

WINDSOR CHAIR MAKING ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LONDON; WILLIAM WEBB OF NEWINGTON AND HENRY WEBB OF HAMMERSMITH

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The makers of nineteenth-century English Windsor chairs have been extensively researched and published in what is widely recognised as the principal text on the subject.¹ This comprehensive study was considerably facilitated by the large number of chairs extant with makers' name stamps and the availability of several contemporary trade directories. It is clear from this work that regionally distinct Windsor chairs in a variety of styles were being supplied by makers in different parts of the country to satisfy the demand for an affordable, robust, utilitarian form of seating. One of the main areas of supply was the Thames Valley, particularly around the town of High Wycombe, but there were also many makers in other areas, even as far away as Scotland.

The Windsor chair design seems to have originated in the early 1700s but, apart from a few individuals, little is known about the eighteenth-century makers of these chairs or the way they conducted their businesses. Name stamps were rarely used and other printed sources of information are scarce. Some makers appeared to have attached trade labels beneath the seats but because these were often fixed with tacks most have disappeared with the passage of time, with just a group of holes as evidence of their former presence. In consequence, our knowledge of these craftsmen and their way of business is mainly defined by newspaper advertisements, trade cards, bills, and just four surviving labelled chairs. Two of these are comb-backs made by John Pitt and Richard Hewett, both of whom worked in the Thames Valley village of Upton-cum-Chalvey, Buckinghamshire, now part of Slough.² The other two are yew-wood bow-backs; one was made by William Wood, of whom nothing is currently known, and the other by William Webb of Newington.³

The *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers* lists at least fifteen eighteenth-century makers/suppliers of Windsor chairs in London, although others are recorded in provincial cities, as well as in more rural locations.⁴ Some of the London makers probably supplied mahogany Windsors constructed on cabinet-making principles (i.e. with legs pocket mortised into the seat) to grand country houses.⁵ Others, though, such as John Brown of St. Paul's Churchyard who, in 1730 advertised 'ALL SORTS OF WINDSOR GARDEN CHAIRS, of all sizes, painted green or in the Wood', clearly supplied chairs of conventional Windsor design. However, Brown, who was a cabinet maker and upholsterer, may not actually have made these chairs himself.⁶ In an attempt to investigate how Windsors might have been sourced in the London area, this article focuses upon the activities of two eighteenth-century makers with premises strategically situated on main routes into the city. Using information from on-line archives, as well as from local history centres, this research aims to build up a picture of the trade and domestic circumstances



1. Windsor chair, c.1790, bearing the trade label of William Webb, snr. (fl. 1783–95).

Illustration taken from Agius (1976)

of two successful Windsor chair making businesses. The individuals studied are William Webb of Newington Butts (a village then in Surrey), maker of the labelled bow-back referred to above, and Henry Webb, no relation, of Hammersmith (a hamlet then in Middlesex, about 14 miles along the Great West Road from Pitt and Hewett in Slough), whose business was continued in the nineteenth century by his daughter Martha and her partner William Bunce.

William Webb, Windsor Chair and Coach Maker

The surviving chair made by William Webb is a classic example of the form, and has been illustrated in several books, having first been described in 1976 (Figure 1).⁷

Unfortunately, the lower half of the fretted splat seems to have been damaged and may be a replacement and the present whereabouts of the chair is unknown. This elegant cabriole-leg chair is of a type known to have been produced in the 1760s because an invoice from John Prior, Uxbridge, dated 1768, shows a Windsor of a similar design.⁸

Apart from the label beneath the seat, which was reported to be in very poor condition, William Webb is also known from his trade card in the Banks collection at the British Museum (Figure 2), and from an entry in a contemporary (1791) trade directory.⁹ In this, his business is described as a 'Windsor-chair and light Carriage-manufactory, Newington, Surry and Mile End Road'. However, although the trade card does not illustrate a chair with cabriole legs like the labelled example it does show that he made a variety of Windsor chairs, gothic and rustic garden seats, arbours and carriages. This extensive range of products, together with the fact that he had several leasehold properties in Newington (see below), suggests that he may have had a substantial business. Another interesting point is that as a carriage-maker he would need to have made spoked wooden wheels and therefore, like Pitt and Hewett, he probably also worked as a wheelwright. Similarly, some other eighteenth-century chair makers were also wheelwrights, hence the combination of these two trades might have been fairly common at the time. Moreover, the wheelback design is known to have originated in the eighteenth century and may symbolise this association of chair making and wheelwrighting.¹⁰

Webb's will survives in the National Archives and has recently been transcribed.¹¹ This does indeed show that he was a prosperous businessman with leases on a number of properties; he was also in the process of building a house at Norwood Common, Surrey, at the time of his decease. The various leases (see later) were taken on between 1788 and



2. Trade card of William Webb, c.1790.
Trustees of the British Museum (Banks Collection)

3. John Cary, 'A New and Accurate Plan of LONDON AND WESTMINSTER, the Borough of Southwark and parts adjacent...' (1787): detail, showing parish of St Mary, Newington, Surrey, with turnpikes (arrowed).
From 'Suburbia in Focus,' www.ideal-homes.org.uk

1791 and describe him as a chair maker or chair manufacturer with the final one, which indicates his status in society, referring to 'William Webb, St. Mary Newington Sy. gent. chairmaker'. His premises were in the parish of Newington St. Mary, an area of Surrey now in the London Borough of Southwark, also known as Newington Butts due, it is suggested, to its association with archery in the time of Henry VIII. However, Webb also seems to have been in business making coaches because an item in the Surrey Quarter Session for Michaelmas 1783 notes; 'Information and examination: Samuel Cross accused of stealing an iron punch chissel and prieses [sic] of iron bars from William Webb of St. Mary Newington, coach-maker.'¹² The actual site of his chair making workshop has not so far been located, however he states on his trade card that his business was 'near the turnpike'. A 1787 map shows that there were 3 turnpike toll gates in the vicinity, a northern gate at the top end of Newington Causeway, a southern one at bottom of Newington Road, near Kennington, and a central one at the bottom of the Causeway (Figure 3). The latter was near the crossroads where the Elephant and Castle public house was situated; this was not far from the church and, at the time, was the most built-up area of Newington (Fig. 4). No details of his property on Mile End Road have yet been found and it is not referred to in William Webb's will (see later) although it may be significant that this was an important area for trade in the eighteenth century. Moreover, both these business premises were well located because main routes into London from Sussex and Kent converged at the Elephant and Castle and the Mile End Road was a major route from Essex.



