Saving the Great House Press: Observations Made during the Dismantling and Rebuilding of a Seventeenth-Century Built-in Lake District Press-Cupboard

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The Great House press, which is on display in Armitt Museum, Ambleside, is a very large seventeenth-century oak press or press-cupboard, of frame and panel construction (Figure 1). It was probably built into a wall or partition at the Great House at Troutbeck near Windermere; building-in was normal practise in the Lake District at the time of its construction. The Royal Commission for Historic Monuments (RCHM) survey of Westmorland recorded over 250 presses or cupboards but the author does not know of any example of a carved Lake District built-in press of any age with such strong provenance, and which is on public display.[1]

The press has three levels of doors, with the top level recessed, forming a narrow shelf in front, and is surmounted by an overhanging canopy. Turned drop pendants hang from the corners of the carved frieze. It is a form common in the Lake District, and the upper doors and frame are carved in a distinctive Lake District style. The frieze bears the initials W L for the owner, William Longmire, and the date 1634. A National Trust survey of thirty-two Lake District presses in their ownership in 2006 recorded only one which is older, by six years.[2] One other press-cupboard in Troutbeck, of a dozen recorded by the late Jean Marshall, has the same date of 1634.[3] It is not known whether this survives. The Great House press also appears to be the largest recorded Lake District press of its type. It is worth noting that the early date confirms Sarah Woodcock's observation in an earlier article on Lake District press cupboards, that dropped finials on the canopy are not necessarily later in date than turned pillars.[4]

William Longmire (1611–1682), was born in Great House, Troutbeck (Figure 2).[5] William's grandfather, also called William, had moved into Great House from Longmire Yeat, a few hundred yards further down the road, when he married Genet Richardson of Great House in 1587.[6] As was the custom among statesmen farmers in this area, he inherited the house on the death of Genet's father George, and in due course the house passed to William and Genet's son George and hence to his son William, for whom the press was made. William was twenty four years old when the press was carved but the date does not have any known significance in terms of family events.

[1] RCHM (1936)
[2] Woodcock (2010).
[3] Marshall (*c.* 1980).
[4] Woodcock (2010).
[5] https://familysearch.org/search/collection/igi
[6] https://familysearch.org/search/collection/igi

1 The Great House press, made for William Longmire, 1634. *The author*

2 The Great House, Troutbeck, photographed in March 2014. *The author*

3 Mural cupboard dated 1677, made for John Longmire and still *in situ* in Great House. *The author*

There is a uniquely decorated two-door mural cupboard still in Great House at Troutbeck, bearing the initials J L and dated 1677 (Figure 3); the date on this cupboard coincides with the marriage of William's eldest son John to Bridget Brown of Townend but only John's initials appear. One might expect both initials considering such mural cupboards are still referred to as 'brideswain cupboards' by local people even today. This exemplifies another of Sarah Woodcock's findings, which is the great variation found in the significance of dates and initials on Lake District furniture.

TROUTBECK AND THE HOLEHIRD TRUST

The village of Troutbeck is spread along both sides of a single narrow road on the northwest side of Troutbeck valley (Figure 4). It must be one of the least disturbed villages in the country, made up almost entirely of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century houses. Little building was done in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and only four new houses were added in the twentieth.[7] It is unfortunate that when the road

[7] Marshall (*c.* 1980). The late Jean Marshall, a resident of Longmire Yeat in Troutbeck, produced a study for the Women's Institute of Troutbeck village. She made tiny detailed drawings of furniture and the carvings on them and also recorded five pieces which had been sold or removed. She included details of the dates and initials on these lost pieces, presumably gleaned from interviews with the families who were her neighbours. Should these pieces ever surface this information will be most useful in assigning provenance. From comparison with other recorded carved furniture of the district her drawings appear to accurately indicate the style of motif on these pieces. Twenty-one carved date stones were also recorded in this remarkable hand written document.

4 View of Troutbeck from the south east. *The author*

5 Glenside, photographed in 2012. *The author*

through the village was widened, possibly in 1878, the part of Great House into which the cupboard had originally been built was demolished.[8] The demolition probably necessitated the cupboard's first move which was to a house called Glenside, currently a holiday cottage, only a short distance down the road from Great House (Figure 5). It appears that Glenside was part of a larger group of buildings once collectively known as 'Lane', the property of Birkett de Lane (aka Old Laney). In *A Westmorland Village*, Samuel Haslam Scott wrote '... from Great House a very large oak cupboard, one of

[8] Scott (1904), p. 212.

6 The Great House press photographed at Glenside, *c.* 1936. Reproduced from *RCHM, an Inventory of Historical Monuments in Westmorland*

the finest examples of old oak in Troutbeck, was removed to Lane'.[9] The RCHM survey of Westmorland, published in 1936, contains a photograph of the Great House press built into a partition at Glenside (Figure 6). This photograph was used by Victor Chinnery to illustrate the vernacular Lake District style in his book *Oak Furniture, the British Tradition*.[10]

Glenside cottage was purchased by the Holehird estate in 1922.[11] The estate mansion, Holehird, along with several farms, land, cottages, paintings and several items of furniture, including 'a cupboard', were given in trust to the people of Westmorland by Henry Leigh Groves, the last owner of Holehird, in 1945. It was 1961, sixteen years after the legacy, before a suitable occupier was found for the mansion house and it became a Cheshire Home for the district, fulfilling the stipulations of the Holehird Trust that it should benefit the young and disabled of Westmorland.

