A Triangular Gothic Stool

AIDAN HARRISON

Medieval stools have received very little attention in the standard literature. Chinnery says that little is known about their various types since no reliable examples have survived. He does cover boarded stools, but because his work concentrates largely on the period after 1540 it is understandable that earlier furnishings are not discussed in detail.[1] Eames delves into this earlier period and accepts that there are so many stylistic and constructional similarities between British, French and Flemish furniture of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries that her study extends to these countries and beyond.[2] French furniture historians also venture into medieval territory; while Thirion and Burckhardt restrict themselves to France, their predecessor Dervieu's brief specialised study of chairs and seats takes the same international approach as Eames.[3]

Like the early writers such as Shaw, Macquoid, Cescinsky and Gribble, and Roe, both Eames and Thirion are perhaps understandably more excited by grander furnishings and spend little time discussing stools of any sort. They touch briefly on the 'slab-ended' French and Flemish styles which usually have central stretchers and often bear fine Gothic or early Renaissance carving to their aprons.[4] Despite the apparent familiarity of this type in medieval manuscript images, there appear to be only a few rare survivors such as those at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, dating from the late fifteenth century.[5] Jellinek suggests that the English boarded stool, often beautiful in its simplicity with shaped aprons and simple cut-outs, but lacking a stretcher, which was popular well into the sixteenth century, may have been inspired by that earlier slab-ended Continental type.[6]

In mid-sixteenth-century France, elegant joined stools with four and even five or six straight, slender, turned legs, such as the *Tabouret de Chantre* with a D-shaped seat, began to appear.[7] It is possible that, just as Jellinek suggests the English boarded stool may have been a variation of the Continental version, France could have provided inspiration for the late sixteenth and seventeenth-century English joined stool with its decorative turned legs.

When it comes to the three-legged triangular stool, it is a significant coincidence that while Eames and Thirion acknowledge the ubiquity of the utilitarian type produced by the turner's trade (Figure 1) the only example they can cite occurs amongst a group of boarded examples in an altar retable of the *The Last Supper* by Jean de Molder of Antwerp of 1513, now displayed at the Musée de Cluny in Paris.[8] Manuscript illustrations of contemporary interiors depict both the simple turned and refined

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[1] Chinnery (1979). p. 261.
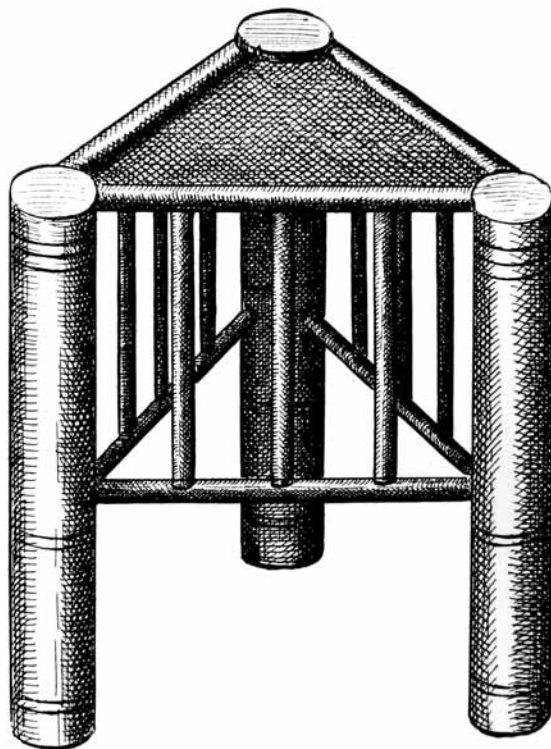[2] Eames (1977).
[3] Dervieu (1910).
[4] Eames (1977), p. 209; Thirion (1998), p. 52; Burckhardt (1977), p. 22.
[5] Eames (1977), pl. 63b.
[6] Jellinek (2009), p. 188.
[7] Burckhardt (1977), p. 70.
[8] Thirion (1998), p. 52; Eames (1977), p. 209.

