**Bench**

Place of origin: England (made)

Date: ca. 1870 (made)

Artist/Maker: Dresser, Christopher, born 1834 - died 1904 (designed by)
Coalbrookdale Company (maker)

Materials and Techniques: Iron, cast, painted

Museum number: M.938-1983

Gallery location: Ironwork, Room 114b, case 7C

**Public access description**

Christopher Dresser (1834-1904), the renowned and prolific designer in all media, believed that it was possible to bring some of the qualities of wrought-ironwork into the cheaper production of cast ironwork. He was designing for the Coalbrookdale firm from 1867 to the 1880s, producing a series of distinctive hallstands, umbrella stands and garden furniture. The design for this bench was styled by the firm 'Medieval' and was available in different colourways. This design was registered by the firm on 22nd April 1870 as no. 240809.

Cast iron is an alloy of iron and other elements, principally carbon. It has a crystalline structure and melts easily, which makes it particularly suitable for casting, when it is poured into moulds to form items. Casting makes it possible to produce numerous examples, and generally foundries used the same model for decades. Other foundries would also cast models from another foundry's original, which meant that the same example was produced by many different firms. Coalbrookdale was unusual in that it almost always marked its products.

**Descriptive line**

Cast iron bench, painted, made by the Coalbrookdale Company, designed by Christopher Dresser. England, c. 1870.

**Physical description**

Cast iron bench, now painted yellow. Cast in four separate panels, the seat frame, the back, and the two sides. The openwork design of the back is made up of an intricate symmetrical pattern of heart shapes and scrolls, decorated with five petalled flowers. The two side panels incorporate trefoil arches and leafy scrolls. All the panels are bolted together by means of three rods. Five wooden slats screwed in place into the seat frame are probably replacements of the originals.

Made by the Coalbrookdale Company iron foundry, of Shropshire, and offered in its catalogue as the 'Mediaeval' model. It was probably designed by Christopher Dresser (1834-1904), and its design is loosely inspired by medieval manuscripts of the 12th-13th century. It was available in three painted colour options, bronzed, green or chocolate.

**Dimensions**

Height: 87 cm, Width: 192.8 cm, Depth: 40.5 cm Depth of seat

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**Historical context note**

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**URL**

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O373910/bench-dresser-christopher/