It is not known at what point the cottage was modernised and the press taken up to Holehird, but while researching her family tree in 1989, local historian Kath Hayhirst

[9] Ibid., p. 214.
[10] Chinnery (1979), p. 491.
[11] Jones (2002), p. 90.

7 The Great House press in the barn at Holehird, 1989. *Kath Hayhirst*

8 Holehird, photographed in June 2013. *The author*

(née Longmire) found the cupboard of her ancestor William Longmire in the barn at Holehird, '... covered in bird droppings and being used as a hen coop' (Figure 7). Whether the press had been stored here all of the time or had spent some time in the house is not known, but forty-four years had elapsed since it was photographed in Glenside.

A clean up and rescue mission resulted in the press being taken to the Museum of Lakeland Life at Kendal. After fourteen years there in store the press was returned to Holehird in 2004, as its condition was deemed too poor for it to be exhibited. Holehird today is still occupied by Leonard Cheshire Disability charity (Figure 8). The press was kept at Holehird from 2004 until 2011 but when the charity embarked on reorganisation and decoration of the house it was once again consigned to the barn.

Each time the press was moved a few more pegs pulled through the tenons and the joints failed. With this last move, at least the fifth, a point had been reached where the

9 The Great House press, photographed in the barn at Holehird, 2012. *The author*

press was falling apart (Figure 9). It was clear that major repair work was required if it was to survive.

The author had been aware of the press for several years and hoped in retirement to have time to study it, particularly as its history was not known to anyone at Leonard Cheshire Disability. His retirement fortuitously coincided with the press's second move to the barn. The need for immediate and drastic action was obvious. It was also clear that the cost of restoring it would far exceed its monetary value, should this ever be accomplished. On the other hand, to completely dismantle a press of this age, repair and rebuild it, offered an opportunity for study too rare to resist. The author obtained permission to carry out a rescue of the press from the Holehird Trust Committee via their Land Agent David Rawle. The hope was that once the press was in a presentable condition a permanent home could be found, despite its size, where it would be accessible to the people of Westmorland, in keeping with the wishes of Henry Lee Groves, the former owner of Holehird and founder of the Holehird Trust.[12] Discussion with Sarah Woodcock and John Griffiths, respectively regional curator and conservator for the National Trust, resulted in a plan of restoration.

EXAMINATION AND RESTORATION

The Great House press is 92 inches (234 cm) long, 73¼ inches (186 cm) high and 23½ inches (60 cm) deep. The mortise-and-tenon joints are held with wooden pegs and no glue would seem to have been used, which was normal practice in joined furniture construction at the time.

[12] During research it transpired that the owner of Great House Troutbeck, having traced the cupboard to Kendal Museum of Lakeland Life, had made an offer to the administrators of the Holehird Trust in 2004. He was prepared to have the cupboard restored at his expense and returned to its original home, now his house, for safe keeping; making all legal requirements for its ownership to remain with the Trust and a limited access provision for the public. Unfortunately this offer got lost in bureaucracy and due to subsequent house alterations at Great House it is no longer a possibility due to the size of the cupboard.

The parts of the press which are original are the front and the two ends. The skirt board seen in the RCHM photograph (Figure 6) is gone (this was not an original feature) and the cornice, which is seen along the top in the photograph, had since been nailed between the front feet as if to replace it. When the press was moved to Glenside in the late nineteenth century it is likely that it was found to have deteriorated, having been built-in for two hundred and forty four years at Great House, and the rear parts appear not to have survived the move intact. A replacement of the top, back and shelves was presumably required at that time and is indicated by the fact that they were replaced with the same material as the partition into which the press was built at Glenside, namely, tongue and groove boards; these are visible in the RCHM photograph (Figure 6). No significant parts of the press, such as panels or carving, were missing, but the frame of the whole carcase was in a state of collapse.

When the press was removed to the workshop it was immediately apparent that more damage was present than had been possible to see when it was standing in the barn. When all the parts were dismantled and laid out it became clear that almost every piece of wood required some kind of attention. It was, however, quite easy to dismantle the press. The pegs punched out in most cases and only a few joints presented any challenge where nails had been used when attempting repairs.

Three sections had to be removed from the carcase to effect a repair; two complete end frames and the bottom level shelf and doors; they were dismantled, worked on and recorded separately. The top and back were removed to facilitate this work. The record of repair and over 130 photographs are deposited with the press and a copy of both text and photographs are available from the Armitt Museum in Ambleside. The text deposited there necessarily contains a great deal of woodworking detail, so what follows is a summary of observations made during the rescue operation.

WAS THE CUPBOARD BUILT-IN AT GREAT HOUSE?

The practise of making presses complete, including the ends and back, can disguise their built-in origins. Once a press has been removed from its original position it looks like a free-standing one. The fact that the cornice moulding does not continue around the sides cannot be used as an indicator, because this feature is also true of some free-standing presses in the area. A line of stain and polish along the top and a less obvious line down the sides, however, show that the press had in fact been built into a wall or partition for at least part of its life (Figure 10). A series of vertical fixing holes down the two ends are also convincing. The 1934 RCHM photograph (Figure 6) showing the press built-in at Glenside could account for both of these observations, but does not necessarily prove that the press was built-in at Great House. However, according to Jean Marshall, Troutbeck valley had a dozen other cupboards still built-in, all of which exhibited the same style and carved decoration as the Great House Press. Sarah Woodcock recorded thirty-two others also of similar style and decoration built-in at other Lake District houses.[13] It is this kind of evidence which supports the assumption that the press had been built-in at Great House. The replacement of the back, top and shelves, found to be necessary when the press moved to Glenside, is consistent with

[13] Woodcock (2010).