1 Drawing of a medieval turned stool,
reproduced from Dervieu (1910), fig. 12

boarded styles in use across Northern Europe, at table, by bedside, by fireside and occupied by musicians. In contrast, the first known English depiction of a stool of joined construction — an early specimen with four turned legs — occurs in a portrait of the seventh Earl of Northumberland, dated 1566.[9]

Few early inventories are specific about the details of stools, presumably because most were workaday objects of little value. One which offers a little help is in the Earl of Northumberland's accounts of 1512, prior to the siege of Thérouanne in northern France:

Tryangle stolys for my Lord: Itor, xij thre fottyds stolles, torned, the seets of them of blake lether.[10]

Their military application and apparently unusual combination of turned legs with leather seats raises a possibility that they were three-legged versions of the four-legged form which could be folded for ease of transport in such campaigns.[11]

In view of the apparent assumption amongst nineteenth- and twentieth-century furniture historians that three-legged medieval stools in general have disappeared, it is remarkable for one to feature in Jellinek's twenty-first century work (Figure 2). The author's chronological sequence of joined stools begins dramatically with this example

[9] Jellinek (2009), p. 22, pl. 4.
[10] Wolsey and Luff (1968), p. 66.
[11] Chinnery (1979), pp. 233–34, pl. 3:4.

2 Triangular joined stool, *c*. 1500.
Tobias Jellinek

which fully justifies his description as 'apparently unique' and 'amazing'.[12] Its four-sided legs, of kite-shaped section, are joined by plain stretchers. Vertical full height intermediate stiles reach from stretcher to seat-rail between the legs, separating pairs of small Gothic open tracery panels, thus forming two decorative friezes beneath each seat rail. The only comparable use of such intermediate legs is on a few Scottish caqueteuse chairs, the later seventeenth-century examples being turned.[13] The stool is dated by Jellinek to *c*. 1500 and identified as English. It may owe its survival to clearly being of a superior class to the apparently extinct everyday turner's version.

Understood to have once been in the collection of Sam Wolsey and now in a further private collection, this stool is described as being extensively restored. Its feet have suffered considerable wear and decay from damp floors, so that it now stands just 18" (45 cm) high, resting on its stretchers. It is important to consider Chinnery's emphasis that joined furniture was never made with stretchers at floor level, suggesting that this stool would originally have been around the typical 22"–24" (55 cm–60 cm) height.[14] Part of the top has been replaced. The legs, seat rails and stiles bear light scratch-moulding to their edges.

Unlike the turner's plain utility stools and chairs, this is the sophisticated product of a joiner. It is significant that its small, finely carved Gothic open tracery panels below

[12] Illustrated in Jellinek (2009), p. 215, pl. 265.
[13] Ibid. (2009), p. 86, pls 78, 79. p. 106, pl. 109.
[14] Chinnery (1979), p. 265.

the seat rail separate it stylistically by two whole generations from the next joined stools in Jellinek's otherwise dense chronology, consisting almost entirely of the well-known four-legged form, spanning from *c.* 1560 to *c.* 1700. It also lacks the turned legs which are almost universal on those later joined stools. While late sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century triangular joined stools with three turned legs do exist, they are very different in design and character to this ancestor from the Gothic period.[15]

The absence of turning may point either to a place of manufacture where the trades of turning and joinery were strictly demarcated, or alternatively, that the apparent absence of any surviving furniture which combines pure Gothic styles with turned decoration suggests that the former had died out before the introduction of the latter. The ancient turner's trade produced predominantly utilitarian chairs and stools, with every part except the seat turned. The round ends of stretchers fitted into round holes bored into the equally-round legs. In contrast, decorative, boldly-turned legs in combination with the mortise and tenoned open-frame construction of tables, chairs, open cupboards and stools, only survive from the Elizabethan period and later.[16] At that time true Gothic decoration had essentially disappeared. Chinnery's statement that this form of open-framed furniture almost certainly evolved subsequent to the introduction of the frame-and-panel system is of particular significance to this study.[17]

Finding the historical and geographical origins of a sophisticated piece of previously unresearched form is far from straightforward. One negative indicator is its apparent absence from the many surviving painted manuscripts in medieval Northern Europe's cultural heartlands of France, Burgundy and the Rhine, the Low Countries and England, which show sophisticated Gothic interiors where such a stool might be expected. As we have seen, Eames, Thirion and others regularly refer to these sources to show every other style of seating and furnishing, both extant and extinct. This suggests that this form of stool was rare and even raises the possibility that it may have come from somewhere outside those cultural centres. Chinnery's view suggests that its open-frame construction points to a workshop conversant in the emerging craft of framed panelling while its carved aprons point to a source which retained Gothic forms of carving.

