gave the surface a distinctive and attractive ray pattern. Since straight grained, quarter sawn Oak boards could be purchased from Scandinavia, Northern Europe or Russia, this made it extremely attractive to woodworkers and furniture makers, and it was said to have been no more costly than purchasing indigenous Oak. In a report from Fife in the 18th century, the writer comments that 'The crooked timber is imported from Hamburgh and Bremen, and the Oak plank from Dantzick. The foreign timber, after paying duty, is cheaper than what can be brought from any place in Britain. A considerable proportion, however, of English Oak is used, where it is most useful.'[xv]

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Oak was often used in making armchairs in Scotland, which were sometimes called 'Wainscot' chairs. On the Northern Islands of Orkney and Shetland, armchairs were also commonly made with a framework of Oak and with Pine panels and seats. **See Illustration 8.**

In addition, Oak, pickled in the tannin of the peat bog did not decay, and produced a dense, heavy, black bog oak. It was much prized by furniture makers, and was used as an inlay wood to simulate Ebony; or in some cases whole pieces of furniture were reportedly made from it. It was also occasionally used as the dark staves in quaiches and other decorative coopered wares. In other instances, naturally shaped pieces had legs socketed into them to make stools.

SYCAMORE (Acer pseudoplatanus)

Known as Plane in Scotland, Sycamore grew abundantly as both a hedgerow and a plantation wood where it grows with a heavy dome and to some twenty metres high in Scotland. It is regarded sceptically in England where its canopy and fallen leaves kill the herbage below, and its winged seeds spread the growth of small acers over a wide area. However, in Scotland, it was regarded more kindly, with many uses being found for it.

The wood of Sycamore oxidises when cut to a light yellow colour. It is a diffuse porous wood, and predominantly composed of sapwood, which allows wood boring beetle to attack it readily. Traditionally, it was used in dairies in the form of dressing boards, churn stands, turned bowls, butter moulds and spoons, or for stop-cocks in barrels. It was also used in laundries and butchers' premises, since the wood is non-aromatic and does not taint dairy and other foods or fabrics. Its use in Scottish furniture was limited, however, to being integrated as parts in joined chairs or other furniture, or, more extensively, as an inlay wood, either in its natural colour, or stained various colours to form decorative inlays. **See Illustration 9**. One consistent and particularly Scottish use, however, was to provide the light coloured staves in small coopered vessels, bickers and coggs, **See Illustration 2.** This wood was especially used in the form of burrs, too, to make Scottish snuff boxes, when, in common with field maple and Elm, it was oxidised with nitric acid and stained with lamp black to simulate tortoiseshell. Other small or decorative wares, particularly that of Mauchline ware, also utilised Sycamore as the basis of its inlaid products, including card cases, needle cases and similar small items.

WILLOW (Salix sp.)

In Scotland, the White Willow, (Salix alba), was known as 'Huntingdon' Willow and was highly valued. The wood of the Willow is tough and pliable, and had the benefit of being the fastest growing timber in Scotland. At Strathblane, Stirling, an entry in the Statistical Account of 1834 - 45, for example, claims that 'The Huntingdon Willow grows most rapidly. One of these trees in twenty three years has risen to a height of forty five feet.' [xvi]

In Scotland this tree was also grown as a plantation tree in company with other hard and softwoods. It was grown as a pollarded tree as well as being allowed to grow to a full height before being felled, to provide timber for use in joinery including roofing timbers for houses, and for making furniture. One account of Huntingdon Willow growing in Kilmarnock claimed that if they are allowed to grow to a sufficient age without being cut over, (pollarded), they make excellent household furniture, take a fine polish, are very light, and last long.'[xvii]

Given the clear interest in Willow as a furniture timber, it is perhaps surprising that so few items of furniture made in Scotland have been identified as made in this wood. However, it does attract wood-boring beetle, and it is probable that much furniture made in this timber has now disintegrated.

SOFTWOODS.

