

The Elusive Turn-pin Chair

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William Sergeant, a keen researcher of Lincolnshire chairs and author of the article on Joseph Newton published elsewhere in this Journal, long ago remarked to the author that no one could confidently identify a ‘pin’ chair, also known as a ‘turn-pin’ chair. These chairs and their makers are something of a late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century mystery. An idle search in the British Newspaper Archive during some Windsor chair research turned up Nicholas Allen of Boston, chair and spinning-wheel maker, who placed two advertisements for pin chair-makers in the *Stamford Mercury* on 6 August 1790 and 10 June 1803.¹ Could the archive shed further light on pin or turn-pin chairs and their makers?

Available references to pin chairs were extracted from the British Newspaper Archive (hereafter BNA) from all newspapers from the UK and Ireland, currently searchable online. Searching the archive is a hit-and-miss business through no fault of the BNA. Some material is in poor condition, some typographically obscure: even the most advanced optical character recognition engines struggle with faded and skewed print. People spelled things differently at different times. What this means is that no researcher can ever claim to have unearthed all references. One can only examine the material that emerges from well-informed and rigorous repeated searches. The author has long experience in IT and with search engines but that is no guarantee of perfect results. However, the BNA coverage is comprehensive across the whole country. With these words of caution, what follows is an analysis of the information discovered.

The search revealed 103 references to turn-pin or pin chairs and their makers between 1768 and 1889. Twenty-five of these are repeat insertions of an advertisement that had already been published. The duplicates have been excluded from analysis. The newspapers in which the seventy-eight remaining advertisements appeared show an overwhelming Lincolnshire, East Anglian and East Midlands concentration. Fifty-nine (more than 75%) were placed in the *Stamford Mercury*, ten (13%) in the *Ipswich Journal*, two apiece (5% between them) in the *Grantham Journal* and the *Northampton Mercury*, one each in the *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, the *East Anglian Daily Times*, and the *Suffolk Chronicle* (4% between them) making 97% of the references. The last 3% is made up by two outliers, one in the *Salisbury & Winchester Journal* and the other in the *Dundee Advertiser*. It is not clear that the last pair are using the phrase ‘pin chair’ in the same way as all the others. Nonetheless these two outliers have not been excluded.

A total of thirty-seven identifiable individuals or firms placed the advertisements: fifty (64%) of the advertisements were placed by nine firms or individuals who each placed between two and thirteen advertisements. The remaining twenty-eight advertisements were placed singly by each individual or firm. The seventy-eight references can be broken down into five groups:

¹ www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

- i job advertisements for chair-makers (seventeen, 22% of the total references),
- ii a sale of stock-in-trade (one),
- iii a court case (one),
- iv an inventory for valuation purposes (one)
- v sales, nearly all by auction, of household furniture (fifty-eight, 74% of the total).

THE JOB ADVERTISEMENTS

Table 1 below shows that nineteen jobs were offered specifically in turn-pin chair work by thirteen employers in seventeen advertisements between 1768 and 1823. Sixteen of the jobs were available during the period 1768 to 1803, the last three in 1811, 1819 and 1823. Where text relating to other matters appears in the original it has been omitted from transcription and the shortening in each case marked by [...].

Table 1

NO.	DATE & PUBLICATION	PLACE & COUNTY	ADVERTISER	RELEVANT EXTRACT
1	6 February 1768 <i>Ipswich Journal</i>	Bury, Suffolk	Henry Steward	[...] A Cabinet and Chair-Maker is wanted: whoever brings Tools with him may be sure of constant Work: Likewise a turn'd Pin Chair Maker. Enquire of Henry Steward, Bury.
2	23 June 1770 <i>Ipswich Journal</i>	Ely, Cambridgeshire	William Aungeir	TWO JOURNEYMEN CHAIR-MAKERS, in the common Turn-pin Chair-making way. Any such Persons wanting a Jobb, may depend upon constant Work and good Wages, by applying to WILLIAM AUNGEIR, Chair-Maker and Jobb-Turner, in ELY. A Man that can MAT is likewise wanted.
3	13 April 1780 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Wisbech, Cambridgeshire	John Curtis and Son	A TURN-PIN-CHAIR-MAKER, who can prove himself a sober and good Workman, may meet with constant Work and good Wages, by applying to JOHN CURTIS and SON, Chair and Cabinet-Makers, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire. N.B. Such only (as above described) need apply. If he can Matt well, it will be the more agreeable.