Further investigations have revealed that the stool featured by Jellinek, while undoubtedly rare, is not unique, although it certainly has its own specific and distinctive decorative features. The discovery of three further early joined triangular stools has inevitably reduced this example's exclusivity, yet their presence provides reassurance that, far from being an inexplicable aberration, it is a sophisticated example of a rare, previously unexamined form.

A second stool passed through the hands of a leading specialist dealer who acquired it at an East Sussex auction in 2008, catalogued as 'a child's table' (Figure 3).[18] The construction is similar to the Jellinek example, with its plain legs of the same 'kite' section. The intermediate vertical stiles and tracery carvings of the Jellinek example are absent, while a plain rectangular apron beneath each seat rail displays a finely carved early Renaissance opposed S scroll, suggesting a slightly later date, but still

[15] Chinnery (1979), p. 268, pls 3:103, 3:104; Jellinek (2009), p. 216, pl. 266, pp. 222–23, pls 279, 280, 281.
[16] Ibid. (1979), p. 119.
[17] Ibid.
[18] www.marhamchurchantiques.com

3 (left) Triangular joined stool, *c.* 1520–40.
Paul Fitzsimmons

4 (right) Triangular joined stool, *c.* 1520–40,
Weller King Auctions

decades earlier than the accepted date for the development of the joined stool. The
only other decoration is a simple moulding which blends the seat-rails into the thinner-
section aprons. On the evidence of the photographs it appears that the decorative
apron panels on all these stools are tenoned without pegs into the legs. This was a
standard form of fixing for such aprons, for example below early cupboards. The seat
is likely to be an early replacement, but the rest of this stool is understood to be
original.

   Little is known of the third stool, which was part of the dispersal of the collection
of Alex Slone of Dial Post House in 2003 (Figure 4).[19] The only known photograph,
enlarged from the auction catalogue, is not well defined, but suggests that it is the
simplest of the four, with undecorated legs and stretchers, while below each seat rail
is again an apron, entirely plain apart from its shaped Gothic profile. The originality
of this seat and other elements of the stool, as well as its whereabouts today, is
unknown.

   The fourth example was purchased at a specialist early oak furniture auction at
Doncaster in 2015, catalogued as a Tudor stool (Figures 5 and 6).[20] Again it is of joined,

[19] Weller-King Auction, Horsham, West Sussex, 23 September 2003.
[20] Wilkinson's Auctioneers, Doncaster, 21 June 2015.

Two views of a triangular joined stool, *c.* 1500. *The author*

pegged, open-framed construction with a triangular top and the same arrangement of legs of 'kite' section. Beneath each seat rail is an unpegged, thin, riven apron, in this case forming an arcade of three arches. The central cusped ogee arch is topped by an incised cross and flanked on each side by a plain arch. The lower edge of each apron is finished with a fine concave moulding. Both Chinnery and Jellinek are uncertain about the significance of the incised cross occasionally found above a central Gothic arch on boarded stools and benches and whether it implies ecclesiastical origins.[21] The formality of the execution of the aprons is striking in such an apparently humble application. It is more rigid and architectural in style than the more fluid ogee and bicuspid forms found, occasionally with the same central cross, on the aprons of boarded stools of the period.[22] This less formal form is also evident on chairs; both on the front seat-rail of the earliest sixteenth-century armchair discussed by Jellinek and on the aprons around a slightly later chair also discussed.[23] Another rare example of cusped arches on seat furniture is on the late fifteenth or early sixteenth-century form from Barningham Hall, Suffolk, at the Victoria and Albert Museum.[24] Again, the contrast with the form's more naïve style highlights the sophistication of this stool.