10 The top of the press, showing the replaced top boards and the line showing the depth to which it was built in at Glenside. *The author*

being in such a built-in position which would have been damp and susceptible to the deterioration of these parts of the cupboard.

PLANING AND SAWING

An obvious feature of several of the panels is the shallow concave grooving or rippling seen running down the length of the panel (Figure 11). These are the marks left by the use of a plane with a convex blade, variously called a jack, fore or scrub plane. It is much easier to use a plane with a slight convex shape on the plane iron when planing wide boards by hand as it leaves smooth hollows, even when the panel is not perfectly flat. The sharp square edge of a straight ground plane iron is not so forgiving but requires perfect flatness over the whole surface demanding much more work and hand scraping. Obviously it was quite acceptable for these hollow plane marks to be left visible in frame and panel construction of early provincial woodwork in view of their frequent occurrence on both furniture and panelling.

11 Two views of the press's panels, showing plane marks on the outside (left) and inside (right) faces. *The author*

A convex plane blade has also been used to chamfer the edges of the panel to fit into the groove of the frame. Note that the chamfer is on the inside of the panel thus presenting a flat face to the outside. Saw marks on the inside face show it to be sawn, not riven.

THE CHOICE OF WOOD FOR CONSTRUCTION

It would be difficult to think of a defect in wood not illustrated on just two faces of the back right stile (Figure 12). The wood for this stile is so bad it must have been used for reasons of timber shortage; any joiner would have rejected it if he had had the choice. It is perhaps a branch, blown from a tree and picked up in a field that has been trimmed to the required size. It is in total contrast to the other rear stile which is sound, fault free and square, having been sawn from a good butt and planed on all sides. The front stiles were also planed all round but the huge shakes and splits indicate the use of poor quality green wood.

The re-use of old wood for much of the cupboards framework with the possible exception of the horizontal rails is evident by close examination. Two different sources can be identified.

12 The back right stile, showing the very poor quality of timber used. *The author*

The muntins on the two end sections do not have channel mould like the rest of the frame. On their inside face they have mortises for no obvious purpose and edges with chamfers which are superfluous on an inside face. These chamfers are stopped at only one end in the case of the bottom right hand muntin; presumably the other end chamfer has been lost when the piece was cut to length. The four guilloche-carved muntins of the upper front section also have unexplained mortises. If the end muntins, without channel mould, had their cyma recta mouldings planed off they would provide a muntin with a flat face on which to carve the guilloche. The piece would of course be narrower and this is in fact the case. The inside faces of these pieces of wood are smooth and finished suggesting they come from a source which was seen on both sides, a settle or screen for example.

The muntins in the two front bottom doors do not match the rest of the façade either, having no channel mould on the outside face, but they have chamfers on the inner face leading to the conclusion that they are from the same source as the end muntins described above.

The second source of reused wood would appear to be one which was not seen on both sides as the inside face is not smooth or finished. Room panelling would be an obvious suggestion. It is known that Great House had panelling because Jean Marshall records panelling in Lane Foot farm within living memory 'brought from Great House when the road was widened' about 1878.

13 Two views of the upper right door frame, showing run-through scratch stock mouldings on the stiles, and on the inside faces of the stiles and rails. *The author*

The centre muntin of the front façade, also the centre of the middle level, is probably the only unaltered piece of original old panelling whatever its origins. All other pieces have the cyma-recta edge moulding missing from one side or both. This would occur when they were planed off in order to remove the groove in them and make a solid square edged piece required for the cupboard doors or frame work. Compare the bottom of the centre muntin to the top of the bottom muntin immediately below it (Figure 1) which has had the moulding reshaped to form rebates for the doors. It should be noted that the channel mould is not in the centre of the muntin but decidedly to the right.

The two door-stiles to the left and right of the centre muntin have had their grooves planed out to form a square edge for the doors but this did not removed the cyma-recta edge mould completely; an ovolo scratch stock mould has been run up the edge to tidy things up. When this was done on the wider side of the channel mould it had the effect of making the channel mould look more central. Possibly in order to achieve some consistency, the simple ovolo scratch stock mould has been used on the edge of every piece of frame wood, the only exception being edges with chamfers. Could this be why there are ovolo mouldings on the inside of the doors (Figure 13)? The joiner even used the scratch stock to form an ovolo on the narrow square edges of the returns of the frames where they meet the moulding of the sunken panels, a most unusual position to work them. They can just be seen running through at the joints on the ends of the door stiles.

The three front bottom framing muntins do not seem to belong to either of the above sources which may indicate the supply had eventually run out. These three pieces have been very roughly hacked to the required thickness by means of a side axe, possibly from green wood.

Finally, the large and very thick internally-chamfered top panels of each end frame are in sharp contrast to the fine but un-chamfered, thin panels of the rest of the frame; including the four front panels. If the thin ones are from reclaimed panelling it would account for this difference. Supporting the idea is the fact that the two top end panels both had pronounced shakes to be expected from green wood but the rest of the panels did not.