4. G. Yates, 'View of Newington Turnpike on Newington Causeway with the Elephant and Castle Inn beyond' (1825).

Guildhall Library, City of London

Recorded working dates for William Webb suggest that he was still making chairs in the early nineteenth century; for example, an entry in an 1805 trade directory lists a William Webb as 'Chair-Manufacturer, Newington, Surry'. However his will, signed 31st August and proved 10th September 1795, indicates that this is not the case. The error is due to the fact that his son, also called William, set up in business as a chair-maker after his father's death. Confusingly, there was also a William Webb, turner and chair-maker of St Anne Westminster, who died in 1790.¹³

Attempts to find out more about William Webb using on-line family history records (International Genealogical Index, IGI) have not been successful, in part because Webb is a very common name, but primarily because the St. Mary Newington parish register for the eighteenth century does not seem to have been transcribed.¹⁴ So far, it has not been possible to establish dates for William Webb's birth or marriage. However, his will does mention seven children and a brother Henry. William's wife seems to have predeceased him because she is not referred to in his will, although her property is mentioned. However, the contents do provide some new information about his family and business arrangements. In the will, his offspring are mentioned by name in the following order: William, Augusta, Kitty, George, Joseph, Richard and Frederick. Sadly, inspection of the Newington parish records indicates that William and his wife, also called Augusta, had a total of 12 children, so it must be assumed that five of them died young.¹⁵ The christening dates are as follows: Augusta Maria, 22nd May, 1771; William, 19th May, 1772; Richard, 21st December, 1773; Frederick, 19th May, 1775; Mary Sophia, 4th September, 1776; Harriet, 18th November, 1778; Kitty, 8th January, 1783; Elizabeth, 27th March, 1784; Thomas, 26th October, 1786; Sophia, 21st January, 1788. The baptism dates for George and Joseph have not been found. However, at the time the will was written (1795) George was said to be under 21 years and Joseph under 14. Possible birth years for these two sons are suggested by one version of the 1841 census; two George Webbs were born in Surrey in 1781 and a Joseph Webb was born at St Mary Newington about 1786.¹⁶ However, another version of the census records a 'Joseph Webb, aged 56, Chairmaker', living at Union Court, St Mary Newington in 1841, giving a birth year of 1785.¹⁷ Since the census states that he was 'born out of Surrey' this is likely to be William's son, as it explains why he does not feature in the Newington parish register. Finally, with regard to William and Augusta's marriage, this probably occurred around 1770 and if William was then in his twenties he would have been born in the 1740s.

In his will, William requested a plain funeral, to be buried at Newington, and 'to be carried to the church by my own workmen', with £10 provided for hatbands and gloves. Several other monetary bequests are also indicative of his financial status. These include: £20 per annum to Augusta and Kitty until they marry and £100 to their husbands when they do; £10 per annum to George until the age of 21 when he is then to receive £50; £20 per annum to Joseph until the age of 14 then £20 to bind him an apprentice with an annuity of £10 until the age of 21, followed by £50 divided into quarterly payments; £20 each to Richard and Frederick; 5 guineas to each of the children for mourning; finally, £5 to Sarah Porter who lived with the family (a housekeeper or servant?). It seems that his son William, who was one of the executors and the major beneficiary of the will, was required to make these bequests from funds derived from trade profits and the disposal of assets such as household furniture and surplus stock. There were also gifts to his

children and brother Henry of personal items, such as clothes, watches and jewellery, as well as one guinea to Augusta to care for her sister Kitty. In addition, the new house under construction at Norwood Common was to be finished and sold with the proceeds divided equally between the children. At that time Norwood was a rural area where wealthy families were beginning to build substantial villas with large gardens. As most of William's property was leasehold it rather looks as if his financial assets were tied up in this new, presumably freehold, house in the country to which he may have planned to retire; if this was case, then his demise seems to have been untimely. In fact, on the assumption that he was born in the 1740s he may have only been in his fifties when he died.

The most important parts of the will were bequests to William, 'his executors and administrators', concerning various leasehold properties and future of the chair and coach making business. William was left '...the lease of the house I now reside in together with the yards and workshops thereunto belonging and also the lease on the premises behind the large workshop and also the new shop and Smith's shop for the remainder of their several terms that will be unexpired therein at the time of my decease subject to the payment of such money as I may have borrowed thereon...'. William was also bequeathed '... all the furniture belonging to the house I now reside in save and except the furniture in the room wherein my daughters Augusta and Kitty sleep...'. William was also left '...all my stock in trade of every kind and description whatsoever...', and his son Richard was bequeathed '...the lease of the house he now dwells in situate in the Kent Road for the remainder of the term that will be unexpired therein at the time of my decease...'. An important proviso was that if William did not wish to carry on the business, the bequests made to him would be declared void and the executors and executrix (Augusta) would look after the property and business for the benefit of all the children until George reached the age of 21. George was then to inherit the leasehold properties, furniture and stock in trade under the same conditions stipulated for William, who was then to receive £20 per annum, paid quarterly, for life. Alternatively, if George did not wish to run the business, the executors were to sell everything and divide the proceeds equally amongst the surviving children.

Rather than continue with their father's businesses it appears that the family members decided to sell up. All of the offspring would have benefitted from the funds that this released and some of them probably used the money to start new businesses. William junior worked as a chair-maker and later went into partnership with his brother Richard, an arrangement that lasted until 1811. Richard may have had to change direction at this time because he had probably been previously involved in painting coaches; an entry in the London Apprentice Tax Records states; 'Webb Richard, son of William, Newington, Surrey, coach and chairmaker, to John Naish, 6 Feb 1788, Painters' Company'.¹⁸ George, however, seems to have set up on his own because in 1835 a George Webb, chair-maker, was listed as working at 2 Mint Street, Southwark. Also, as previously mentioned, a Joseph Webb, chair-maker, was living at Union Court, St Mary Newington. Therefore, four of William's five surviving sons, William, Richard, George and Joseph, appear to have continued in the chair making business.

The disposal of William senior's assets was soon carried out because a series of advertisements to this effect appeared in a London newspaper in November 1795.

The first one, printed in *The Morning Chronicle*, Saturday, November 28, was as follows:¹⁹

SALES BY AUCTION

By J. MILLS

By Order of the Executors of the late Mr. WILLIAM WEBB, deceased, Coach and Chairmaker at Newington Butts, Surry, on Monday next, and the two following days, ALL the GENUINE HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE, and Stock in Trade, of the Coach-making and Chairmaking business, and at the same time the Lease of the Dwelling-house and Premises, for carrying on the Chair-making business, and the lease of the large and commodious Premises for carrying on the Coach-making business; likewise a piece or parcel of Ground behind the same, the whole of which will be sold without reserve to the best bidder.