Scots Pine (Pinus Sylvestris)

Of the softwoods or conifers grown and imported into Scotland, Scots Pine, which is confusingly known as Scots Fir in Scotland, is the indigenous tree most associated with that country. See Footnote [1] This tall and distinctive pine grows to some forty metres in

[1] Archaically, Scots Pine was known as 'Caledonian Pine' (Sylva Caledonia), a name

height, with an irregular crown and branch pattern, unlike those of other conifers, and with a crusty brown bark. It is also indigenous to Scandinavia, the Baltic States, Western Siberia, and all of Europe and Turkey, and when this wood was imported into Scotland and elsewhere in Britain from other countries, more potential confusion about its name occurred, with the names 'Red Baltic Pine', 'Red Pine' or 'Redwood' applied to it. Other names were also used including 'Red deal', and in the north, 'Yellow deal', although the term 'deal' is used wrongly here since this is a measure of wood rather than a species.

The wood of Scots Pine is aromatic and resinous. It has a well-defined red-brown heartwood, and a pale creamy brown sapwood, and it is distinctive in having clear bands of red-brown summer wood which create a clear annual ring pattern. It was very versatile in its uses, being tall and straight in the trunk, it was used widely in house joinery and in making domestic furniture, and in common with Pitch Pine (Pinus rigida) which was imported from the USA, was used widely in making church pews and other ecclesiastical furniture from about 1830 onwards .

Historically, Scots Pine held a special place in the affections of the landowners of Scotland, particularly in the Northern counties, where it was thought to be the most suitable and durable of native trees. However, it is apparent that in some areas, much of the stock of this tree had gradually disappeared without replacement, and it remained in decline until the second half of the 18th century when estate owners attempted to improve their estates' income in a variety of ways, including planting woodland of mixed tree species as a long term investment.

Whitewood (Abies alba & Picea abies) Illustration WO11

However, the most commonly identified softwoods used in furniture making are Silver Fir (Abies alba), and Norway Spruce (Picea abies). Although separate species of tree, they are today conjointly known as 'Whitewood', [xviii] (although previously 'Whitewood' was reserved for Norway Spruce alone,*)* and they do have properties in common, with the timber colour ranging from almost white to yellowish brown. The wood is straight grained, and unlike White Pine, has clear growth rings, although these are much paler and less obvious than in Scots Pine. In a similar way to White Pine, Silver Fir and Norway Spruce work easily and give a clean finish which glues and nails well, and provides a smooth base for paints and varnishes. Writing on timbers in the 1920's, however, Bullock said that Whitewood 'On the whole, (it) does not work as well as redwood, requiring exceedingly keen tools to properly manipulate it when used for joinery purposes, but when finished, the wood has a fine lustrous surface, and with its creamy white colour, presents a good clean appearance. It thus forms an excellent material for table tops, dressers, floorboards, cupboards, and other fitments for the house, as it retains and keeps this clean appearance.' [xix]

Weymouth or Wite Pine. (Pinus strobus)

In addition to Fir and Spruce, a further excellent Pine, Weymouth or White Pine (Pinus strobus) was grown in Scotland. The wood of this tree was commonly called 'Yellow Pine' in the timber trade, a name which can lead to confusion between this and the Scots Pine which was also called 'Yellow Deal'. However, amongst estate foresters, the term Weymouth Pine, named after Captain George Weymouth who introduced it into Britain in 1705 from North America, was the usual term.

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derived from the ancient name for Scotland.

This tree is also the largest conifer to grow in Eastern North America, with a magnificent straight trunk growing to ninety metres in height in ideal conditions. It is a straight and even textured timber which provided wide boards of pale straw to light reddish brown colour, and with inconspicuous growth rings. It was a popular imported wood with furniture makers ,[xx] since it works and finishes easily, and has good nailing and screwing properties. It also glues well and takes stain, paint, and polish readily too. It has the admirable property of a low shrinkage rate, and it was favoured for making 'kists' or chests, where wide boards, often entirely made the side or top boards, and provided clean interior surfaces for meal and clothing storage.

Larch (Larix sp.)