All these anomalies indicate that the joiner did not have the luxury of choice in the selection of his wood. Whether this was due to availability or cost is an interesting question. The press was made for Great House, a name which suggests the most prestigious house in the valley, and its size and decoration do not suggest an obvious lack of funds. A major factor may be the fact that estate farmers of this period had to seek permission to fell any tree on their holding from the landowner, even if this was for

14 Dismantled joint, showing how the pegs have pulled through the short tenons. Note that the setting-out lines for the mortise are scribed to the full width of the rail rather than to the narrower tenon. *The author*

the repair of their house which technically belonged to the landowner. This and many other strictures applying to wood-cutting in the area during the seventeenth century have been detailed by Susan Denyer, and from a 1663 census of trees growing on Crown lands, including the Barony of Kendal, Charlotte Kipling concluded that 'timber trees were scarce around Windermere'.[14] In the 1663 census only 260 trees — mainly saplings, were recorded on Crown land in Troutbeck and ordered to be marked with red lead; to be kept for the king. Troutbeck village was even more affected by being an area once part of a 'park'. It is fascinating to consider that the variation in quality and even choice of materials used during construction of the Great House press may reflect these strictures and shortages.

SHORT TENONS AND FULL WIDTH MORTISES

The tenons in most joints are too short, causing the pegs to be placed too close to the ends of the tenon and allowing them to pull through more easily when racking of the frame occurred. Pegs which had pulled through the tenon were often still unbroken in the mortise hole before being punched out. In fact, the tenon is scarcely longer than the housed edge of the panel, and in some cases the pegs had missed the tenon altogether (Figure 14).

In many case the pegs are also too close to the side edges of the tenon (Figure 14). This was a serious miscalculation, and it appears from the setting out marks in the

[14] Denyer (1991), p. 163; Kipling (1974), p. 76.

rails that the joiner cut the mortises and tenons to the full width of the rail, forgetting that when he ploughed the grooves for the panels the sides of the tenon would also be ploughed out. A further consequence of this was that the sides of the tenon were unsupported in the too-wide mortise.

As was customary in English joinery, all the inside or hidden shoulders of the tenons were cut back to allow the joint to close tightly on the visible face. This makes life easy for the joiner but means that the inside shoulders do not offer any support to prevent racking. The practise of cutting inside shoulders back is now much frowned on by conscientious craftsmen and by woodwork teachers when students attempt it; tenoning machines have now generally removed the problem.

PEGGING

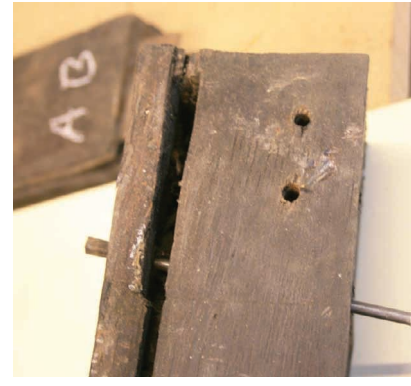
The weakness of the joints is compounded by the lack of offset pegging in some joints. This standard joinery technique involves drilling the peg holes in the tenon fractionally offset from the holes in the mortise so that when the peg is driven in it pulls the tenon tight into the joint. The straightness of many pegs removed from the press and the absence of signs of stress, raise the suspicion that the joiner did not do this every time, probably because it was quicker to drill the holes through the mortise and tenon simultaneously, rather than to dismantle the joint to drill the tenons and mortises separately (Figure 15). The fact that so many pegs either missed the tenon or were too close to the edge of the tenon indicate that the joiner did not see the position of them; presumably because he did not mark the tenons and then take them out to bore the hole offset.

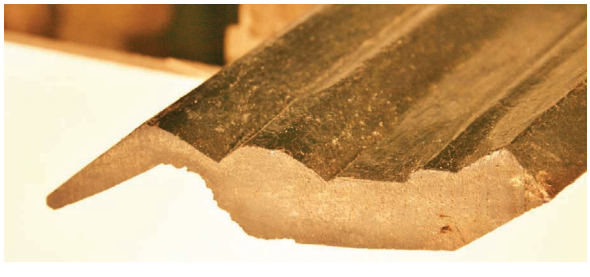
Even where the holes are offset the joiner has been very careless in his boring; several mortises were bored at such an angle that the peg passed through the first hole in the mortise and the hole in the tenon but hit the inner wall of the mortise and bent into a curl (Figures 16 and 17).

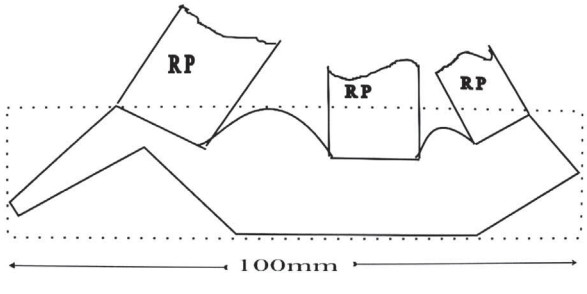
FORMING THE MOULDINGS

Sunk panels are often a feature of seventeenth-century furniture and this cupboard is a good example, with the door panels being sunk by almost three inches (70 mm). The mouldings to the panel were normally just planted on, but here they are housed in a groove on all four sides. This is unusually sophisticated, but could be explained by the fact that the framing is re-used, so that the groove was already there, perhaps suggesting to the maker this form of fixing.