4	6 May 1785 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Deeping St James, Lincolnshire	William Allam	WANTED IMMEDIATELY, A JOURNEYMAN PIN CHAIR-MAKER. One that is a good hand may meet with constant Employ and good Wages, by applying to WILLIAM ALLAM, Chair-Maker of Deeping St. James, Lincolnshire. May 5, 1785
5	14 April 1787 <i>Ipswich Journal</i>	St Mary's Colchester, Essex	Henry Bedford	WANTED immediately, A Journeyman Turn-pin Chair-maker; one who is a good hand, may have constant employ by applying to Henry Bedford, St. Mary's, Colchester
6	7 March 1788 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Boston, Lincolnshire	Thomas Granger	WANTED IMMEDIATELY, A JOURNEYMAN PIN CHAIR-MAKER. A good Hand may have constant Employment, by applying to THOMAS GRANGER, Cabinet and Chair-Maker of Boston aforesaid. N.B. Also WANTED, a good CHAIR-BOTTOMER.
7	19 July 1788 <i>Ipswich Journal</i>	St. Nicholas- street, Ipswich, Suffolk	Robert Chaplin	WANTED immediately, Two turn-pin Chair-makers; those that are good hands may have constant employ by applying to ROBERT CHAPLIN, cabinet-maker, chair-maker, broker and appraiser, [...] Dyed, painted and japaned chairs made to any pattern on the shortest notice
8	6 August 1790 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Boston, Lincolnshire	Nicholas Allen	WANTED IMMEDIATELY, A JOURNEYMAN PIN-CHAIR and SPINNING-WHEEL MAKER. A good Hand may have constant Employ, and good Wages, by applying to NICHOLAS ALLEN, Chair and Wheel-Maker of Boston, Lincolnshire. N.B. Letters (Post paid) duly answered.
9	15 October 1791 <i>Ipswich Journal</i>	St. Nicholas- street, Ipswich, Suffolk	Robert Chaplin	ROBERT CHAPLIN, Cabinet and Chair-maker, Broker and Appraiser, at his old-established Shop and Warehouse near the Falcon, St. Nicholas-street [...] Wanted immediately, A Journeyman Turn-pin Chair-maker and Cabinet-maker

Table 1 *continued*

10	7 January 1792 <i>Ipswich Journal</i>	St. Nicholas-street, Ipswich, Suffolk	Robert Chaplin	WANTED immediately, Two Journeyman Cabinet-makers and One Turn pin Chair-maker; those that are good hands may have constant work, by applying to Robert Chaplin, cabinet maker, broker, and appraiser, St. Nicholas-street, Ipswich
11	11 March 1797 <i>Northampton Mercury</i>	Biggleswade, Bedfordshire	Joshua Malden	[As part of an auction notice] [...] Particulars may be had [...] of the Auctioneer [J. Malden], Biggleswade; where a Turn-Pin Chair-Maker, may have constant Employ by applying immediately
12	27 January 1798 <i>Northampton Mercury</i>	Biggleswade, Bedfordshire	Joshua Malden	A TURN-PIN CHAIR-MAKER may have constant Employ by applying to Joshua Malden, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire
13	12 July 1800 <i>Ipswich Journal</i>	Colchester, Essex	Joseph Parker	WANTED immediately, A Journeyman Turn-pin Chair-maker; a good hand, may have constant employ by applying to Joseph Parker, Colchester
14	10 June 1803 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Boston, Lincolnshire	Nicholas Allen	To Pin Chair-makers and Bottomers. WANTED, a JOURNEYMAN to each of the above Businesses; who will meet with constant Employment, and liberal Wages will be given, by applying to NICHOLAS ALLEN, Chair and Spinning-wheel-maker, Boston, Lincolnshire. 10th June 1803.
15	4 February 1811 <i>The Salisbury & Winchester Journal</i>	Blandford, Wiltshire	Pennings	To Chair and Cabinet Makers THREE CABINET-MAKERS may hear of constant employ, on the most fashionable and tasty work, by applying immediately at Penning's Cabinet and Upholstery Manufactory, St. Mary's Blandford, or at his Warehouse, Salisbury-street. Inferior hands need not apply. A Turner and Fancy turn-pin Chair-maker may also meet with a very desirable situation, by applying as above. An Apprentice of genteel connections wanted.

16	25 June 1819 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	11 Westgate Grantham, Lincolnshire	William Shirley	WM. SHIRLEY, Turner, Windsor, Turn-pin, and Fancy Chair and Spinning-wheel Manufacturer, No. 11, Westgate, Grantham, is in want of an Apprentice, who at the expiration of his time will be entitled to the Freedom of the Borough. N.B. All sorts of Dish Turning, wholesale and retail on the lowest terms.
17	7 November 1823 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Grantham, Lincolnshire	John Amos	Two Journeymen Chair-makers wanted immediately: one Windsor, and one Turnpin Chair-maker who can bottom. – Apply (if by letter, post paid) to JOHN AMOS, Grantham.

