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THE HISTORIES OF MATERIAL CULTURE AND COLLECTING, 1700–1950

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# The Design, Production and Reception of Eighteenth-Century Wallpaper in Britain



CLARE TAYLOR

# The Design, Production and Reception of Eighteenth-Century Wallpaper in Britain

Wallpaper's spread across trades, class and gender is charted in this first full-length study of the material's use in Britain during the long eighteenth century. It examines the types of wallpaper that were designed and produced and the interior spaces it occupied, from the country house to the homes of prosperous townsfolk and gentry, showing that wallpaper was hung by Earls and merchants as well as by aristocratic women. Drawing on a wide range of little known examples of interior schemes and surviving wallpapers, together with unpublished evidence from archives including letters and bills, it charts wallpaper's evolution across the century from cheap textile imitation to innovative new decorative material. Wallpaper's growth is considered not in terms of chronology, but rather alongside the categories used by eighteenth-century tradesmen and consumers, from plains to flocks, from Chinese papers to papier mâché and from stucco papers to materials for creating print rooms. It ends by assessing the ways in which eighteenth-century wallpaper was used to create historicist interiors in the twentieth century. Including a wide range of illustrations, many in colour, the book will be of interest to historians of material culture and design, scholars of art and architectural history as well as practising designers and those interested in the historic interior.

**Clare Taylor** is Senior Lecturer in Art History, The Open University.

Cover image: Detail of flocked wallpaper hung at Eagle House, Bathford, c.1750–80. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, E.237–1968. Photo: © Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

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Clare Taylor

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**For Peter**



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# Preface

In the course of researching this book and the PhD which preceded it over the past twelve years I have prayed for sunny days in an English winter, blithely followed instructions such as ‘drive through the woods for three miles’ and replaced my torch with a mobile phone’s light. I have peered into attics, cupboards and behind dadoes and on one occasion been presented with a Chinese border paper found behind a filing cabinet. None of these encounters would have been possible without the archivists, curators, house managers and owners who have facilitated my access to spaces and documents relating to wallpapers. I am immensely grateful to: Stephen Astley (formerly of the Soane Museum); Alexia Clark (Stroud District Museum Service); Ciara Canning and Debbie Barnes (Colchester & Ipswich Museums); Sophie Cummings (Lydiard Park); Tracey Earl (Coutts & Co); Elise Edwards and Catherine Grigg (Wycombe Museums); Amy Frost (Bath Preservation Trust); Sally Goodsir (Royal Collection Trust); Alice Halden, Fiona Sheridan, Rachel Lloyd and Mark Hartwell (Stafford Borough Council); Emma Hardy (The Geffrye Museum); Jo Johnston (Bowood Archives); Carole Jones (The Kelmars Trust); Elinor Ling (The Fitzwilliam Museum); Alexandra MacCulloch (formerly of Buckinghamshire County Museum, now with Historic Royal Palaces); Tiia Marcos; Janet McNamara (Boston Manor House); Eloise Morton (River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames); Tim Oliver; Laura Houliston, Jerzy Kierkuć-Bieliński, Charlie Newman and Cathy Power (English Heritage); Lee Prosser (Historic Royal Palaces); Lars Roede (Oslo Museum); Fiona Salvesen-Murrell (Paxton House); Lindsay Speight (Watford Museums); Jill Tovey (Croome Court); and to the staff of the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford; Catalyst Science Discovery Centre, Widnes; and Wotton-under-Edge Heritage Centre. At the V&A special thanks are due to the Word and Image Department, in particular to the Print Room staff, to Gill Saunders, and to Frances Rakine who patiently responded to my queries and also conducted me around Blythe House. In the Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department I am grateful to Lizzie Bisley (and previously to James Yorke) who assisted me in consulting the Department’s archive. My site visits to National Trust properties have also benefited from the assistance of Trust staff, in particular Victoria Moulton (formerly of Felbrigg Hall); David Moore (Dunster Castle); Diana Shaw (Blicking Hall); Tracy Clement (Shugborough) and Helen Webb (Clandon Park). Nino Strachey, Sophie Chessum and the late Sue Baumbach were all generous in discussing schemes connected with properties in their care. In addition I am grateful to the following for their invaluable assistance in tracing eighteenth-century schemes and references: Katie Arber; Anna Chalcraft; Helen Clifford; David Conradsen; Sue Donnelly; Jane Eade; Michael Garton; Sam Hearn; Miles Hobart-Hampden; Gareth Hughes; Kevin Rogers; Lindsay Speight and Gillian Williamson.

