

To: David Armstrong-Jones, Earl of Snowdon.

Dear David,

I am a specialist box maker, writer and teacher based in Shropshire - we met briefly at a function at Pimlico Road in the early 90s when I did a small amount of making for Linley. In 2001 you kindly agreed to write the foreword to *Celebrating Boxes*, a book I wrote jointly with another prominent UK box maker, Peter Lloyd, to accompany the exhibition of the same name.

Since early 2011 I've been marketing a high quality box hinge called **smartHinge**. I have promoted this energetically, I'm widely associated with it and have sold some 5,000 pairs to high-end box makers worldwide. Some of the workshops that do or have done work for Linley were using them - but the orders stopped coming during 2013 and it eventually became clear that the company had had the **smartHinge** copied in China and was issuing these copies to makers to be used in place of the **smartHinge**. This was done without my knowledge or permission, with the sole purpose of saving money and in the full knowledge that this would deprive me of legitimate business. Linley has been selling boxes fitted with these very poor quality Chinese-made hinges, copied from my originals, ever since.

There can be no question, incidentally, that the hinges were copied directly from mine and that the design is identical - James Oliver confirmed as much very early on in our dealings in 2014, and an offer by Kevin Blumenthal just before Christmas 2017 to buy the 'right' to use the design further confirms this. However, they're made from weaker and softer material, an aluminium alloy I think, so lack the necessary strength to support heavy lids safely. They also suffer from inconsistent leaf width and most open too far which further strains these already weaker hinges. All in all they are so poorly produced that they don't benefit from any of the advantages of my original design.

When I visited the Belgravia showroom before Christmas there were more than 30 boxes on display with these Chinese hinges fitted. These are being offered as high quality boxes - the prices are certainly high, some costing as much as £9,500. I recently saw an image of you with Jacky Tsai launching the Linley 'Jacky Tsai' jewellery box. I assume that neither he nor you know that this box, selling for £13,955, is fitted with poor quality hinges copied from mine without my knowledge or permission and costing £1.50 a pair.

I consider it wholly unacceptable, as I'm sure you will, that these extremely expensive boxes are fitted with poor quality Chinese made hinges costing only £1.50, chosen over excellent quality British-made ones costing £26.50, purely to save money. I'm sure that Linley's customers would consider this economy unacceptable, as I'm sure would Jacky Tsai.

I've tried to get this matter settled twice now, once in 2014 and again in 2017, and broadly speaking both attempts have met with the same pattern of responses: firstly with apology and courtesy, and 'shock' that this should have happened at all. Then on both occasions the initial courtesy and cooperation have gradually evaporated, turned to evasion and then ultimately to a refusal to communicate in any way. The fact of the copying has never been denied, but when it's come to any material settlement the company has simply stopped responding and I've not been paid a penny for the unauthorised use of this design.

A condition of KB's offer before Christmas was that I sign a non-disclosure agreement. This at least indicates that the company is acutely embarrassed by its actions, but the cost of the preparation of this agreement would be subtracted from the already minimal offer, so effectively paid for by me. Understandably I have refused this offer finding it derisory, offensive and completely against common sense and any spirit of fairness.

I realise that you no longer have the direct involvement with the company you once did, and I am making four important assumptions in sending you this:

- first, that you have no knowledge of the particular situation I describe
- second, that you would not have approved of using cheap, poor quality Chinese-made hinges on such expensive items
- third, that you wouldn't have sanctioned the unauthorised reproduction in China of a quality British made hinge
- and fourth, that you don't approve of the way the company has handled the resulting situation.

After all, everything you publicly say and write emphasises your enthusiasm and support for things British: the Linley showrooms fly Union Jacks outside, inside there are boxes with Union Jack lids, and without question the general public perception is that the company is offering the highest possible quality and proudly supporting and promoting British craftsmanship to that end.

In the main this may well be accurate - but in my case the exact opposite is true. I am well known for what I do, I have an excellent reputation nationally and internationally, and yet the way I've been treated in this matter is quite appalling and clearly at odds with the original vision you had for the company you founded and which still bears your name.

Please understand that my contacting you is an absolute last resort. I certainly have nothing against you personally and I apologise for involving you in this. But trying to deal reasonably with the company has drawn a complete blank and going public with the facts of this seems to be the only leverage left open to me. I have uploaded a page on my website which sets out the facts. The URL is www.smartboxmaker.com/linley-facts, I've sent this to Kevin Blumenthal and he knows I've sent it to you. It is currently private so no one has access without a password, and I hope I can keep it that way. The password is 'linleyfactsforall'.

I've tried to keep this brief, but a certain amount of detail is necessary so that the situation can be fully understood. There's more information in the attached document 'Supplementary Material'. I have also included a detailed report on the copied hinges submitted to James Oliver in 2014 when I was still hopeful that a mutually beneficial way forward could be agreed. It never received any response. Kevin Blumenthal has copies of both these documents.

I considered that you should be aware of the situation - thank you for your attention.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Crawford', written in a cursive style.

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Supplementary material
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