Six advertisements are in Lincolnshire (three in Boston, of which two by Nicholas Allen, two in Grantham and one in Deeping St James), four in Suffolk (three by Robert Chaplin in Ipswich and the other in Bury St Edmunds), two apiece in Bedfordshire (both by Joshua Malden, Biggleswade), Cambridgeshire (in Ely and Wisbech) and Essex (both in Colchester) and the last in Wiltshire in Blandford Forum. This last advertisement seems to be an outlier in many respects: it is both later, not by an individual, and of an entirely different tone, amusing as it is. Who wouldn't want fashionable and tasty work in the company of a genteel apprentice with no inferiors permitted on the premises? What can be said is that the job advertisements are firmly centred in East Anglia and south Lincolnshire. As will be seen, turn-pin chairs seem to have a centre of gravity in south Lincolnshire.

There are some intriguing additional hints. The two Cambridgeshire advertisements, from William Aungeir in 1770 and John Curtis in 1780, also called for someone who can 'mat' or 'matt'. In Boston in 1788 Thomas Granger also called for a chair bottomer, as did Nicholas Allen in 1803 and John Amos in 1823. This must tell us that the seats of turn-pin chairs were made of rush: why else the need for matting or bottoming?

THE SALE OF STOCK-IN-TRADE

The hints from the job advertisements are fleshed out by the contents of this chair-maker's workshop (Table 2): William White made pin chairs, as well as supplying bed sides, wainscoting and camp poles. But the pin chairs are closely associated in the list with their likely companion materials and tools: '... a quantity of pin chairs, a large quantity of stuff ready turned, a quantity of mats and rushes, 2 benches, blocks, turning-frame, tools &c. &c. N.B. The wood being all dry ...'.

Table 2

NO.	DATE & PUBLICATION	PLACE & COUNTY	ADVERTISER	RELEVANT EXTRACT
I	26 June 1812 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	High-street, Boston	Matthew Bacon for William White, deceased	To Chair-makers, Cabinet-makers, Wheelwrights, &c. To be SOLD by AUCTION By MATTHEW BACON, On Friday the 3d day of July 1812, on the premises of the late WILLIAM WHITE, Chair-maker, HIGH-STREET, BOSTON; ALL the STOCK in TRADE; consisting of upwards of 400 ash poles, 2,250 feet of ash, elm, and wainscot, 50 camp poles, 60 bed sides and ends, a quantity of pin chairs, a large quantity of stuff ready turned, a quantity of mats and rushes, 2 benches, blocks, turning-frame, tools &c. &c. N.B. The wood being all dry, is well worth the attention of the public. Credit will be given for all bargains above forty shillings, on approved security, to January the 20th, 1813.

One begins to wonder whether turn-pin chairs were made with turn-pin legs and seat frame in ash with a rush matting seat? Perhaps turn-pin chairs were in fact what are now known as Lincolnshire rush-seated chairs?

THE COURT CASE

This is an interesting effort by the enterprising and litigious but ultimately disappointed Mr John Adams to try and throw Robert Chaplin off what he clearly hoped was to be his turf alone (Table 3).

Table 3

NO.	DATE & PUBLICATION	PLACE & COUNTY	NAME	RELEVANT EXTRACT
I	4 April 1789 <i>Ipswich Journal</i>	St. Nicholas- street, Ipswich, Suffolk	Robert Chaplin	At the same assizes a traverse was tried upon an indictment preferred by Mr. John Adams, of this town, turner and chair-maker, against Mr. Robert Chaplin, of the same place, joiner, cabinet-maker, and broker, for

exercising the trade of a chair-maker, and turn-pin chair-maker, contrary to the statute of the 5th of Eliz. but the learned judge being clearly of opinion, that the trades, for carrying on of which the defendant was indicted, were part of the business of joiner and cabinet-maker, to which the defendant served an apprenticeship; and the prosecutor not being able to prove the trades, for which he caused the defendant to be indicted, to be trades used at the time of the passing of the said act, the defendant was acquitted, to the satisfaction of the whole court, without having called a single witness.