My aim in this book, however, has not just been to document sites and the papers hung there, important as that task is, but also dig down into the archives to tell the story of how wallpaper became a key eighteenth-century decorative material and consumer desirable. It is archives around the country which have served up the meat of the daily encounters between consumers and tradesmen over wallpaper and I remain indebted to all the archive staff who have enabled me to delve into the nitty gritty of costs, colours and damp, including the county archives in Buckinghamshire, Cheshire, Essex, Gloucestershire, Gwent, Herefordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Wiltshire and the London Metropolitan Archives. Thanks to Jon Stobart's advice, the Shakespeare Birthplace Archive also shed new light on work at Stoneleigh. In the Bodleian Library I have benefited from the efforts made on my behalf by Colin Harris, Superintendent, Special Collections Reading Rooms, and Julie-Anne Lambert, Librarian of the John Johnson Collection, both of whom have undertaken extensive searches to locate trade cards and papers for me. I am grateful to the Trustees of the Bowood Collection for permission to quote from papers in the Bowood Archive. I am also grateful to John Fisher and Michael Melia of the Guildhall Library, City of London, for access to their library's trade card collection, and to Beverley Cook and Julia Hoffbrand of the Museum of London for their help at an early stage of my research in locating both trade cards and papers. The staff of the Prints & Drawings Study Room at the British Museum also assisted me in my study of the Banks and Heal trade card collections.

Throughout these researches I have been widely welcomed as 'The Wallpaper Lady'. I am glad to say that since I started work on this book, wallpaper's study has begun to emerge as part of the material turn and there are now more wallpaper women (and yes, men too). My thanks go firstly to the small community of specialists in the UK who have flown the flag for wallpaper studies since the 1980s, and here I would particularly like to record my debt to Andrew Bush (formerly of The National Trust), the late Treve Rosoman, and Christine Woods (formerly of The Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester). Special thanks are also due to Abby Cronin, a long-term member of the Wallpaper History Society, both for her encouragement and for generously giving me her copy of the late Jean Hamilton's revision of Charles Oman's 1929 catalogue of the V&A's wallpapers published in 1982. Gaining the input of others on my ideas has been a crucial stage in this book's gestation, and I am grateful for opportunities to share my findings with audiences at The Architectural Association, the universities of Birmingham, Oxford and at Van Mildert College, Durham, as well as at conferences and seminars held by the Centre for Studies of Home, the Chinese Wallpaper study group, the Design History Society, The Wallpaper History Society, the East India Company at Home project, The Henry Moore Institute and English Heritage. Further afield the centennial conference on wallpaper held at the Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, provided a memorable combination of wallpaper, sunshine and crayfish pie in Canton.

What research also needs of course is time, and money. I was fortunate that the Design History Society showed early faith in my subject, awarding me a PhD Bursary in 2005–06 which enabled me to complete much of my early fieldwork, and that the Open University has continued to support both my research and the costs of illustrations for this book. In addition, I am immensely grateful to the Wallpaper History Society for their generous contribution towards the cost of the book's colour plates. I remain indebted to colleagues past and present at Bucks New University and the Open University, in particular Emma Barker, who, together with Gill Perry, set me on the pathway to this book in my PhD, while Ray Batchelor, Polly Binns, Sue Capener,

Helena Chance, Leah Clark, Peter Elmer, Maddy Sharman, Encarna Trinidad, Greg Votolato, Susie West and Jane Ziar have all encouraged me along the way. Particular thanks are due to Pam Bracewell-Homer, who stepped in at a crucial point to assist me in the final stages of image gathering, and to Yvonne Bartley, who has provided administrative support in this task. My greatest debt, however, is to Professor Elizabeth McKellar who has stood by me throughout the gestation of this book, and much of the PhD that preceded it, offering an irreplaceable combination of wise counsel and insights across the architecture and design of the eighteenth-century.