While the three stools already discussed all have plain lower stretchers, this example's apron decoration is echoed by three plain round arches carved into the lower edge of each stretcher, which is therefore 4" (10 cm) as opposed to the typical 2" (5 cm)

[21] Chinnery (1979), p. 261; Jellinek (2009), p. 188.
[22] Tracy (1988), p. 198, pl. 126.
[23] Jellinek (2009), p. 44, pl. 13, p. 77, pls 13, 65.
[24] V&A Museum, W.67-1921; Tracy (1988), p. 195, pl. 122.

in height. Again, the lower edge of the arches is finished with the same fine concave moulding. The only published evidence for decorated stretchers is on two of the seventeenth-century chairs at Trinity Hall, Aberdeen, which also have a shaped lower edge to the stretchers.[25] Those examples are however of a simpler, more shallow profile. Undoubtedly because of their vulnerability near floor level, each of the stool's stretchers has lost all of the fragile cross-grained points of this decoration, both between the arches and at each end, adjoining the legs. Some of the damaged points have been re-attached, some replaced and others are missing. The grain in the best-preserved stretcher differs slightly from the other two, possibly suggesting that it was replaced a long time ago — but this is not certain.

The geometry of this joined, triangulated form of construction makes it inherently stronger than square or boarded stools, which may help account for the four examples discussed here surviving for five centuries. However, as with all joined stools, the top is the weakest point, so it is not surprising that the other three have replaced or extensively restored tops. As a result the originality of the pegged seat of this stool with its fine edge-moulding has to be questioned. It is completely split across, six inches in from the corner with the shortest grain and strengthened by a screw into the top of the leg. Yet the grain of the 16" (40 cm) wide board is more open than the tight, straight-grained oak used in the rest of the stool. Taken together with its early date one must conclude that the top of this fourth stool is probably a replacement. The remainder of the stool appears to be original. At 21" (53 cm) it retains most of its original height, although old worm damage and rot to the feet show that they have suffered some reduction.

The varying degrees of wear to the stretchers found on most joined stools show that they were sometimes used as footrests. The distance from the seat down to the top of the stretcher measured on a wide range of joined stools indicates a typical distance of 16½–18½ inches (42–47 cm). Centuries later this still provides a comfortable seat for a 5' 8" (1.7 m) sitter, the average height of a sixteenth-century adult male. The proportions of the Jellinek stool in its photograph appear very similar to the present example. They are both unusual in that while they share the original height of conventional stools, the distance from the seat down to the top of the stretchers is only 14½ inches (37 cm), producing a very uncomfortable position for a 5' 8" sitter. This raises the possibility that these stools were made for smaller people, namely women. It may be significant that this is the same measurement from the seat to the floor of two Scottish chairs with front stretchers too high to be footrests and made for named women in 1596/7.[26]

<center>A SCOTTISH STOOL?</center>

A possible Scottish connection is also suggested by another unusual feature of the stool, which is its moulding. The inside edges of the legs, rails and stretchers have a full-length moulding in an 'S' profile, abutting a chamfer which on the legs is stopped just before meeting the seat-rails and stretchers (Figure 7). The moulding runs the full length of the legs, from floor to seat. It gives each of the stool's three facets the visual

[25] Jellinek (2009), p. 173, pl. 206, p. 177, pl. 214.
[26] Harrison (2015).

7 Detail of stool moulding.
The author

impression of the moulded, chamfered surround to a panel. This early stool adds support to Chinnery's belief that the development of open-framed furniture originated from sources familiar with making framed panelling. One stretcher, otherwise identical to its fellows and apparently original, is un-moulded, possibly suggesting that it may have been intended as the preferred foot-rail.

In a previous article I drew attention to the use of this S-form, or '*double-ogee*' moulding profile in Scottish work, and suggested it might be a specifically Scottish feature.[27] In particular, it is found on woodwork in Aberdeen associated with the joiner John Fendour, who was of French or Flemish extraction, and who undertook major timber construction and woodworking projects during his recorded career in Aberdeen between 1495 and 1520.[28] The scale of his business is evident in the records for timber work at St Machar's Cathedral, King's College Chapel and St Nicholas' Kirk in the city. His craftsmanship was of the highest standard, evident in the accounts of further major projects for King James IV at Falkland Palace, eighty miles away. The workshop is particularly renowned in Scotland for the fine quality of its ecclesiastical woodwork and an unusual combination of the early use of panelled construction with the late use of Gothic tracery.

[27] Harrison (2012).
[28] Fawcett (2004), p. 328.