The mouldings are formed from a four-inch (100 mm) board; three cuts have been made with a rabbet plane; a plough in the middle and two more at an angle on each side. The four arrises so formed have been rounded over to form an astragal, one large and one small. A further cut below forms the tongue to fit into the groove around the frame (Figures 18 and 19). This probably indicates that the joiner did not have the necessary moulding planes, one more example of the limitations he was labouring under. Nevertheless he has produced a most attractive mould. The cornice moulding was produced in the same way. It is worth asking how many other cornices were produced in this manner and assumed to be moulded with moulding planes? It is only the limited skills of this particular joiner which make it detectable.







15 (top left) Pegs removed from the press, showing varying amount of distortion caused by offset pegging and later by racking of the joints. *The author*

16 (top right) Dismantled joint, showing the steep angle at which some peg holes were drilled. *The author*

17 (lower right) Distorted pegs, caused by the pegs missing the holes in the far side of the mortise because of the steep angle of the mortise holes. This is careless work. *The author*

18 (middle left) Section through the cornice. *The author*

19 (bottom left) Drawing of the cornice section, showing how the profile was constructed with a series of cuts with a rabbet plane. *The author*

20 Left upper door, showing the deeply inset panel; the left hand inner moulding has been made too short. *The author*

21 Left middle tier door, showing the disappearing channel mould on the upper and lower rails, with the replaced right door stile. *The author*

The top level middle door has a sunken moulding that is not parallel with the horizontal frame at the top (Figure 20). This is because the joiner cut the left hand moulding too short. The joiner obviously did not consider it worthwhile to make a new piece, which would have involved a lot of work; he knew his customer and took the calculated risk of leaving it.

THE DISAPPEARING CHANNEL MOULD

The left hand door on the middle level has a disappearing channel moulding (Figure 21). It appears that a new, thinner closing stile has replaced the original one. The stile does not have a channel mould and is not cut out for a lock, unlike the right hand door and the three doors above. The stile was made flush with the rails on the inside despite needing to have a rebate cut up the closing edge, but then the outside of the door has been planed off to taper the top and bottom door rails to the same thickness as the stile. If it had been made flush on the outside its lack of thickness would have been lost in the rebated edge, a much better solution. If it was done to hide the fact that it was a replacement it was not a success in view of the missing channel mould. The repair is visible in the RCHM 1936 photograph (Figure 6) which suggests that it may have been done when the cupboard moved to Glenside towards the end of

22 Two views of the left middle tier door and aperture, showing the shelf overlapping the front rail and (right) the rebate cut out of the lower edge of the door. *The author*

the nineteenth century. Considerable work was carried out at that time replacing the back, top and shelves with pine boards.

A FUNDAMENTAL ERROR

The joiner had originally intended the doors to close against a rebate cut up the edge of the muntin of each door frame (Figure 22); this intention is clear because the rebate would have had to be cut before the carcase was assembled. The corresponding rebate cut up the closing stile of the doors is also present. This arrangement is a good solution, especially if toggles are to be used to keep the door closed when the two rebates come together. It allows the shelves to be completely free from obstruction in the form of door stops. This is a superior method of door-stop chosen from a number of options. Note, however, how close the shelf is to the muntin rebate. The shelf comes half way across the rail and the door is the same thickness as the rail. Hence the door cannot close to the rebate because of the shelf.

At first sight this looks like an error on the part of the people who have replaced the original oak shelves with the softwood ones but this proved not to be the case. The design of the cupboard required each shelf to rest on a back and front rail of the carcase. The rails were made level so that this could be achieved. However, the front rail

23 Inside face of the left middle tier door, showing how the joint has been weakened by the rebate cut in its lower edge, and the iron plate used to strengthen it. *The author*

was not thick enough to allow the shelf to rest on it and the door to close to the muntin rebate. If there had been battens on the inside of the carcase front rails to make them wider or they had been thicker in the first place, the shelves could have been set back to allow the doors to close to the rebate in the muntin. Fixing such battens during construction would have been easy and not unusual in cupboards of this type. The inside faces of the horizontal front rails were examined and no fixing holes are present to suggest that battens had ever been fixed there. When the shelf was removed during repair, rusted nail holes were present all along the top edges of the front rails beneath the pine boards indicating that this is where the original oak shelf had been fixed. It is normal practise for the carcase to be made and the shelf put in before the doors are made, in order to make the doors a good fit to the frames. Only then would it become instantly clear that the doors could not shut because of the shelf. This simple mistake has had significant consequences.

In order to clear the front edges of the shelf a rebate was cut along the bottom of the doors. It is obvious from the tool marks of a saw and rabbet plane along the bottom of each door that this was a difficult operation, as it would be even today with only hand tools, cutting across the grain of the stiles and along the grain of the bottom rail. Unfortunately this solution was not a good one because when the rebate was made it cut the haunches off the bottom of both of the door stiles. This exposed the tenons, which then had a tendency to drop out, which accounts for the unsightly plating of the doors (Figure 23).

The problem of the shelves was later compounded when the oak shelves were replaced by softwood boards, probably on the cupboard's move to Glenside about 1876. The boards are fractionally thicker than the original oak boards so the rebates on the bottom of the doors cannot pass easily over them. Attempting to close the sticking doors puts extra stress on both the straps of the hinge and the hinge pins, which was probably the cause of the broken straps on two of the hinges.