Research is one thing, a book of course quite another. I owe a debt to Margaret Michniewicz, previously commissioning editor at Ashgate, and to this series' original editor, Michael Yonan, as well as to the anonymous readers for their faith in my subject. Isabella Vitti, my editor at Taylor & Francis, has taken over the baton to steer me through the final years of writing. I am grateful to her, as well as to the copy editor, Maria Whelan, and to Colin Morgan for seeing me through the final stages of production.

Friends and family have also encouraged me through years of research and writing. I am grateful to the Womens' Cultural Weekenders, the Windrush reading group and the Taylor clan, especially to Rachel, Sam and above all my husband Peter who have been my best supporters.

# Introduction

In 1998 the architectural historian John Harris recalled a visit made in the early 1950s to Belvedere, a country house in Kent, then virtually derelict:

Rain pelted down, and I hurried back into the darkened house. There was an elegant Stuart library, many more Stuart chimney-pieces and rooms with Stuart trim. The real find was upstairs, where a room on the south front was hung with Georgian chinoiserie papers, mounted on canvas and battened to the walls, but defaced by someone who had gone round poking a finger in as many places as possible.<sup>1</sup>

Within the decade Belvedere was demolished and with it all traces of this interior. What Harris glimpsed was a scheme devised from the most significant new decorative material of the eighteenth century, wallpaper. To eighteenth-century producers, retailers and consumers, ‘paper hangings’ (as wallpaper was known) was not a derogatory category, but one associated with innovation and modernity. This apparently ephemeral material transformed interiors, at once imitating, and competing with, other materials and spawned a whole new range of skills necessary for its successful making and installation. This meant that by end of the century it was sold across Britain, and hung throughout the home, in town as well as in the country, as well as exported in quantity. This new commodity can also illuminate another aspect of eighteenth-century consumerism; the ways in which commodities came to be seen as desirable, in particular how they were described, selected and acquired, issues which are the focus of this book. Yet the story of wallpaper’s development has never enjoyed the scholarly attention paid to other components of the interior such as textiles and plasterwork, and by the 1950s schemes such as that at Belvedere languished unseen. Why is this the case?

## **In search of paper hangings: visual and written evidence**

One reason is that the surviving material evidence for wallpaper has been seen as scant. As the architectural writer John Cornforth (1937–2004) expressed it, the key problem in studying the eighteenth-century interior hinged on the rarity of ‘entities, of complete rooms, apartments and houses’ and what he termed the ‘major distortion that cannot be cured’ of the imbalance of visual evidence between country and London houses, since ‘many fashions must have started in London and spread to the country’.<sup>2</sup> These difficulties are especially acute when it comes to wallpaper.

## 2 Introduction

It could be stripped from the wall or simply panelled or pasted over when tastes changed, obliterating material evidence while at the same time accommodating new consumer desires. In 1939 Alan (A.V.) Sugden (b. 1877) wrote the foreword to a centennial reprinting of a lecture on 'The History of Paperhangings' delivered by the decorator J.G. Crace (1809–89). In it, Sugden admitted that Crace's descriptions of 'old' wallpapers had been omitted, since all traces of them had since been lost.<sup>3</sup> However, wallpaper is not quite the ephemeral, invisible material it might seem; my journeys across Britain have found that much remains, albeit the material effects of those schemes which do survive on the wall have been transformed. Colours have faded, contrasts reduced and schemes bear the marks of later modifications. Many papers are visible as fragments, hidden in hard-to-reach corners, inside cupboards or concealed under later panelling. Where larger sections do survive they are often in areas which have escaped later decoration, such as that on the attic staircase at Boston Manor in Middlesex, remnants of a design which in the eighteenth century spread down all three flights (Plate 17). More often, survivors are those papers which were regarded as worthy of preservation from the start, such as at Saltram in Devon where four rooms are still hung with Chinese papers, silks and paintings, highly valued in the eighteenth century and remaining so today. Even when removed from the wall and preserved in the collections of museums and galleries wallpapers often sit awkwardly between categories, a material no-one is quite sure what to do with once divorced from the built environment. Still others find their way into archives where they lurk unseen in family papers, for example as the covers of account books. Nevertheless, this material evidence can shed light on key issues around eighteenth-century consumerism, especially when combined with textual evidence and with new approaches applied to its study.