May be viewed on Friday and Saturday preceding the sale, which will begin at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, on each day; Catalogues and particulars to be had on the Premises, at No. 98, Fleet-market, and at the Auctioneers, No. 11, Newington Causeway, Surry.

Similar advertisements headed 'To COACH and CHAIR-MAKERS' came out on Monday 30th November and on Wednesday 2nd and Thursday 3rd December (Figure 5).

To COACH and CHAIR-MAKERS.—By J. MILLS,
By Order of the Executors of the late Mr. WILLIAM WEBB;
deceased, at Newington Butts, Surry, THIS and the follow-
ing day.

ALL the Genuine HOUSEHOLD FURNI-
TURE. Second Day, the Stock in Trade of the Chair-
making Business; and the third and fourth days, the Stock of
the Coach-making ditto; and at two o'clock in the afternoon,
on Tuesday, the second day, the Lease of the Dwelling-house
and Premises, for carrying on the Chair-making Business, and
the lease of the large and extensive Premises for carrying on the
Coach-making or any other Business requiring room; likewise a
piece or parcel of Ground behind the same.

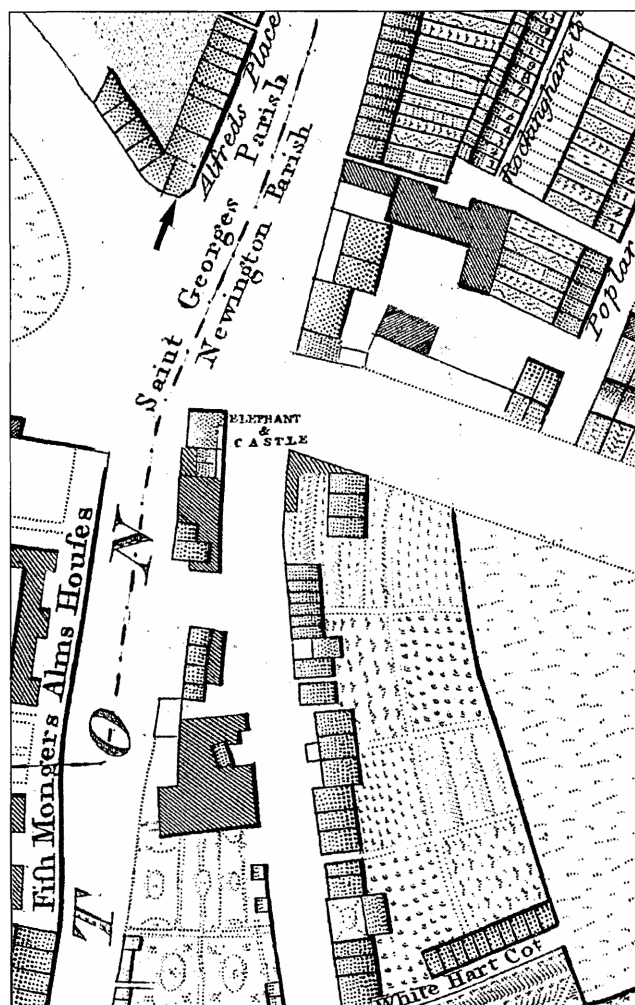
May be viewed till the sale, which will begin at eleven o'clock,
in the forenoon, on each day; Catalogues and particulars to be
had on the Premises, at No. 98, Fleet-market, and at the Auction-
eers, No. 11, Newington Causeway, Surry.

5. *The Morning Chronicle*, Wednesday 2 December 1795,
advertisement for sale of the business of William Webb.

Courtesy of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library

However, compared to other notices of furniture sales in the same newspaper it would seem that Webb's household contents were not very grand because no individual items of furniture were described. The advertisement indicates that the chair and coach-making businesses, which had taken place on different leasehold sites, were being wound up and the workshops disposed of. Whilst chair making had been done near William's home, coach making had probably been carried out at 'the premises behind the large workshop and also the new shop and Smith's shop' mentioned in the will. It is likely that this property, which had facilities for blacksmithing and shoeing horses, was also in the Newington area, as suggested by the 1783 court case described earlier.²⁰ However, because the various workshop leases were being sold the chair making activities of William's sons must have been carried out elsewhere in the neighbourhood. Richard, for example had the lease on a property not very far away in the Kent Road, Walworth, which is now the Old Kent Road, and George is later recorded as working in nearby Southwark.

Although Webb was both a chair and coach-maker he also seems to have been involved in property development. Apparently, this was fairly typical of a number of London furniture makers at this time.²¹ The information about Webb's property dealings has been obtained from the London Metropolitan Archives which provided a catalogue of documents relating to the Sheppard family and, in particular, the estate of John Sheppard junior.²² These records refer to wills of several families, although it is not clear how the various individuals were connected. One possibility is that the Sheppards purchased land for speculative development, which they then offered for sale leasehold. William Webb's involvement is difficult to untangle but he appears to have raised mortgages to finance the building of various properties (on land leased from the Sheppards) which he then let for business and residential use. These developments took place on parts of St. George's Fields near Newington Causeway, an area shown as devoid of buildings, apart from the toll-house, on the 1787 map (Figure 3). The ground here was marshy so building presumably only took place after the land had been drained. One John Rolls held an 81 year lease (from 1788) to carry on trade as a carcase butcher on part of this site. However, there was a change of use because Webb (chairmaker) then leased two pieces of the land on which he erected brick messuages. In 1789, after various mortgages and re-lets, the land had 5 more houses on it and by 1791 the development was known as Nos. 1-7 Alfred's Place. It is likely that it was Webb who built these houses and that his home and chair making premises (i.e. 'near the Turnpike') were also there. In 1790, Webb, described as a 'chair manufacturer', granted a lease on the corner house next to Newington turnpike (No. 6 Alfred's Head, a public house) to Sarah Stone for 23 years less 3 months. Also, in 1791 Webb and another jointly granted a lease for 78 $\frac{1}{4}$ years less 1 day to Edward Shewell with respect to No. 7 Alfred's Place and a small plot on its north side. The remarkable 1792-9 Horwood map of London, showing every building, illustrates a block of 13 dwellings at Alfred Place, directly opposite the Elephant and Castle (Figure 6). The additional 6 plots may represent a second phase of development, while the corner building (No. 6) is the Alfred's Head inn (Figure 7). The other development undertaken by Webb in this neighbourhood was on 'ground on the W side of high road (i.e. Newington Causeway) from Stones End to Newington Turnpike'. This was a plot of about 100 x 100 feet on which Webb planned to erect messuages. Again, reference to the Horwood map shows that building had also begun on this part of



6. Richard Horwood, 'Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark and parts adjoining.' (1792-99).
Detail, showing Alfred's Head Inn (arrowed, top left).