It is noteworthy that every surviving example of the panelling still within its original framing at Aberdeen employs the same decorative moulded surround with this distinctive profile. Survivals include the rood-screen at King's College Chapel; panels moved to the undercroft of St Nicholas' Kirk; and an armorial panel of *c.* 1520 from the city's royal mint, now in the Marischal Museum, which displays the royal arms of the infant King James V. The same profile is also evident on work removed from St Nicholas' Kirk, Aberdeen to the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.[29] The museum also holds a fine fragmentary early sixteenth-century door of parchemin panels from the Edinburgh house of Mary of Guise. The door's central muntins bear the same moulding profile as the work at Aberdeen (Figure 8A–H).[30]

It is likely that woodworkers copied the moulding from its earlier use in Scottish masonry, notably the fifteenth-century work at Melrose Abbey attributed to the Paris-born John Morow. The same moulding also occurs on Morow's work at Paisley Cathedral and Lincluden Church, and it has been described as one of the most important elements in the development of moulding styles in Scottish ecclesiastical carved masonry before the Reformation.[31] The moulding does not, so far as can be determined, occur in England and Wales.

While the distinctive form and constructional features of Aberdeen's sixteenth and seventeenth-century chairs are well known, examples or even images of early Scottish joined stools no longer survive, leaving us without any indication whatever as to their form. Just as so much of Scotland's physical heritage has suffered catastrophically from a conflict-ridden history, there are not nearly so many images, written records or inventories as are to be found in England. Prominent amongst those that do survive are the accounts of successive kings. The best-known Scottish inventories of the period are the wardrobe accounts of King James V recorded in 1539 and 1542.[32] These do extend to storage chests, but make no mention of stools apart from the somewhat specialised 'stool of ease' and its lavish, costly textile trimmings. However, in the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer there is an entry for five stools in 1507 under the section headed '*pro regina*' — 'for the queen'.[33] At that date the Queen of Scotland was Margaret Tudor, wife of King James IV:

Last day of July; Item; for v stulis to the queenis chambers. 15*s*.

The queen's chambers were almost certainly those at Holyrood Palace where James IV had lavished considerable expenditure since before their marriage in 1503.[34] Unfortunately there is no elaboration as to the number of legs on the stools for the queen, but judging by the cost of her opulent textiles also listed, their cost of just 3*s* each suggests that they are unlikely to have been upholstered. However, here is clear evidence that stools were used in medieval Scotland — at the highest level. Bearing in mind their regal application, one would assume they were of the highest quality.

[29] Simpson (2014), p. 91.
[30] Museum ref: HKL 127.
[31] Fawcett (2002), pp. 46–48 and 55.
[32] Rush (2006).
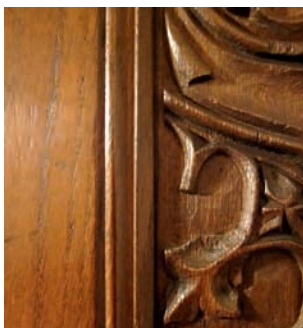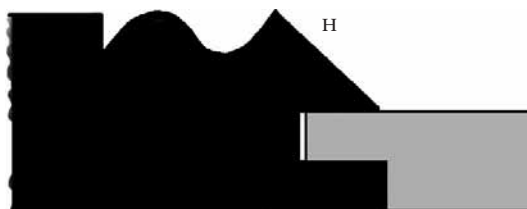[33] National Archives of Scotland, Beaton, fol. 26.
[34] Dunbar (1999), p. 56.

8 Details of early sixteenth-century mouldings from: A) rood screen door, King's College Chapel, Aberdeen B) rood screen frame, King's College Chapel, Aberdeen C) armorial panel from the Royal Mint, Aberdeen D) oak fragments in St Mary's Chapel, St Nicholas' Kirk, Aberdeen E) remnants from St Nicholas' Kirk, Aberdeen (National Museum of Scotland) F) oak door from Mary of Guise House, Edinburgh (National Museum of Scotland) G) oak chest, originally published in *Regional Furniture* (2012) H) moulding cross-section profile

9 Details of seat rail, showing misaligned carved labels. *The Author*

Apart from its deeply carved, formal Gothic decoration, there is further carving to all three of the stool's aprons which cannot be described as decorative, but it is entirely informative. On each is a pair of very shallow rectangular recessed 'labels' filling the spaces which flank the central cusped arch. Within each is carved in relief an angular 'device' centred by a tiny coat of arms (Figure 9).