A second reason why eighteenth-century wallpaper has been understudied is the difficulty of approaching the textual evidence. Makers, retailers and consumers used the term 'paper hangings', or 'hanging paper'. In the early part of the century 'paper for rooms' sometimes appears, in order to distinguish paper applied to the wall or ceiling from that intended for lining books or furniture, discussed in Chapter 1. By the end of the century the use of paper was sufficiently well established to be included in dictionary definitions, such as that of John Ash in 1795, which defines the verb 'paper' as 'To adorn with paper, to furnish with paper hangings' and 'papering' as 'Hanging with paper'.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, 'paper hangings' was an evolving category which included decorations produced by printing, stencilling, painting and flocking as well as papier mâché. As the century progressed, 'paper' was increasingly used either on its own or as part of specialist terminology such as 'stucco paper', a category discussed in Chapter 5. Wallpapers also frequently gave their names to rooms, often by their colour; for example the Red Chamber, hung with crimson flock at Clandon Park in Surrey, discussed in Chapter 4. Specialist nomenclature was also used, such as an 'India paper [Chinese wallpaper] room', suggesting that wallpaper was both easily recognisable and a useful shorthand for identifying spaces in place of other, more readily moveable, commodities. However, wallpaper was rarely recorded alongside moveable goods in inventories since it was seen as part of the fabric of the room, the exception being occasional references to 'India paper', either on the wall or in storage. Survival is also an issue when it comes to written evidence. No pattern books exist until the very end of the century, and few manufacturers' records survive, meaning collections of trade cards have assumed prominence. I have widened this scope, interrogating a much wider range of cards

than have been looked at hitherto, and I do so through the lens of new approaches.<sup>5</sup> I have also drawn on the texts of advertisements and newspaper notices, sampled for the period 1720–90, to illuminate the messages of trade cards. To counterbalance their rhetorical claims I have consulted bills in museums and archives across Britain which reveal what trade cards rarely mention: actual quantities ordered, their price and sometimes the specific rooms that were decorated. This has allowed me to make judgements on paper quality, the cost of hanging, and a scheme's complexity and scale.

In addition, I have sought to balance emphasis on the manufacturer's or retailer's viewpoint by turning to consumers' correspondence and a small sample of fictional accounts. When it comes to consumers' correspondence about wallpaper, remarks on the business of supply, cost and hanging outweigh comments on pattern, colour and visual effects. One exception, however, was the account written in 1741 by the poet and patron Frances, Lady Hertford about the decorating projects at her country house, Richings Park in Buckinghamshire:<sup>6</sup>

I begin to fear that the air of Richings is whimsically infectious; for its former owner (lord Bathurst) had scarcely more projects than my lord and myself find continually springing up in our minds about improvements there. Yesterday I was busy in buying paper, to furnish a little closet in that house, where I spend the greatest part of my time within doors: and, what will seem more strange, bespeaking a paper ceiling for a room which my lord has built in one of the woods. The perfection which the manufacture of that commodity is arrived at, in the last few years, is surprising: the master of the warehouse told me that he is to make some paper at the price of twelve and thirteen shillings a yard, for two different gentlemen. I saw some at four shillings, but contented myself with that of only eleven-pence: which I think is enough to have it very pretty; and I have no idea of paper furniture being rich.<sup>7</sup>

Hertford's account encompasses many of the key issues around eighteenth-century wallpaper with which this book is concerned. She described both wallpaper ('paper furniture') and papier mâché ('a paper ceiling', made with moulded ornaments using off-cuts from the paper making process), newly available commodities with which she was familiar. It was also a material which was rapidly developing and she singled out wallpaper's 'perfection', its ability to match the finish and colours of other wall treatments, such as textiles, plaster or wood. Many of these processes of course combined technical skill with artistic ability, perhaps especially so when it came to hanging a complete scheme. However, the warehouse owner whom Lady Hertford consulted was valued as much for his ability to supply what was deemed tasteful as goods that embodied 'perfection' in making. Lady Hertford also portrayed herself as active consumer rather than passive observer, one who both made and executed decisions, not only for herself but on her husband's behalf, too. However, this simple passage belies the evidence in this book that an increasingly wide range of consumers hung wallpaper: from female and male aristocrats to the gentry and aspirant merchants, apothecaries and brewers.