St. George's Fields in the 1790s (Figure 8). As Webb also had a house under construction at Norwood, the above details may represent only a part of his property portfolio; they nevertheless serve to illustrate another aspect of his diverse business activities.

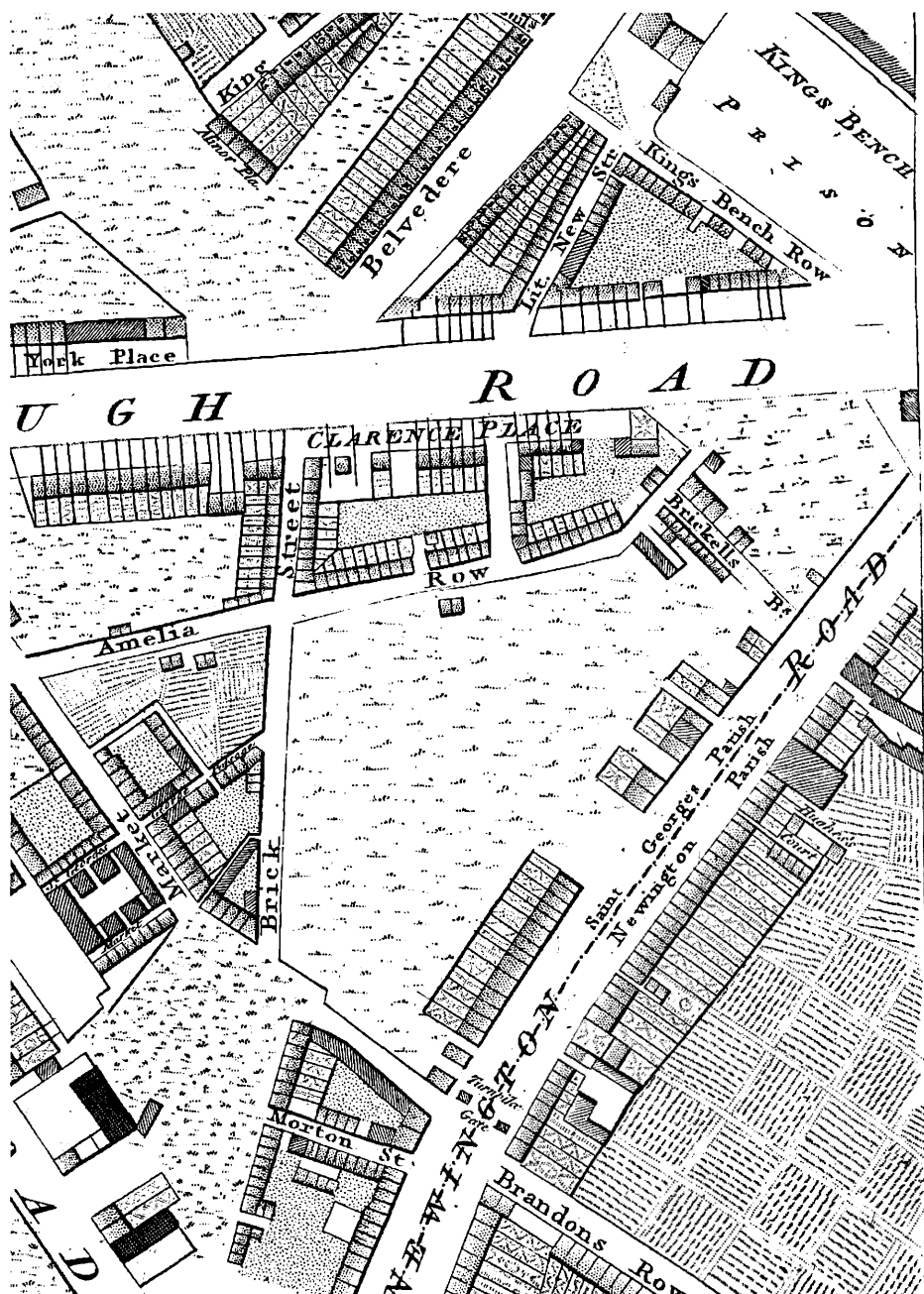
Due to the difficulty in attributing unlabelled chairs to William Webb, much of this article has necessarily focussed on details of his domestic and business affairs. Therefore, before concluding, it is perhaps worth making a few points about the type of Windsor that bears his trade label. Judging by the number of similar chairs that survive, it seems likely that this was a popular style that arose later on in the 18th century than some other Windsor designs. It is generally considered that the comb-back preceded the bow-back



7. Anon, 'View of Alfred's Head Inn on the Corner of Newington Causeway and London Road, Southwark (c.1830).
Guildhall Library, City of London

and although there are many paintings from the 1740s onwards showing comb-backs, usually in an outdoor setting, no early pictures of bow-backs have so far been found. In fact, the first known illustration is the 1768 invoice from John Prior, referred to earlier. On the other hand, a 1754 advertisement mentions '...Windsor and Forrest Chairs and Stools in the Modern Gothic, and Chinese taste...'.²³ The 'gothick' Windsor, most probably inspired by the fashion popularised by Horace Walpole, characteristically has a back in the form of a two-part arch and fanciful fretted back splats instead of spindles. Notably, though, there are some examples that have a one-piece bow-back instead of an arched back. This raises the possibility that the bow-back arose from the gothick form, with the back simplified to incorporate spindles and updated to include one central splat based on Chippendale's designs for armchairs. This, perhaps controversial, suggestion is the converse of the traditional view that the bow-back Windsor preceded the gothick.²⁴ Certainly, there is no technical reason why the bow-back design could not have appeared earlier, as the method for making back-bows is the same as that used for the arm-bows of comb-backs. However, further research is needed to establish which was the course of events and the picture is also complicated by the fact that gothick Windsors continued to be made for many years, as indicated on Webb's trade card.