Close inspection reveals that on each apron the left-hand label is between ⅛" (3 mm) and ³⁄₁₆" (4.5 mm) lower than its neighbour to the right. The distortion is sufficient for some of the labels to be distinctly out of square. The labels also vary in width by almost half an inch (10 mm). This amateurish inaccuracy, combined with the equally unsym-pathetic nature of their layout, points to them having been carved *in situ*. Because the aprons are not pegged, but allow slight movement, it is possible to envisage the carver failing to notice a fractional anti-clockwise movement of the apron as he worked on each in turn. This contrasts with the formal, highly accurate design and execution of the stool's construction and Gothic carving, evidently done before the stool was assembled. Moreover, whoever carved the labels used only a flat chisel, whereas the original maker of the stool clearly employed a curved gouge to produce the deep con-cave moulding to the aprons' Gothic arches.[35]

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[35] With thanks to Frank Wood for his advice on the carving of the stool, and to Dr Charles Tracy for his views.
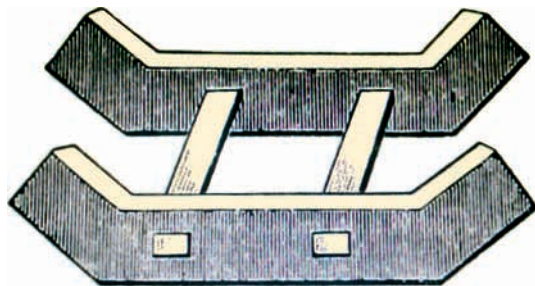
10B The Stourton 'drag' or sled

10A The Stourton arms

The originality or otherwise of these carved labels is of fundamental importance to this study. The possibility of scientific analysis of its surface finishes to detect whether or not the labels were carved when the stool was made has been investigated but unfortunately, like the possibility of dendrochronological examination of such slender timbers, science has been unable to help. As a result, we are left only with the physical evidence of the erratic execution of the badges and their blunt aesthetic insensitivity to suggest they are later additions. However, further documentary research has provided at least one possible explanation for their presence.

The tiny arms carved in the centre of each label are those of the Barons Stourton (Figure 10A).[36] This Wiltshire family of ancient Saxon stock managed to retain their position and their lands both during and for centuries after the Norman invasion. The arms portray the River Stour running between the six springs which form its source on Stourton land. The larger device surrounding the arms is the ancient military badge of the Stourtons (Figure 10B).[37] Until the middle of the sixteenth century there were over a hundred badges of this type, devised by England's nobles to be worn by their fighting men to identify their comrades in battle.[38] As coats of arms had become increasingly complex, these simple badges were designed to be easily recognisable. The badges became redundant after the reign of Henry VIII, when the development of a professional army with distinctive uniforms rendered the feudal badges obsolete.

The Stourton badge is in the form of a golden 'drag' or sled.[39] It dates back to the Norman Conquest and Botolph, Lord of Stourton, who was not only brother-in-law to both Edward the Confessor and King Harold, but allegedly a Saxon giant. He supposedly slew so many of the invading Normans at 'Bonhomme Down' (an unknown and possibly mythical battle site) that he had the sled constructed in order to remove their bodies. It is claimed that William the Conqueror could only advance westwards after negotiating personally with Stourton and agreeing that he should

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[36] Fox-Davies (1909), fig. 243; Mowbray (1899), p. 22n.
[37] Palliser (1870), p. 338, fig. 252.
[38] Wise (1980), p. 19.
[39] Mowbray (1899), p. 4.

retain his lands and title. Victorian accounts relate that there were medieval stained-glass windows depicting Botolph's sled in St Peter's Church at Stourton. They were lost in the re-modelling of the church during the estate's later ownership by the Hoare banking family in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[40] Apart from its use on the tomb of the 6th Baron in Stourton church, the badges on this stool are its only known survival.