Another key issue is how wallpaper was acquired, and here Lady Hertford goes to a new type of artisan, the owner of a paper hangings warehouse. This signals that wallpaper had given rise to a new type of trade. However, as I explore in Chapter 2, it also brought opportunities and challenges for other, longer established, trades such as the stationer and cabinet-maker. The account also offers insights into questions about how Lady Hertford made her choice and how much she paid, questions this book

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also takes up. Choice involved viewing samples and talking to the warehouse's owner, acquiring knowledge which enabled her to make her selection and place her order. She also organised the making of a papier mâché ceiling, which would have involved the choice of suitable ornaments. Moreover, her account also sheds light on why these materials were chosen. For the wallpaper, it was a balance of costs and aesthetics in order to achieve a 'very pretty' effect, a phrase to which we will return. Choice was also not just about wallpaper in isolation but related to the room where it was to be hung; there is no mention here of dining rooms, drawing rooms or indeed parlours. Rather, the warehouse's products are to be displayed in her own most private space in the country house, her closet, and on the ceiling of a garden building.

Wallpaper was in addition a malleable material; by 1742 Lady Hertford was using paper as a different kind of metaphor, conveying not novelty and fashionability but economy. She reported to her sister that the Duchess of Manchester had rented a house at Englefield Green in Surrey, 'no bigger than a nutshell', and 'furnished all her rooms with paper'.<sup>8</sup> Wallpaper thus appears as a material which can shift its meanings from one dwelling to another, from the country house, to garden buildings and smaller rental properties as well as from one consumer to another. And although decisions about decoration could be taken in isolation by a (female) consumer, men and women could also make them together. In the case of the Hertfords, projects were shared between husband and wife, and this shared interest in decoration extended to a joint investment in making. Lady Hertford conjured up the harmonious scene in another letter to her sister:

Within doors we amuse ourselves (at the hours we are together) in gilding picture frames, and other small things – this is so much the fashion with us at present, that I believe, if our patience and pockets would hold out, we should gild all the cornices, tables, chairs and stools about the house.<sup>9</sup>

No foray into embellishing a room's decoration was then too small, and it was not simply about executing these finishes yourself, but also the opportunity decoration gave to collaborate in making 'things' with others – other women as well as husbands – away from the demands of the public life of the country house. These activities could therefore cement both social and marital relations.

One writer's assessment, and one with an elite bias at that, cannot of course encompass the multiple motivations of eighteenth-century consumers, but my study of other correspondence explored in this book conveys the cultural investment made by consumers in this new material. This was not just part of the process of furnishing requests for wallpaper but also a means to exchange knowledge of this new material, in the process shaping the taste of correspondents. Correspondence reveals not only worries about supply but also admiration, both for skills in hanging and for the achievement of tasteful effects.

#### **Interpretations of eighteenth-century wallpaper**

Issues of survival and shortfalls in evidence are only part of the explanation of why wallpaper as a component of eighteenth-century interiors alongside other material objects has been understudied. Another is the way in which the narrative of wallpaper has been commandeered by scholars. Perhaps ironically, early articles



devoted to aspects of eighteenth-century ‘paper furniture’ were written primarily by furniture historians, such as McIver Percival and Oliver Brackett. Their aim was to show readers how to create appropriate settings to display antique or reproduction ‘Chippendale’ or ‘Sheraton’ furniture.<sup>10</sup> These studies were rooted in the burgeoning interest in the eighteenth century, for which the standard bearer for interiors was Margaret Jourdain (1876–1951). Jourdain wrote a series of articles in *Country Life* dedicated to English, Chinese and another, much neglected, category, English wallpapers in the Chinese style.<sup>11</sup> Much of Jourdain’s research was driven by her employers’ agenda; the dealer Francis Lenygon (1877–1943) employed her on a retainer and she authored several books and articles published under his name, including one on leather hangings in the *Art Journal*, at that time owned by Lenygon.<sup>12</sup> John Harris has described her ‘unsatisfactory’ links to dealers, a link reinforced in her illustration of items from Lenygon’s and others’ stock in her publications, including a flock discovered on the firm’s premises.<sup>13</sup> However, as Elizabeth McKellar has shown, Jourdain was also pioneering: she expanded the architectural treatment of the interior to consider wall hangings as well as panelling and painted finishes, developing a less architectonically based approach to the study of the historic interior.<sup>14</sup>