William Webb's name has inadvertently become associated with an eighteenth-century Windsor chair design that was probably fairly typical of many made at the time. His yew-wood bow-back with a fretted splat and front cabriole legs is the exemplar of a form regarded by many as the quintessential Georgian Windsor. Although his will provides



8. Richard Horwood, 'Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster, the borough of Southwark and parts adjoining' (1792-99): detail, showing Webb's(?) developments on the Causeway and St. George's Fields on the left side of Newington Road above the turnpike.

some new background information, it is unfortunate that no probate or apprentice records are available to tell us more about his business. However, the new material does provide some insight into his working practices and domestic circumstances. Notably, like some other Windsor chair makers, he ran another business which also seems to have involved an element of wheelwrighting. He employed several workmen and the two sides of his business appear to have been carried out at different leasehold premises. He and his sons occupied various properties in a part of Surrey that was rapidly changing from a rural to an urban environment and his hope that at least one of them would continue the business was realised. However, his family life was marred by the death of his wife and several children and he, himself, appears to have died early. He does not seem to have been born or married in Newington and may perhaps have moved there with his new bride around 1770. His working dates as a chair maker can be stated with certainty to be 1788–1795 and he was known to have been working as a coach-maker in 1783. However, if he started out in business at the time of his marriage he could have been working for 25 years. His premises were well located to attract passing trade and his trade card shows that a wide range of products was on offer. He prospered as a result of his business, and probably also due to property development, but was not especially wealthy, perhaps preferring instead to build himself a new home in the country. His social status improved to the extent that he was described as a ‘gentleman’ prior to his decease, although he did not survive long enough to enjoy the fruits of his labour. Nevertheless, the chance survival of one of his products will ensure that his name will forever be associated with an archetypal and much admired style of English Windsor chair.

Henry Webb, Martha Webb, and William Bunce, Windsor and Garden Chair Makers

Henry Webb is recorded in the *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers* as a chair maker working in Hammersmith, Middlesex, between 1763 and 1791.¹⁵ Mention is made of 24 ‘forest stools’ painted white at £5 8s. and 6 ‘German stools’ similarly painted supplied to Sir John Griffin Griffin of Audley End, Essex, in 1767. In 1769 he also supplied Croome Court, Worcestershire, with a sofa and 4 ‘German’ chairs painted green at a cost of £4 14s. 6d. In 1782 and 1789 chairs were also provided for Osterley Park Middlesex; in 1791 Lord Dulcie received ‘6 large Fluted back German chairs’ at 2s. each. According to the compilers of the *Dictionary*, ‘these commissions indicate that his main trade was in simple sturdy chairs, painted, and in the main for garden use.’ However, although Windsor chairs were also widely used as garden seats in the eighteenth century, they are not specifically mentioned as one of Webb’s products in the *Dictionary*. Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that he supplied these as well (see below). A bill and receipt from Henry Webb for George, 3rd Earl of Egremont of Petworth House, Sussex, also exists (Figure 9).¹⁶ This is for 6 ‘fan back’ chairs (Windsors?), painted green, costing £2 14s. plus 1s. carriage, supplied on 20th June 1789, and paid for on 16th October 1789. Unfortunately though, no chairs made by Henry Webb have yet been identified. Consequently, this part of the article is mainly concerned with various aspects of the Webb family chair making business in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It is conceivable that Henry Webb was in business as a chair maker in Hammersmith in the 1750s and an intriguing possibility is that there was some association between him and Thomas Ay(c)liffe Jnr., ‘Turner in Ordinary to his MAJESTY’, who was based in

1789 The Rt. Hon^{ble} Earl of Egremont
 To Mr. Webb
 at Hammarston
 June To 6 fan back Chairs £ 5.0
 Panels given ———— 9 ———— 2.14.0
 Carriage ———— ———— 1.0
 £ 2.15.0

16 Oct^r 1789
 Rec^d of The Rt. Hon^{ble}
 Earl of Egremont
 The Sum of Two Pounds fifteen
 Shillings for Chairs
 J. Henry Webb
 £ 2.15.0

9. Bill and receipt for chairs supplied by Henry Webb to 3rd Earl of Egremont, 1789.
The Earl of Egremont: photo courtesy of Sussex Record Office

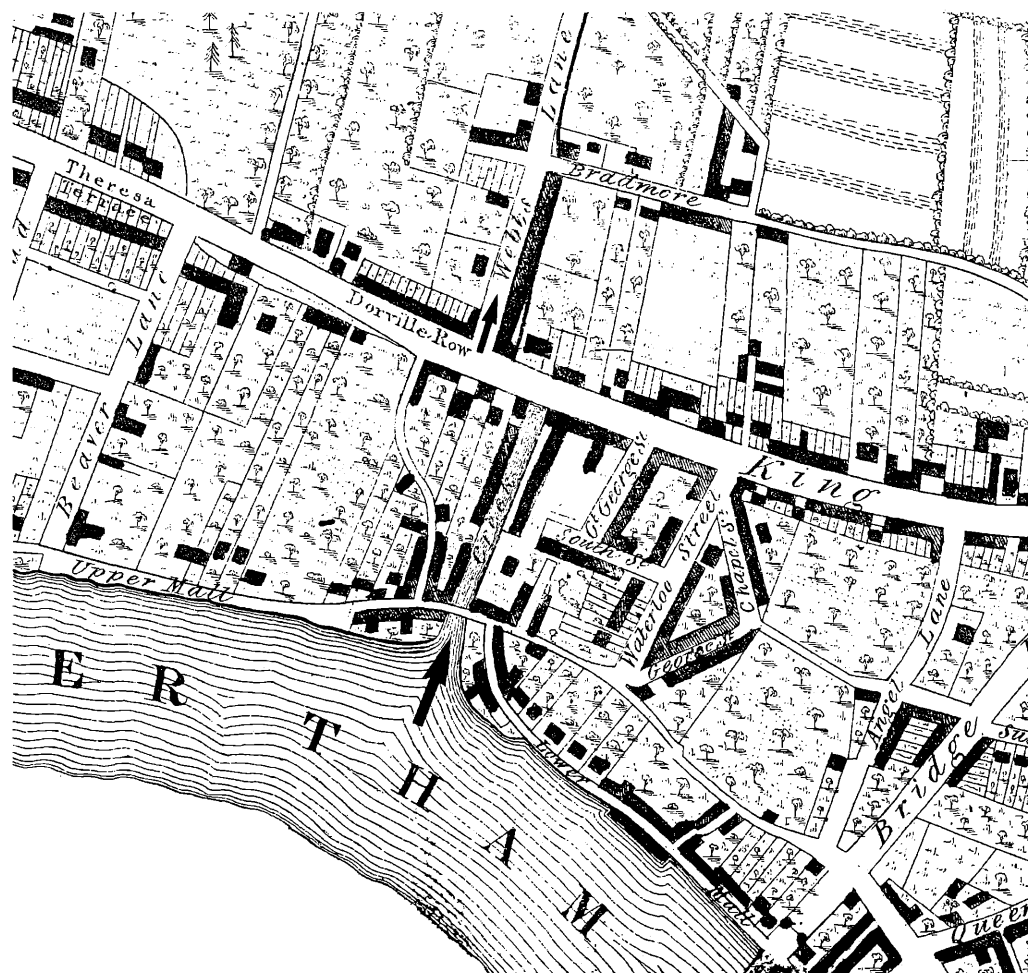
Soho. The reasons for this are that between 1767 and 1783 the latter traded as 'Aycliffe and Webb' and that, coincidentally, Aycliffe also supplied similar garden furniture to Sir John Griffin Griffin at Audley End as Webb had done in 1767, i.e. six 'forest stools' at £14s. in 1775 and a quantity of garden chairs and 'forest stools' totalling £10 9s. in 1783.²⁷