It can be seen from Robert Chaplin's advertisements for jobs at items 7, 9 and 10 in the job advertisements table, that he spanned a broad range of commercial interests, rather wider, one suspects than the luckless Mr Adams. The reference to the '5th of Eliz.' is to the so-called *Statute of Artificers* (often called the *Statute of Apprentices*), passed in 1563 and which remained on the Statute Book until the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Statute '... controlled entry into the class of skilled workmen by providing a compulsory seven years' apprenticeship; they reserved the superior trades for the sons of the better off; they assumed a universal duty to work on all the able-bodied; and empowered justices to require unemployed artificers to work in husbandry; they required permission for a workman to transfer from one employer to another; they severely restricted the freedom of movement of the poor by enabling a person without means to be removed, by order of the justices, to his original parish or last place of settlement; and they empowered justices to fix wage rates for virtually all classes of workmen...'.²

John Adam's case was typical of many brought at this time by tradesmen in traditional single trades who felt their livelihood was under threat from new, unregulated, multi-trade competitors. However, 'Because the 1563 Act had carefully listed all the trades to which it applied the lawyers held that it did not extend to trades which had not existed when it was passed. In some trades the use of indentures, except for paupers, had become much less common and in many areas the Statute was clearly not enforced ... Sections of the 1563 Act were ... repealed in 1814 and it was no longer possible to prosecute anyone who practised a trade without having served a seven-year term.'³

THE INVENTORY

Table 4 shows the single inventory reference found. Unremarkable, but included for completeness.

Table 4

NO.	DATE & PUBLICATION	PLACE & COUNTY	ADVERTISER	RELEVANT EXTRACT
1	25 September 1795 <i>East Anglian Daily Times</i> 9 March 1901 re-publishing an old lease appraisal	Hacheston, Suffolk	Unknown for John Walker	as followeth [...] Kitchin: [...] six turn pin chairs [...]

THE SALES

Table 5 below shows that mentions of turn-pin and pin chairs in the sale of effects start thirty-one years later than the job advertisements and persist for more than sixty years after the last job advertisement. It is noteworthy that the preponderance of sales occur in south Lincolnshire.

Table 5

NO.	DATE & PUBLICATION	PLACE & COUNTY	ADVERTISER	CLIENT	RELEVANT EXTRACT
1	27 April 1799 <i>Ipswich Journal</i>	Little Bromley, Essex	W. Watts	John Ward, deceased	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] turn pin chairs [...]
2	21 September 1799 <i>Ipswich Journal</i>	Linstead near Haleworth, Suffolk	John Barber	Robert Bilney	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 6 turn pin chairs [...] 6 rush-bottom chairs [...]
3	2 June 1810 <i>The Suffolk Chronicle</i>	Old Wherry Inn, Ipswich, Suffolk	W. E. Levett	Joseph Spooner	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 5 dozen mahogany, walnut-tree, hollow seated Windsor and turn-pin chairs, easy chair and cushion [...]
4	5 October 1810 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Great Gonerby, Mr Cox Lincolnshire		Morris Beet	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] joiners' and turn-pin chairs [...]
5	27 May 1814 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Billingborough, Mr Norbury Lincolnshire		John Pickworth	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] Windsor, framed, and turn-pin chairs [...]

6	11 November 1814 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	New Inn, Spittlegate, Grantham, Lincolnshire	Mr Cox	Mrs Smith	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] armed Windsor, joiner's, and turn-pin chairs [...]
7	2 December 1814 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	New Inn, Spittlegate, Grantham, Lincolnshire	Mr Cox	Mrs Smith	[Revised] To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] Windsor, joiner, and turn-pin chairs [...]
8	22 March 1816 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Burton Coggles, Lincolnshire	William Cox	Mrs Clipsham and Son	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] very good frame and turn-pin chairs [...]
9	5 April 1816 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Irnham, Lincolnshire	William Cox	Charles Wright	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] frame and turn-pin chairs [...]
10	26 April 1816 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Braceby, Lincolnshire	J. Sumner	John Clark	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] framed and turn-pin chairs [...]
11	8 November 1816 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Westby, Lincolnshire	William Cox	William Goodson	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] Windsor, frame, and turn-pin chairs [...]
12	17 January 1817 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Bottesford, Leicestershire	Mr Cox	J. Hickson	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] joiners' and turn-pin chairs [...]
13	28 February 1817 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Osgodby near Corby, Lincolnshire	Mr William Cox	Richard Knight	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] framed and turn-pin chairs [...]
14	22 August 1817 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Corby, Lincolnshire	William Cox	Mrs Ruth Bish	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] frame, Windsor and turn-pin chairs [...]
15	19 March 1819 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Burton Coggles, Lincolnshire	Mr William Cox	Edward Warneford	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] frame and turn-pin chairs [...]
16	16 April 1819 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Little Gonerby, Lincolnshire	Mr Storr	Thomas Charles	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] painted, stained, Windsor, and turn-pin chairs [...]
17	26 April 1822 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Swinstead, Lincolnshire	Mr William Cox	William Lowe deceased	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] frame and turn-pin chairs [...]
18	20 September 1822 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Black Horse Inn, Grimsthorpe near Bourne, Lincolnshire	William Cox	W. Willson	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] a large quantity of framed and turn-pin chairs [...]
19	9 October 1822 <i>Grantham Journal</i> 5 May 1934	Nightingale Inn, Braceby, Lincolnshire	Roberts & Son	J. Wood	Sale Bill [...] Windsor and turn-pin chairs [...]