Jourdain’s interest in wallpaper was also related to her study of textiles, and she was not alone in this. The first book-length study of historic wallpaper was authored in 1923 by Phyllis Ackerman (1893–1977), an American who established a reputation for her books on tapestry and textiles.<sup>15</sup> Historic wallpaper offered an opportunity for Ackermann and other women to carve out new areas of research, none more so than the leading American interior designer, Nancy McClelland (1877–1959).<sup>16</sup> McClelland’s own ambitious survey, published in 1924, included French, American and British examples and was published simultaneously in Philadelphia and London.<sup>17</sup> Hers was one of the earliest studies to employ original documents; for example making use of eighteenth-century American newspapers. McClelland also set about comparing papers, notably the series of wallpapers hung in the Van Rensselaer manor house in Albany, New York state, with those then at Harrington House in Gloucestershire, a scheme on which I shed fresh light in Chapter 5 (Figure 5.8).

It was not just historians of furniture and textiles who became interested in wallpaper, there was also commercial interest from manufacturers. In 1926 *Country Life*’s correspondent, H. Avray Tipping, commented that to date ‘it is curious that native wallpapers have found no native historian’.<sup>18</sup> Avray Tipping was reviewing *A History of English Wallpaper 1509–1914* by A.V. Sugden and J.L. Edmondson, published in that year. This narrative was rooted neither in furniture studies nor in textiles, but in Sugden’s own connections with the wallpaper industry as chair of the Wallpaper Manufacturers Ltd (WPM), who took up his suggestion for the book.<sup>19</sup> Dedicated to Metford Warner (c.1843–1930), founder of Jeffrey & Co, at the time the leading ‘art’ wallpaper manufacturer in Britain, it is not surprising that technology loomed large over consumer agency in this history. Its chapters on the eighteenth century argued that circumstances had combined for ‘wallpaper to take its assured place in domestic interior decoration’, and built a narrative of the industry based on technological progress and manufacturing growth centred on London.<sup>20</sup> Christine Woods has argued that this emphasis on economic and technical success rooted in craft skills was in part a response to the desire of many members of the WPM, who



were manufacturers of hand-made wallpapers and wished to disassociate themselves from large scale machine production.<sup>21</sup> However, it was also an approach based on ‘famous pioneers’ and equally famous consumers, including Horace Walpole (1717–97), reflecting a desire to establish a methodology based around named individuals. The unchallenged status of Sugden and Edmondson’s history meant that more than thirty years later when the bibliography on interior decoration was put together for English Historical Documents’ volume on the eighteenth century, theirs was the only source listed for wallpaper.<sup>22</sup>

These publications, by Ackerman, McClelland and by Sugden and Edmondson did, however, stimulate interest in the subject and in the late 1920s and 1930s more specialist articles on different types of eighteenth-century wallpaper in Britain appeared: *Old Furniture* published a series entitled ‘Old Wall-papers in England’ by Charles Oman of the V&A, who went on to publish the first catalogue of the museum’s collection.<sup>23</sup> Enthusiasm for chinoiserie in 1920s and 1930s design fed into demand for knowledge of Chinese wallpapers in particular.<sup>24</sup> The stress here was less on ‘famous pioneers’ than on the Chinese papers’ supposedly unique qualities and their superiority to home produced products: again, a position which informed later wallpaper studies.

Sugden and Edmondson’s model of technical achievement and named pioneers was in turn taken up E.A. (Eric) Entwisle (1900–98). Entwisle, who had probably undertaken much of the research for the 1926 *History*, was also part of the WPM, of whose London offices he became Director in 1948. He produced a steady stream of books and articles on wallpaper over some fifty years.<sup>25</sup> His survey of the field, *The Book of Wallpaper: A History and An Appreciation*, first published in 1944, had a foreword by Sacheverell Sitwell (1897–1988), and included a brief chapter on ‘Chinese Wallpapers and English Imitations’, followed by two chapters on ‘London Paperhanging Makers’ covering the period from 1690 to 1800.<sup>26</sup> Although the emphasis was once again on making, Entwisle also covered neglected aspects of decoration including papier mâché, painted papers and print rooms, although there was no attempt to analyse individual schemes and probe consumer motivations.