Henry Webb seems to have run a very successful business. In 1775 he took out insurance cover of £400 on a house and shops, and land tax returns for 1780 and 1782 indicate that he owned freehold property in King Street, Hammersmith.²⁸ Further information about his financial circumstances is to be found in his will, dated 5th May 1793 and proved 5th June the same year, a copy of which has recently been obtained from the National Archives.²⁹ This long, rambling and rather repetitive document starts by describing him as a 'Windsor Chair Maker' and the way his bequests are outlined may give some insight into his personality. The first, to his eldest son John, included property in Hammersmith adjoining The Hampshire Hog Alehouse and, '...my Copyhold Messuage or Tenement situate in Hammersmith aforesaid wherein I now live and reside and carry on my Trade and Business with all and every [sic] the Erections Buildings Workshops Timber Yard and all other Yards Gardens and Appurts whatsoever thereunto belonging as the same now are in my hands and Possession except of the Chamber wherein my Daughter Martha Webb usually sleeps and the Bed Bedding and all the ffurniture and Goods therein which I do hereby Give to my said Daughter...'. His son Henry was left '...my two Copyhold Tenements with their Appurts situate and being in ffrog Lane in Hammersmith aforesaid and which are known or Distinguished by the Numbers 1&2... [occupied by a basket maker and a gardener] together with the large shed erected behind the same and adjoining thereto and which is now used as a Store House with the ground leaving from the corner of the said Storehouse to the Corner Post of James Adams Yard'. His daughter Martha was left '...my other Copyhold Messuage or Tenement situate in ffrog Lane aforesaid known or distinguished by No.3... with the Yard Garden and all other appurts thereto belonging...'.

In addition to bequests of property, Henry Webb made substantial financial gifts to his children. Martha was to receive £600 from '... my Capital stock now standing in the Transfer Books in my name in the new ffour per Cent bank Annuities...'. This was for her own use and not subject to any debts or conditions. Similarly, his sons John and Henry were given £100(0?) and £250 respectively. Also, the churchwardens and overseers of the poor were to receive £40, the interest from which was to be used to provide bread for the needy. The household goods (furniture, books, plate, linen, clocks, watches, utensils, etc) were to be appraised and divided into 3 portions of equal value; however, if the offspring could not agree on their allocations they were to draw lots. Similarly, Webb's wearing apparel was to be divided between the two sons. The sons were also to receive '...all my Stock in Trade consisting of Chairs Timber Wood Utensils Implements and other things and Materials in the way of my Trade...'. Once again, Webb was anxious to avoid disputes so he specified that the items were to be divided into portions of equal value and if the sons could not agree they were to draw lots. Finally, in a codicil added on 28th May the same year, an additional bequest of £50 was made to each of the offspring and £20 to his niece Mary Carter. Also, the fact that there is no mention of Henry's wife in the will suggests that she had died sometime earlier.

It is possible approximately to locate Henry Webb's workshops as Frog Lane later was known as Webb's Lane and today is part of Dalling Road running north from King Street. Also, a public house known till recently as 'The Hampshire' still stands on the corner of what was Webb's Lane in King Street, although this is a nineteenth-century rebuild. However, there was an inn there as early as 1741 known as 'Hog' or 'Hogs' on a half-acre plot and it is likely that Webb's workshops were built on this site.³⁰ A note in Henry Webb's will indicated that he purchased the land from a William Faulkner (?) Esq.; the location of Webb's Lane is shown on an 1830 map (Figure 10).

Family details can often be obtained from parish records summarised in the online IGI. However, because St. Paul's Hammersmith was a Chapel of Ease rather than a parish church the records seem to have been missed; moreover, they were not noted down in

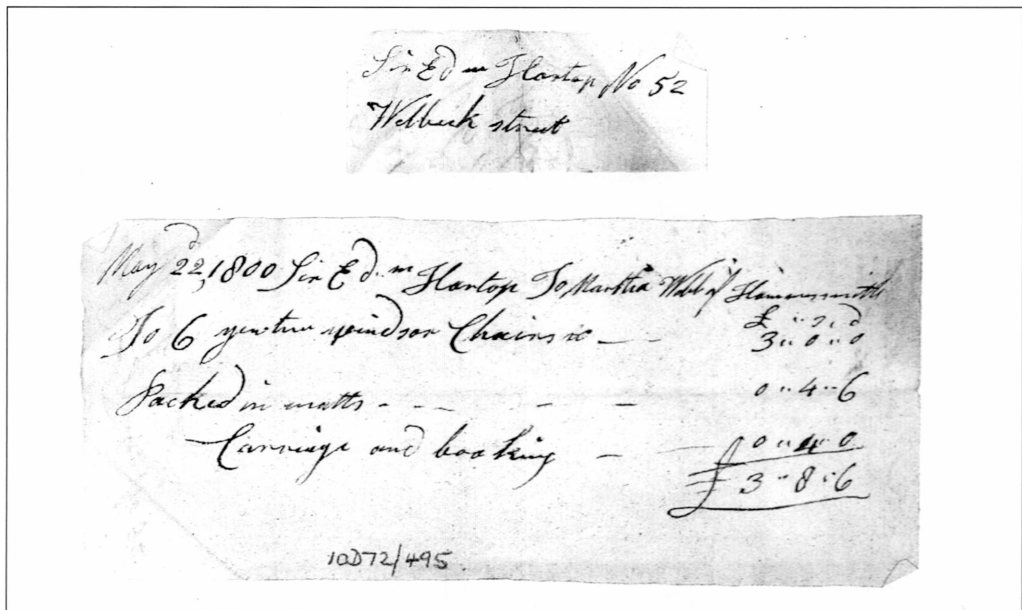


10. Map of Hammersmith, c.1830, showing Webb's Lane at the top (indicated by smaller arrow) and the Creek below (indicated by large arrow).