24 (above) Upper left door with surviving original lock and (above left) a detail of the lock. *The author*

25 (left) One of the original hinges, on the central upper door. *The author*

THE METALWORK

The top level left-hand door retains its original iron lock (Figure 24). The doors on the top and middle levels of the cupboard are cut out for locks. The bottom level doors are not but they have key holes indicating they probably had plant-on locks added later.

The lock plate of the surviving lock was sunk into the stile deeper than required to make the back plate flush with the wood. It is unlikely that this was done for aesthetic reasons; was it done so that the bolt would shoot into a mortise and act as a door stop? This may have been necessary because the rebates found in the closing stiles and muntins of the lower four doors are absent from the top three doors. If the lock plate is left flush with the frame instead of being sunk in, the bolt would shoot behind the muntin, a much simpler fix, but it would not act as a door stop. It appears from the rough edges of wood around the bolt area to have been in a mortise but the mortise has broken out at the back, proving to be a very poor substitute for a rebated door stop.

The three top level doors retain their original iron 'T' hinges (Figure 25). There are marks of old fixing holes for similar sized 'T' hinges on the four lower doors which now have nailed butterfly hinges. Also visible are old fixing holes for toggle door catches which have been replaced with newer ones, post-1850 by the look of the screws. Three of the seven iron door handles were missing so copies of the original ones were made to replace them.

26 Detail of the lunette carving in the top rail. *The author*

THE CARVING

The 'S' scroll, guilloche, lyre, lunette and fluting patterns on the rails and panels of the cupboard were all noted by Sarah Woodcock on the other Lake District presses. These are features described by Christopher Gilbert as 'stock decorative vocabulary'.[15] However, he went on to say that 'any regional character is usually expressed in peripheral detailing or in variations in interpreting this fairly stock decorative vocabulary', and it is hoped to highlight in the following description some of the 'peripheral details' used by the carver of the Great House press.

THE LUNETTE

The four-inch wide frieze immediately below the cornice has a run of lunettes carved along it (Figure 26). There are leaves carved in the spandrel formed between the lunettes and also within the semicircle of the lunette. It is the design of these leaves that can be used to characterise the lunette as 'Lake District'. The shape of the leaves forming the motif in the spandrel is very characteristic of the area. Note in particular the shape of the top pair of leaves formed by two gouges of different radii, the smaller used to shape the end of the leaf and the greater to form the inner wave. The lower leaves vary depending on the radius of the lunette and the width of the rail but are usually cut with the same gouges

The form of the leaf within the half circle is also distinctive but it does not usually have volutes. The volutes are so particular that they may even be used by only this carver, a signature as it were; if not of an individual then perhaps of a workshop group. The number of leaf blades varies.

The two curves forming the arc of the lunette contain three small circles separated by a 'V' groove; such circles are often present on lunettes and strapwork in the north of England. The circles were carved with a small gouge because they are too big to be made with a punch, unlike so many of the smaller decorations on this period of woodwork. The diameter of the circle gives the shape of the gouge but not the size of the

[15] Gilbert (2001), p. 77.

27 Detail of the canopy frieze, showing William Longmire's initials and the date, both with the characteristic Lake District twist. *The author*

gouge, because it can be any arc of the circle; it does define at least one of the carver's tools.

Much of the vigour and character of seventeenth-century vernacular carving is due to the fact that it was done with a limited number of chisels and gouges. Follow the outer curve of the lunette with the eye and it appears that a straight chisel was used to form the curve; this probably reveals the carver adjusting position as he drives his 'V' tool round the circle. The inner curve of the lunette has also been cut with a 'V' gouge; the lower side of the 'V' has cut the tips off the four leaf blades and made a flat on the outer edge of the volute. A volute requires a series of gouges decreasing in curvature from the centre out until it reaches the required size: usually five or six. This was beyond the range of this carver who seems to have only three or four gouges in total. He has managed with straight chisels and his 'V' gouge.

Carved into the frieze are William Longmire's initials and the date 1634 (Figure 27). Date plates like this are quite common on seventeenth-century Lake District furniture. The lettering is bifurcated at the ends and on some examples this becomes a fork or even a curl. The most significant feature of the lettering is the twist in both the L and the number 1. These twists are not the same, for the number 1 is interrupted at mid-point in a distinctive manner while the L is more guilloche-like. The twist in the 1 is frequently found in the Lake District but on letters it is rare. The interrupted twist in the stem of the number one is a very consistent feature and one of the most definitive motifs in the Lake District carver's vocabulary.

THE 'S' SCROLL

Carved along the rail below the canopy is a running 'S' pattern (Figure 28). Modification of the leaf work at the ends of the 'S' motifs can display a regional character although they all usually have a three leaf ending as in this example. It is surprising how little marking out is required for the carved patterns other than division into the sections of the repeat, as most of the shape is determined by the shape of the gouges. It is pointless drawing mathematically accurate volutes and intricate devices when only a couple of fixed diameter gouges are available to carve them, along with a 'V' tool to shape the broad outline. Flower petals and veining are done by eye. If the carving is not clean-cut and precise it is because the carver does not consider it important enough

28 Detail of the 'S' scroll frieze in the top rail. *The author*

29 Diagram showing a) the setting-out of the 'S' scroll design and b) the cuts needed to create it. The 'V' gouge is in red, other gouges are blue and green. *The author*

to spend the time doing it. Vernacular carving owes much of its charm and delight to being no more than a rough sketch in wood, especially early work like this.