### ‘Antipodes of design’

For Sugden and Edmondson the eighteenth century represented the period when wallpaper took its ‘assured place in domestic interior decoration’. However, wallpaper has occupied an awkward place in between a group of divisions upon which scholarship on the interior traditionally builds its arguments. To understand how wallpaper was categorised in the eighteenth century, and more recently, I want to explore these divisions around architecture and decoration, and between mechanical and fine art and decorative art and design.

The division between architecture and what is often called interior decoration is the one most frequently employed in approaching wallpaper, with wallpaper often categorised as interior decoration. However, interior decoration is a term which had little resonance in the eighteenth century; it has associations with what Charles Rice has called calls ‘staginess’, it is seen as distinct from architectural construction and its first use (by the designer Thomas Hope) was not until 1807. Rice has further argued that the interior cannot be divorced from architecture, since it is articulated through decoration, the literal covering of the inside of an architectural ‘shell’ with the soft ‘stuff’ of furnishing.<sup>27</sup> David Brett has also examined how these divisions are embodied

in the writings of the painter Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–92). Brett points out that, for Reynolds, ideal beauty was ‘the capstone of an edifice’ which extended downwards from the higher arts of painting, sculpture and architecture through the lesser arts to the trades of the pattern drawer and wood carver, and, finally, mere ‘manufactures’. Quality is then transmitted down from the artist and architect into everyday manufacture and crafts. Brett also argues that, for Reynolds, the details of a building, a sculpture or a painting are secondary to the main ideal forms, so if detail is equated with decoration then its status is reduced, along with that of those who design or make that decoration.<sup>28</sup>

Yet *architectural* decoration is also a problematic term, since it has often been considered in isolation from the spaces of which it forms an intrinsic part, a practice which has its origins in the categorisation of buildings by their material components, reinforced by the modernist tendency to separate exterior and interior. In part this is because, as McKellar has pointed out, ‘the study of interiors has remained, for the most part, awkwardly situated between architectural historians on the one hand and furniture historians on the other’.<sup>29</sup> However, eighteenth-century wallpaper cannot easily be divorced from architecture. Architectural elements including a room’s aspect, scale and place in the hierarchy of spaces within a building formed a key part of decisions about its choice. Its hanging needed to successfully accommodate architectural features, and in the eighteenth century that meant not just door- and window-cases but also chimneypieces, and sometimes looking glasses and pictures too. Stacey Sloboda has also noted that wallpaper is one of a group of mobile objects which are literally embedded into the structure of the country house.<sup>30</sup> Wallpaper was fused to the architectural shell, on the boundary between architecture and interior decoration, and in the eighteenth-century home it not only provided colour (and usually pattern too) but could cover over cracks and evidence of earlier schemes. Like plasterwork, which, as Conor Lucey has argued in his study of its use in the early modern interior, is ‘Located somewhat uneasily between the liberal and mechanical arts’, so wallpaper has also fallen between mechanical and high art.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, this book places wallpaper as an integral part of a system of decoration composed of plasterwork, paint and other finishes.

The link between the eighteenth century’s growing interest in the mechanical arts and the expansion in the social and economic role of manufactured goods meant that practitioners and critics alike also struggled to comprehend the artistic nature of manufactured products, recognising the lack of suitable definitions for artistic activities outside the fine art realm. Applied or ‘decorative arts’ has long been used as a shorthand for art historians to distinguish manufactured items from the high arts of painting, sculpture and architecture. In 2004 Cornforth wrote that ‘I have become increasingly unhappy about the way we tend to approach interior design, decoration and the decorative arts’; the problem, as he saw it, was that art history had concentrated on the history of style in painting and sculpture and to a slightly lesser extent in architecture, and the decorative arts had been regarded as ‘second class in the ladder of studies and still largely ignored’.<sup>32</sup> As Michael Yonan expresses it, ‘The art-craft hierarchy places painting and monumental sculpture at the apex of art-historical classification, with other sorts of creations viewed as less intrinsically meaningful’.<sup>33</sup> Wallpaper has frequently been seen as an ephemeral object, one which lacked the permanence attributed to high art. It has also been categorised as a decorative art rather than an aspect of design. The nature of the term ‘decorative’ arts has also been probed