A further wood, occasionally used as a show-wood in furniture occurs in items in the collection at Blair Castle. These include two 'Empire' cabinets, made in London, which are veneered with Larch, and a bookcase, now used as a gun cupboard, which was made in Scotland. This wood shows the dark reddish heartwood and pale sapwood to good effect; and the grounds of Blair Castle have, today, fine large examples of Larch trees which it is believed were the first, or are the progeny of these, introduced into Scotland by the Duke of Atholl in 1738. [xxi]

Further examples of Scottish furniture made in the woods discussed above can be seen in B.D.Cotton 'Scottish Vernacular Furniture', Thames & Hudson. 2008

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[i] *SAS (Statistical Accounts for Scotland).1834 - 45. Cortachy and Clova, County of Forfar. Vol 11 p.448.*
[ii] *Ledgers of Hay & Co, General Merchants, Lerwick, Shetland. Shetland Museums Archive.*
[iii] *Bullock,W. Timbers for Woodwork. Evans Bros, London. Pub. early 1920's p.101*
[iv] *SAS 1834 Gelenshiel, Ross & Cromarty. Vol 14 p.191.,*
[v] *Blackie The Cabinet Makers Assistant. 1853 p.12*
[vi] *. Blackie. The Cabinet Makers Assistant. 1853.*
[vii] *SAS November 1840. Kilmuir, Skye, Inverness. Vol 14 P276*
[viii] *Hinckley, F.L. Historic Cabinet Woods Crown Pub, New York, 1960. pp 27,28.*
[ix] *SAS. 1834 - 1845. Vol 8. P.347*
[x] *SAS 1834 - 45 Moffat, Dumfries. Vol 4 p.110*
[xi] *SAS. 1834 - 45 Vol 7.p.16. Inverary, Argyleshire.*
[xii] *Stevenson, R.B.K. (Ed) Cheape,H. The Making of Bagpipes in Scotland. Edinburgh. 1983*
[xiiixiii] *Loudon,J.C. Arboretum and Fruticetum Britannicum. London 1844*
[xiv] *Ibid. P.3.*
[xv] *SAS 1791 - 99 Dysart, Fife. Vol12 p.513*
[xvi] *SAS. 1834-45 Vol 8 p.76. Strathblane, Stirling*
[xvii] *SAS 1791 - 99 Vol 2 p.107. Kilmarnock, Ayrshire.*
[xviii] *Lincoln,W.A. World Woods in Colour. Stobart Davies ltd. 1986. p.217.*
[xix] *Bullock,W. Timbers for Woodwork. Evans Bros. London. Early 1920's.*
[xx] *Edwards, C. Encyclopedia of Furniture Materials, Trades and Techniques. Ashgate Publishing. 2000. P161.*
[xxi] *Bowman,J.E. The Highlands and Islands. A Nineteenth Century Tour. Allan Sutton, Gloucester. 1986*

ILLUSTRATIONS.

COVER. Bureau -bookcase veneered in Broom; made by George Sandeman of Perth for the Duke of Athol 1758-1759. Blair Castle, Perthshire.

ILLUSTRATION 1. Lowland Press Cupboard. circa second half of the 19th century. made from White Pine and painted to simulate Burr Oak. National Museums of Scotland.

ILLUSTRATION 2. Bicker, circa 1840. Light sycamore and dark Alder staves bound with rattan. Private collection

ILLUSTRATION 3. The Top Drawer from a **Chest of Drawers** made in Lowland Scotland circa 1840. Imported Ash linings, Pine drawer fronts veneered with Mahogany. Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire.

ILLUSTRATION 4. Edinburgh pattern Side Chair circa 1880. Made by John Graham of Carluke in Birch, stained to simulate Mahogany. Private collection.

ILLUSTRATION 5. Detail of Broomwood Veneers used in the **Sandeman Bureau Bookcase** circa 1758-1759 (See Cover Illustration) Blair Castle, Perthshire.

ILLUSTRATION 6. Lowland Scottish Armchair circa 1790. made in Wych Elm with a stuffed-over seat. Private collection

ILLUSTRATION 7. Scottish Side Chair circa 1770. made of the heartwood of Laburnum (L.Alpinum) with an upholstered seat. National Museums of Scotland.

ILLUSTRATION 8. Shetland Armchair circa late 18th century. Made with an Oak framework and Pine back panels and seat. Shetland Museum.

ILLUSTRATION 9. Lowland Dresser circa second half of 19th century. Collected on the Isle of Islay, Argyllshire. Softwood with Birch and Tulip Poplar (American Whitewood); Mahogany and Sycamore cross-banding; stained and varnished. Private collection.