The 'S' scroll on this cupboard requires only two gouges and a 'V' gouge to form it. It probably started as a series of touching double circles scribed between narrow borders (Figure 29a). A straight line joining the top of the inner circle to the bottom of the outer circle will produce the angled body of the 'S'. Free-hand gouge work forms the leaves, the size of the gouge sets their size.

In a row along the centre of the design and just touching the circumference of the smaller circle are the circular centres of the scroll. Two-thirds of this circle has been cut using three cuts with the gouge marked in blue (Figure 29b). The edges of the cuts are vertical to the surface where they have been cut-in but they are not very cleanly done leaving a kink where they meet.

All the inner circles have a kink in the curve where the gouge cuts have been met by a 'V' gouge. Use of the 'V' gouge is evident from the sides of the cut as it follows the curve of the 'S' from one circle to the next because the side of the cut leans to the right on the right hand circle and to the left on the left hand circle; down the straight it is vertical. This is a natural leaning of the tool as the carver's hand holding it pushes to get the gouge round the tighter corner at the two ends, gently tapping all the while with the mallet. A kink has been left where the 'V' gouge meets the half circles formed by the curved gouges. This is not high class work but it does provide a chance to see which tools the carver is using more clearly than would normally be the case.

The leaf work on the end of the 'S' may look complicated but, bearing in mind that the 'V' tool has already passed around the curve of the circle, it only needs four stabs with gouges, three with the blue gouge and one with a less curved gouge marked in green; four stabs in five seconds or less, then maybe a little tidy up. When attempting to copy these patterns it is easy to try to make them more difficult than they are by using too many gouges. The skill is to make use of the 'V' groove which is already there marking the outline of the main shape. From the numerous flats on both the leaves and along the border, it is easy to be misled into assuming there are straight chisels being used. But where a straight chisel would leave a clean arris in the cut, a 'V' gouge does not, because it is not possible to have a 'V' gouge with a point, it always has a slightly flat or rounded end which is observable. A closer look reveals the flats to be made by the 'V' gouge as it follows the line round the pattern and attempts to leave a border between the pattern and the scratch stock moulding below. Not enough space was left when the design was drawn for the 'V' gouge to pass. Notice the narrow angled body of the middle 'S' of the three; the carver has wandered off the line.

The points of the lozenges or tear drops between the meeting scrolls are cut by the 'V' gouge when the outer curve of the 'S' is formed. It is very interesting to see how the carver has adapted the small pieces of spare wood left here and cut curves on them with the corner of his smaller (blue) gouge to form a tear drop, greatly enhancing the pattern although not strictly part of it. The blue tool is already in his hand having just cut the leaves. Such peripheral motifs, which are entirely the carver's own invention, illustrate the artistic ingenuity or otherwise of a particular carver.

It is worth noting the absence of a 'V' cut down the centre of the 'S' shapes contrary to all other work on the cupboard. This could be an omission, not intentional.

THE GUILLOCHE

The muntins between the doors on the top level of the cupboard have a pattern of circles and lozenges running down them, a modified guilloche pattern, terminating in elementary leaf-work (Figure 30). The lozenge and circle outlines have been cut out with a 'V' gouge as has the groove running down the centre of them. The smallest circle in the design proved difficult to do with the 'V' tool, producing a number of flats as it was pushed round the circle, fighting the grain; the radius is really too small for the depth of the cut. Once these two geometric shapes are formed the requirements of a modified guilloche are satisfied, leaving a number of areas of wood for the carver to decorate.

The centre of the circle becomes a bud by cutting in four times with the back of a gouge held at an angle of about 45 degrees to form a raised button. The wood between the bud leaves is then sloped down to the bottom of the 'V' groove to give the bud a tip. A delicate touch is the tiny sloping cut made with the 'V' tool just to fill an otherwise empty area between the four bud leaves and attempt to create a more complicated looking bud with the most limited tooling.

The diamond shaped design in the centre of the lozenge consists of four stabs with the smallest gouge, one each side of the diamond, facing outwards towards the 'V' groove. The centre detail is made by four cuts with the 'V' tool held at two different angles so that a vertical stabbing pair cut deep and wide while the other two cuts slope

30 The modified guilloche design — a circle and lozenge. *The author*

from the point of the diamond to the deep centre; say eight stabs, ten seconds, to produce a superb little detail.

In the spaces between the alternating circles and lozenges is a 'duck' shape. Two cuts have been made with a small gouge, the first facing down and the second facing up, producing the breast and face of the 'duck'. The head is already there as is the tail, being the outside cut of the 'V' when it formed the lozenge. All that is needed is one gouge cut to shape the duck's back and one gouge cut to form the tail. The smaller two gouges in the carver's three tool kit, four stabs and a time factor of the order of five seconds; one duck.

These 'duck' motifs offer another clue to the maker of the piece as they are not an essential element of a guilloche but can be regarded as part of the carver's signature; this is his free space, carved with the same two gouges used inside the guilloche.

It is only in carving the leaf or fern design at the bottom of the muntin that a larger third gouge makes an appearance. Looking at the leaf blades to the left of the point of the lozenge and going down are two gouge cuts first with the tool facing in and then with it facing out. Next is a 'V' cut forming a leaf vein and joining up with the centre 'V' of the lozenge. The big gouge then appears, to make a chip — that is a stab down and a sloping cut to meet it. Following this is another 'V' cut forming a vein almost to

the point of the lozenge. Another large-gouge chip but with the tool held much more vertical, finished this time with a reversed cut at the end to form a rounded leaf edge of the next leaf; a vein with the 'V' follows to be met by the bottom edge of the bottom leaf blade. The same big gouge then forms the terminal leaf blade which only needs the vein all down the leaf to finish.