Courtesy of Hammersmith and Fulham Archives & Local History Centre

such a consistent way in the register.³¹ Webb was also a common name so the family history is difficult to sort out. Fortunately, the records indicate that Martha Webb, daughter of Henry and Elizabeth, was baptised on 5th December 1756.³² There were also twins Eleanor and Abraham born in 1758 who failed to survive. However, there seems to be no record of Henry and Elizabeth's marriage or of the christening of their eldest son John or his brother Henry; this might be because the family originated from somewhere else. Also, a William Webb baptised in 1766 could be another brother, although he is not mentioned in Henry's will. Nevertheless, it is possible to determine when Henry senior was born because a note at the Hammersmith and Fulham Record Office states that Henry Webb aged 62 was buried 5th June 1793, the day his will was proved; this gives a birth year of 1731. Therefore he would have been 25 when Martha was born and may have married a few years earlier.

Martha was 37 when her father died in 1793. It seems that she remained single and that it was she, rather than her brothers John and Henry, who was mainly responsible for carrying on their father's chair making business. In this connection, the Hammersmith Rate books record a 'Miss Martha Webb' rated for property on the north side of King Street, 1795-9 and on 2nd December 1811 she took out insurance on property in King Street.³³ There also exists a record of payment to Martha Webb from Sir Edmund Hartopp for 6 yew tree Windsor chairs supplied to his London residence at 52 Welbeck Street in 1800 (Figure 11).³⁴ Sir Edmund Cradock-Hartopp was MP for Leicestershire between 1798 and 1806. In addition, a receipt for £6 5s. 6d. dated 13th February 1800 indicates that she provided garden chairs for Lord Monson who had seats in Lincolnshire and Hertfordshire.³⁵



11. Record of payment for Windsor chairs supplied by Martha Webb to Sir Edmund Hartopp, 1800.
The Earl of Egremont: photo courtesy of Sussex Record Office

1809.

WEBB AND BUNCE'S REPOSITORY,
FOR ALL KINDS OF
PARK AND GARDEN FURNITURE,
AT NO OTHER PLACE, BUT THE
Corner of Webb's Lane, Hammersmith,
Which has been Established upwards of SEVENTY YEARS;
SANCTIONED BY THEIR MAJESTIES,
Their Royal Highnesses, the Prince of WALES, the Dukes of YORK, CLARENCE, KENT, CUM-
BERLAND, SUSSEX, and CAMBRIDGE; the Duchess of BRUNSWICK, and their
Royal Highnesses the Duke and Princess SOPHIA of GLOUCESTER.
D. 2. 1503

IMPRESSED with the liveliest emotions of gratitude, beg leave to return their most
affectionate and warmest thanks for the numerous favours conferred on them by the Nobility,
Gentry and Public, at their Old Established Manufactory; and trust their conduct will justify
them in soliciting a continuance, as they are enabled to execute Orders for the following Arti-
cles, agreeable to quality, on more reasonable terms than any other Manufactory in the King-
dom, and which are now ready for Inspection, viz.

Garden and Park seats, on improved Plans	{ Close Panned Alcoves
Park Paling	{ Cove Seats and Portable Temples
Alcoves of all descriptions and to any order	{ Cabrioles or light Chaises
Ornamental Treillis for Windows Virandoles	{ Bath Chaises with shafts or without, on an
&c.	{ easy and elegant plan, recommended by the

12. Hand bill printed for Martha Webb and William Bunce.
Trustees of the British Museum (Banks Collection)

2

Faculty

Children's Chaises, of all descriptions

Rustic Hermitages, Chairs, Tables, Bridges,
Gates, &c.

Windsor Chairs for Kitchens, Studies, &c.

Camp Stools, Chairs, &c.

Bath Chairs, for infirm Persons, and most use-
ful to preserve Health

Variety of Flower Stands

Grecian and German Sofas, Chairs, ---
Stools

Gothic Settees, Chairs, &c.

Chinese Seats, Pavillions and Awnings

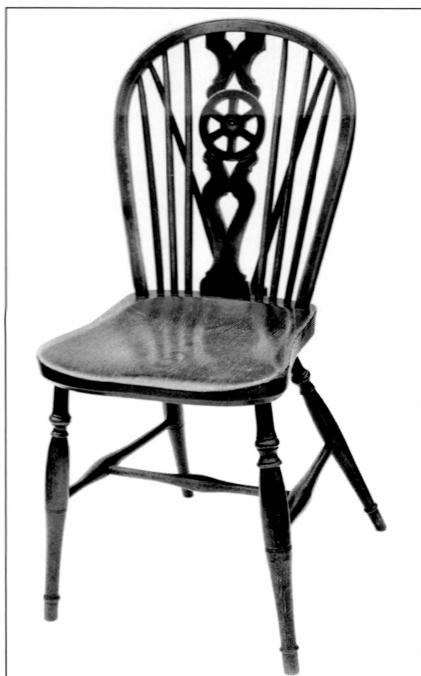
Dog Houses &c. with innumerable other
Articles.

N. B. From the very great demand last Season, for Bath Chairs and Chamber Chairs, W and Bunce have turned their *attention* particularly, to that most useful and excellent Machine, so much recommended by the Faculty for every description of Persons; but more particularly the infirm and convalescent, being made in such a variety of ways to suit all Persons having *least tendency to Ill Health*; Donkeys and Chaises with Harness Complete, let by the Week or Month, and Watering Places supplied on reasonable terms. English Timber bought, Carpenters and Joiners work, Painting &c, and Garden Furniture *let*, for Public Breakfasts.

From 1804 on it appears that Martha Webb was in partnership with an individual called Bunce, and the same year their firm is known to have supplied rustic seats to the Heathcote family.³⁶ It is also noted that on 11th December 1804 they took out insurance of £1250 to cover a dwelling house and workshop in King Street, and a further £50 for a workshop at Hammersmith Creek.³⁷ Their 1808 advertisement in the Banks collection at the British Museum gives the address as 'Corner of Webb's Lane Hammersmith' (Figure 12), but directories also list them at King's Road, Chelsea and Hammersmith. In this connection, there is a counterpart lease of T. Little to Wm. Bunce for land in King's Road, Chelsea, for 88 $\frac{1}{4}$ years from 28th December 1818.³⁸ Also, the Heads of Household census returns for 1821 record 'Martha Webb and Bunce, King Street North. One family consisting of one male and two females employed in manufacture.'³⁹ This suggests that Martha may actually have been involved in making chairs as well as running the business.