Given the likely date of the stool, our attention should focus on William, 7th Baron Stourton (c. 1505–1548). He married Elizabeth Dudley (c. 1500–1560), daughter of Edmund Dudley, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Chairman of the Privy Council of King Henry VII. The vast Stourton estates at that stage stretched across Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset. Although a Catholic, William had been granted further large areas of land at the dissolution of the monasteries. He was a favourite of Henry VIII and 'held the towel' at the christening of Henry's only son, Prince Edward. He was also a loyal and distinguished soldier who is recorded as being more interested in military life than in running his estates. His militaristic tendencies are shown in the fact that, despite his religious affiliation, he was active in suppressing the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536. He took Agnes Ryce, daughter of the Duke of Norfolk as his mistress. Cousin to both Catherine Howard and Anne Boleyn, she later claimed to have secretly married the Baron. In his will he left most of his property to her including 'all my beddes and other stuff of household moveable and unmoveable'. [41]

Litigation by Charles, the 8th Baron ensued, not only over his father's alleged bigamy, but also over accusations of major theft from the family by his father's steward. It appears that Baron Charles' battle over the will was eventually successful, but the other conflict led to him being tried and hanged for the steward's murder in 1557. As a result most of the family's lands and possessions reverted to the Crown. After their heyday during the life of William, the 7th Baron, and following the trial and execution of his son, the staunchly Catholic family's fortunes declined dramatically in a hostile post-dissolution England.[42]

William Stourton played a brief but prominent part in the first of Henry VIII's 'rough wooings' of Scotland between 1543 and 1551. This was Henry's attempt to compel by military force a marriage between his son Edward (later Edward VI) and the infant Mary, Queen of Scots. The required outcome of this 'rough wooing' of Scotland was made very clear by King Henry's message to his two hundred-strong fleet before it sailed from Newcastle:

> Put all to fire and sword. Burn Edinburgh, so razed and defaced when you have sacked and gotten what ye can of it, as there may remain forever a perpetual memory of the vengeance of God lightened upon (them) for their falsehood and disloyalty.[43]

Under the command of Lord Hertford, the seaborne English army of 12,000, aided by 4,000 Border horsemen, arrived at Leith on 3 May 1544. Among them was William, 7th Baron Stourton, whose contribution to the campaign was recorded in his command

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40 Dodd (1981).
41 Mowbray (1899), p. 392.
42 Ibid., p. 417.
43 Merriman (2000), p. 144.

11   Richard Lee, *Sketch of the English attack on Palace of Holyroodhouse and Edinburgh*, May 1544. From Merriman, 'Rough Wooings', fig. 6.1

of a force of 1500 men during the attack and the payment of conduct money on his return to Berwick later that month:

> From Berwick to Sturton , Wilts. 330 miles at 4d per mile for himself, 2d for his petty captain and 1/2d for each man. William Lord Stourton for 93 men to Sturton, Wilts.
> Rec by himself, Berwick upon Tweed, 19th May, 36 Hen VIII.[44]

The English entered Edinburgh on 4 May, and after they had completed their pillage, rape and more, the city was utterly burned, with the invaders returning on three successive days to reignite the flames to ensure that their monarch's orders were vigorously executed. Men, women and children were slaughtered and over a radius of seven miles inland from the city the landscape was reduced to a scorched earth (Figure 11).

Having rescued only the royal tapestries before abandoning the palace of Holyroodhouse which had been little used since the death of King James V in 1542, the Scots at least managed to hold Edinburgh Castle. English accounts of the attack boast of the quantity of plunder they were able to seize before burning the city and its surrounding area. They finally left from Leith on May 14, after burning the town, its port and destroying the pier. The English ships, as well as the captured Scottish vessels *Unicorn* and *Salamander*, were so heavily laden with vast quantities of booty 'to the value of £10,000 or more', that the troops were obliged to march overland back to English soil at Berwick-on-Tweed.

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[44] www.british-history.ac.uk (Henry VIII May 16–20 1544).

A number of the English commanders are known to have profited from the spoils of the 'rough wooing'. Sir Richard Lee, the English army's chief engineer, removed the brass font used to baptise Scottish kings from Holyrood Abbey and is also believed to have taken its Dunkeld lectern. When he returned home, Lee presented the font to St Albans Abbey, and later accounts relate that it bore an engraved inscription honouring his military feat. The lectern, which he is believed to have given to his own church, St Stephens at St Albans, is today loaned to the National Museum of Scotland. The font was later melted down by Cromwell's men in the Civil War.[45] In the ruthless plunder of Edinburgh, Lee probably also acquired some personal but unrecorded souvenirs.