The whole of this rather complicated modified guilloche is carved with three gouges and a 'V' tool. Not even a punch is used to texture the background, it looks like the smallest gouge has been used to lift out any surplus wood.

THE DOOR PANELS

The door panel illustrates a frequently used design on Lake District furniture (Figure 31). It is a fern-like leaf used to terminate the ends of each 'S' scroll forming the main pattern. Close examination once again indicates a limited number of gouges were used because most of the curved pattern has been done with only about three such tools and the curves are again joined together by means of repeated cuts from the 'V' gouge.

31 The 'fern' design in the upper fixed panels.
The author

The two horizontally linked motifs in the bottom loops of the crossed 'S' shapes are cut in a similar fashion to the leaves in the lunettes of the frieze. A consistent design in this carver's repertoire, this small four-blade motif is an oft-recurring motif in Lakeland carving.

The top two wavy leaf blades of the motif in the lunette spandrel also appear as the bottom two leaves in the panel's central motif. This wavy leaf blade is very effective and only requires two gouges. It is a constantly recurring device in Lake District carving. The main crossing 'S' shapes on the panel are cut with a 'V' gouge and all of the areas of spare wood turned into leaves by linking chips from three gouges to these 'V' grooves or the border. The wood left by the main element, in this case two crossed 'S' shapes, defines to a large extent the shape of the leaf work; it is dictated rather than designed. The two main leaves are thought to be fern leaves probably due to the tight curls at the ends. They are a common Lake District motif. Note the tiny marginal 'drolleries', three on the bottom and two on the top, it has been commented that the carver seems compelled to fill every last undecorated space. The alternatives in fact are to cut them out and have large empty space or leave them in and the design looks unfinished. The secret is to make them look an intentional part of the design — as fast as possible; vernacular carvers did not go looking for work.

FLUTING

The run of short fluting along the rail below the shelf reveals again a shortage of tools, because the hollows have been cut out with repeated passes of a tool of smaller radius than the flute (Figure 32). This is not an unusual practise; it is used to achieve the depth of cut desired without losing the clean arras at the sides, which can occur because of grain variations if just one large gouge is used. However, it would be expected that the flute be given a pass from a gouge of full radius to achieve a clean finish. The carver did not have one with the correct shape because he has not used one to produce the curved finish to the bottom of the flute either; it has been done with the help of several cuts of a narrow straight chisel. The largest convex radius on the outside of the tops

32 The fluting. *The author*

33 One of the lower panels, showing the outline of the original applied lozenge moulding. *The author*

of the flute shows signs of having been formed with cuts from a gouge of the correct radius. The gouge required for the outside curve is much greater than that required for the flute and is more likely to have been the starting point for the marking out of the pattern. Note how the tiny triangles of wood left by this large gouge are turned into tear-drops by just the corner of a smaller gouge with huge effect on the overall appearance of the pattern. Exactly the same device as was used on the 'S' scroll, pointing to a consistency of carver on all the cupboards decoration.

The chip at the very bottom of the pattern is the actual size of another one of the carver's gouges because such a chip is done with only two moves, one vertical stab and one sloping cut. Two of the gouges can thus be identified and possibly used as a clue to other work by this carver. The use of small circles as additional decoration on the bridges between the flutes gives the size of a third gouge; it is the same size as the one which made the small circles in the lunette mentioned earlier.

MOULDING LOSSES

During the cleaning and polishing of the front lower section doors, a shadow of a lozenge moulding slowly became visible, this shadow became even more distinct after a few months (Figure 33). Lozenges are present on several cupboards in the locality and were illustrated on a cupboard by Sarah Woodcock.[16] The absence of fixing holes indicates that the mouldings were glued on; the only instance of glue use on the cupboard.

[16] Woodcock (2010).

CONCLUSION

Considering that it was made for one of the principal houses in Troutbeck, the workmanship and materials of the Great House press are poor. The use of poor quality and second-hand timber might be explained by the fact that they could have been supplied by William Longmire himself. It was not unusual for clients to supply the materials to their workmen, and if William was modifying or extending the Great House he might well have had old panelling to hand. But the poor workmanship suggests both a hurried construction and a lack of fundamental competence which is puzzling. How could a craftsman of such limited abilities make a living?

The man was not without some talent, however, and the carving, though crude, is typical of the direct, economic style which characterises much vernacular work in seventeenth-century England. It was achieved with the minimum of effort and the smallest practicable number of tools, perhaps three or four gouges and a 'V' gouge. And although it draws on a common European late Renaissance vocabulary, with its lunettes, guilloches, 'S' scrolls and fluting, its inflections are purely Lake District. This is manifested not only in individual motifs characteristic of the area, such as the fern-leaf design in the upper doors, or the twisted letters and numerals, but also in the manner in which stock motifs are given a local accent, as in the leafy details in the lunettes. Examination of the carving in further detail reveals the individual carver's quirks and idiosyncrasies which distinguish him from other craftsmen and might, with further research, result in the attribution to him of other woodwork in Troutbeck and the surrounding area.

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