Windsor chairs stamped Webb and Bunce are known and figures 13a & 13b show an example produced by this partnership.⁴⁰ Another example of unusual form with columns either side of a solid back, possibly a Masonic chair, has also previously been illustrated.⁴¹ The 1831 census returns also refer to 'Harry Webb, Webbs Lane, chairmaker. Three families in one house consisting of two males employed in manufacture and two females.'⁴² This 'Harry' Webb could be Martha's brother Henry. However a note in the Hammersmith and Fulham Record Office mentions a Henry Webb buried 1828 aged 57, and therefore born in 1761, who seems more likely to have been Henry senior's son. Also, another note refers to a Martha Webb buried 20th June 1822 aged 65; this is almost certainly Bunce's partner although having been baptised in 1756 her age is one year out (but see below). Sometime after Martha's death Bunce relocated the business from King Street to a redevelopment on Hammersmith Road known as Dorcas buildings which was carried out in 1824.⁴³ However, Bunce himself seems to have died not long after as the will of William Matlock Bunce, Garden Furniture Manufacturer of Fulham, Middlesex, was proved 22nd May 1832.⁴⁴ Inspection of this very short document written in 1816 indicates that William Bunce's wife was called Mary and that she and 'Webb' (presumably Martha) were to be executors and S. and T. Little witnesses. This, therefore, confirms that William Matlock Bunce was in fact the second member of the Webb and Bunce partnership and that it was he who expanded the business into Chelsea. Furthermore, his wife Mary was the sole executrix, implying that Martha Webb was already deceased.

The extensive information on the Webb and Bunce advertisement noted that their manufactory of park and garden furniture had been established 'upwards of seventy years' (Figure 12). Assuming it was printed at the date hand-written at the top (1808) this suggests that it started sometime before 1738. The problem with this is that Henry Webb was born in 1731, raising the possibility that it was an earlier generation of Webbs who initiated the business. The printed details indicate that theirs was a major enterprise with a long history of supplying garden furniture to the aristocracy and the gentry. However, the advertisement also makes much of invalid carriages, such as might have been used by those taking the waters in Bath, suggesting that this was an expanding aspect of their business. Interestingly, also, the particulars hint at a rather different indoor use (kitchens and studies) for Windsor chairs. Perhaps the long-standing fashion for painted garden Windsors was finally on the wane in the early nineteenth century, possibly due to the introduction of new types of decorative outdoor seating constructed from painted wrought iron.



13A. Windsor chair, c.1820, bearing the stamp of Webb and Bunce.
Courtesy M. Harding-Hill



13B. Detail of figure 13a, showing Webb and Bunce stamp.
Courtesy M. Harding-Hill

Interestingly, Webb and Bunce were not the only makers of Windsor chairs in this area of Middlesex. For example, Lockⁿ Foulger whose 1773 trade card states that he ‘makes all sorts of Windsor Chairs, Garden Seats, Rural Settees, etc.’, worked in Walham Green, now Fulham Broadway.⁴⁵ In addition, Timothy Carter, chair-maker of Hammersmith, whose will was proved in 1822, is mentioned in Sun Fire Office records as follows: ‘Timothy Carter at the Windsor Chair Manufactory, Hammersmith, gent. Other property or occupiers: the Sun near the Creek Hammersmith.’⁴⁶ As previously mentioned, Webb and Bunce had a workshop at Hammersmith Creek and Henry Webb’s niece was a Mary Carter, who may be a relative. Hammersmith Creek was an outflow river of the Stamford brook and used to run through what is now King Street into the Thames, dividing the river bank into upper and lower malls. Ale was brewed there in the eighteenth century and it was navigable almost as far as King Street, ideal also for barges to offload timber for furniture making and deliver finished chairs to customers further down the Thames (Figure 14). Appropriately, the map shows that the creek was just across the road from Webb’s Lane (Figure 10); in 1936 the creek was filled in and it is now the site of Furnival Gardens.

Henry Webb’s firm had a long tradition of supplying fashionable garden furniture, including Windsor chairs, to the aristocracy and landed gentry which continued into the nineteenth century under the management of his daughter Martha. The contribution made by her partner William Bunce was possibly mainly of a financial nature but it has proved difficult to find out much about him and both he and Martha were dead by 1833. However, in addition to the Webbs, it appears that some other west London firms were also involved in making Windsors at this time, but how significant they were in supplying the London market remains to be determined. On the other hand, the business run by



14. View of Hammersmith Creek, c.1920.

Courtesy of Hammersmith and Fulham Archives & Local History Centre

Henry Webb, judging by the exclusive nature of his clients and the extent of freehold property that he owned, seems to have been of some importance. Due to its longevity, it gave its name to the lane in which it was situated and there is the further possibility that it may actually have been started in the early 1700s by Henry Webb's father or brother, although perhaps not on the same site. In some respects it seems odd that this highly regarded business, which counted Princes and Dukes amongst its patrons, should have been based in what was then a hamlet. Its location on one of the main routes into the capital, King Street (part of the Great West Road), was probably a relevant factor but there must be other reasons for its success; additional research may help to answer this question.

This article has been concerned with two eighteenth-century Windsor chair making businesses located on the fringes of the capital. This would have enabled them not only to supply chairs to the London market but also to attract passing trade from wealthy individuals travelling by coach between their country estates and London residences. However, as is apparent from contemporary 'conversation piece' paintings, there was clearly a fashion for displaying and using Windsor chairs, initially in gardens and later indoors, that lasted throughout the eighteenth century. This was not restricted to London as makers have also been noted in other parts of the country. For example, Windsor chairs were obtainable in Lancaster (Henry Baines, Gillows), Bristol (William Gorton, John Parker, Luke Shewring, John Webb, ? Williams), Slough (Richard Hewett, John Pitt), Oxford (Thomas Munday, William Partridge), Uxbridge (John Prior), Liverpool (John Robinson), Woburn (Robert & Thomas Shaw) and High Wycombe (William Treacher),⁴⁷ and probably from many more eighteenth-century makers and places that have not yet been recorded. Thus, William and Henry Webb were perhaps typical members of a nationwide enterprise supplying fashionable garden furniture and related artefacts, together with high quality indoor yew-wood Windsors, to the well-to-do. However, their businesses differed in scale and the nature of their clientele. Like some rural makers, William was involved in another trade as well as chair making, but it is unclear to what extent coach making and property speculation contributed to the profitability of his business. Henry, though, ran a long-established high-class business selling to the gentry and nobility. In both cases, these two family firms seem to have gone into decline after the decease of the owners. Several of William's sons worked for a while as chair makers and Martha Webb initially carried on supplying the gentry but then began to sell chairs for kitchens and invalids. After 1800 the social order was changing and the Windsor chair was being redesigned for a mass market, with perhaps an accompanying reduction in profit margins. The days when the Windsor chair was the height of fashion in any landscape garden or genteel interior were finally over.

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