Sir James Thynne, steward to the Earl of Hertford, proudly proclaimed his booty, a manuscript of Hector Boece's *Chronicles of Scotland*, in which he wrote that he had 'found it' at Edinburgh. Along with several similar books it was sold from the Thynne library at Longleat in the 2002 auction.[46]

Sir William Speke was another officer involved in the plunder of Edinburgh in May 1544. He took fifteen folio volumes, printed between 1499 and 1533. Among them was a Bible bearing the impress of Alexander, Abbott of Cambuskenneth in Clackmannanshire. The Abbott had a house in Edinburgh's Lawnmarket. In thirteen of the volumes Speke wrote proudly of his plunder in his own hand; the inscription in a volume of Bartolus is typical:

> Memorandum that Edyn Borow was wone the XI day of Maye in anno XXXVI H VIII et anno domini MCCCCCXLIIII and that this boke called Bartolus super Prima Codicis was gotten and brought away by me William Norres of the Speik Knight from Edynborow the XI day Maye in anno supra dicto and now the boke of me the fouresaid Sir William geven and by me left to remayne at Speike for an ayreloume. In wyttenes therof I have wreityn this with my none honde and subscribed my name per me William Norres my lit[47]

The books were bought from Speke Hall in 1825 for the Liverpool Athenaeum Library from where they were acquired by the National Library of Scotland in 2008.[48]

The King himself did not miss out. There can be little doubt as to the origins of a pair of scarlet cushions bearing the arms of King James V of Scotland recorded in the 1547 inventory of Henry VIII at Hampton Court, along with a scarlet bed with a counterpoint also embroidered with the Scottish royal arms.[49] This is likely to have been the same scarlet bed listed in the 1542 wardrobe inventory of James V at Holyrood.[50] Because Henry had ordered that as much as possible should be looted from Edinburgh, his commanding officer, the Earl of Hertford, undoubtedly ensured that such appropriate booty would find its way back to the King.

No official records of all the ship-loads of private plunder appear to have been kept. However, the Lee, Speke and Thynne examples demonstrate that the trophies taken by the leading officers were inscribed or labelled with their own identities, recording

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[45] Galloway (1879), p. 296.
[46] Winstanley (1920), vol. LXXI (1919), p. 11.
[47] National Library of Scotland, Cambuskenneth Collection.
[48] Starkey (1998), vol. 1, p. 278. Nos: 12136, 12174.
[49] Rush (2006), pp. 8–9.
[50] www.british-history.ac.uk (Henry VIII May 16–20 1544).

the fact of their capture. It is noteworthy that while Lee's heavy font and lectern are likely to have continued by ship to London before the twenty-mile overland trip to St Albans, Speke and Thynne's trophies had to be sufficiently portable for the overland march back to Merseyside (170 miles) and Wiltshire (320 miles). It is highly likely that William Stourton would also have availed himself of booty, among which might have been one or more stools. Rather than writing or engraving, the practical means of someone of his status marking such a trophy made of oak was by having the Stourton badge, the symbol of his martial prowess, boldly carved onto the aprons.

CONCLUSION

The four stools discussed here represent a previously unexamined type. Two initial questions arise: the first is, how do these four triangular stools, probably made between 1500 and 1540, fit into the chronology of British joined stools, which received wisdom suggests began about 1560? A further question is raised over their three-legged form, which is inevitably more challenging and expensive to make than a right-angled stool with four legs. Was there some specific cultural or social requirement for expensively built stools with three legs, or is there a more practical explanation, such as their stability on uneven floors?

Three of the stools give no indications as to their origin, although the possibility exists that they all share a similar geographical origin. The 'Scottish' stool bears a highly distinctive moulding at a time when framed construction, especially with such a fine moulding, was in its infancy and likely to have been restricted to the most advanced workshops. Taken in conjunction with its apparent absence elsewhere, the extensive use of this moulding in combination with the early adoption of framed construction and the late use of Gothic design points to Aberdeen's sophisticated workshop.

William Stourton's dramatic involvement in the 'Rough Wooing' of Edinburgh provides a logical explanation for the presence of his crudely carved labels. While they may well exist, it is difficult to envisage alternative circumstances in which one of England's most prominent nobles should proudly impose his identity and military insignia on something so insignificant as a stool.

It is in the nature of research that it exposes new openings for further study. Alternative interpretations of the evidence provided here require exploration while the wider study of 'signature' moulding profiles in early joined furniture prior to the seventeenth-century introduction of commercially made moulding planes may open up a means of identifying individual workshops.

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