Table 5 *continued*

20	17 January 1823 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Great Gonerby, Roberts & Son Lincolnshire	Mrs Beet	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] frame and turn-pin chairs, Windsor chair [...]
21	16 July 1824 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Aslackby, Lincolnshire	John Lumby John Claypole	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] frame, arm, and pin chairs [...]
22	14 March 1828 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Donington Wikes, Lincolnshire	John Lumby William Bell	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] Windsor frame and pin chairs [...]
23	25 March 1831 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Basingthorpe, Lincolnshire	William Cox James Tomlinson	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] frame and turn-pin chairs [...]
24	14 June 1833 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	West Deeping, Lincolnshire	J. R. Henson Henry Ellaby	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 6 very superior framed chairs (new) 1 arm ditto to match, 12 turned-pin chairs [...]
25	23 May 1834 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Morton, Lincolnshire	Joseph Wright Edward Franks	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] framed and turn-pin chairs [...]
26	26 February 1836 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Market Deeping, Lincolnshire	Todd and Croft J. Chesterfield deceased	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] framed and turn-pin chairs [...]
27	1 April 1836 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Swan Inn, Burgh in the Marsh, Lincolnshire	R. Briggs Samuel Clay	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 16 frame chairs, 12 turnpin chairs, 3 arm ditto to match, 8 chamber chairs [...]
28	4 November 1836 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Angel Court, Market Place, Boston, Lincolnshire	John Marshall Unknown	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] elm frame and pin chairs [...]
29	18 November 1836 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Church Street, Market Deeping, Lincolnshire	M. E. Croft Mrs John Youd deceased	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] mahogany frame, chamber and turn-pin chairs [...]
30	7 July 1837 <i>Lincolnshire Chronicle</i>	Swayfield, Lincolnshire	John Fletcher Isaac & Rebecca Wyer	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] chamber chairs, [...] framed and turn-pin chairs [...]
31	8 June 1838 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Mareham le Fen, Lincolnshire	W. R. King Richard Atkinson	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 3 pin chairs, 2 arm windsor chairs, [...] 4 rush chairs [...]
32	5 February 1841 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Gosberton, Lincolnshire	William Gentle Joseph Anderson	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] frame and pin chairs [...]

33	2 April 1841 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Frognall, near Deeping St James, Lincolnshire	M. E. Croft	Stephen Leaton	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] wainscot, walnut, and turnpin chairs [...]
34	9 April 1841 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Surfleet Seas-End, Lincolnshire	William Gentle	Edward Smith	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 8 windsor arm chairs, 6 ditto stools, frame and pin chairs [...]
35	1 October 1841 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Weston Hills near Spalding, Lincolnshire	William Gentle	Thomas Beeston	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 2 windsor chairs, 6 ditto stools, frame and pin chairs [...]
36	10 June 1842 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Rand near Wragby, Lincolnshire	Coney & Son	Samuel Blow	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 2 windsor arm chairs, 1 other arm ditto, 6 turn-pin chairs [...]
37	29 March 1844 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Timberland, Lincolnshire	John Smith	John Booth deceased	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 12 joiners' chairs, 24 turnpin chairs [...]
38	9 January 1846 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Gosberton Cheal, Lincolnshire	John Lumby	John Charles	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] windsor frame and pin chairs [...]
39	26 March 1847 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	New Inn, Gutheram Cote, Lincolnshire	Gentle and Son	John Bentley	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] windsor frame and pin chairs [...]
40	31 March 1848 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Moulton Chapel, Lincolnshire	Gentle and Son	Simon Westland deceased	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] pin chairs [...]
41	15 December 1848 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Bicker Ing, Lincolnshire	W. G. Cooley	J. Clark	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 6 windsor stools, 3 windsor arm chairs, [...] 6 pin chairs [...]
42	30 March 1849 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Bridge Street, Spalding, Lincolnshire	Gentle and Son	Philip Ashton	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] several sets of mahogany, frame, windsor, and pin chairs [...]
43	16 March 1855 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Great Hale near Sleaford, Lincolnshire	John Lumby	John Cox deceased	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 6 and 2 arm mahogany hair-seated chairs, frame, windsor, and pin chairs [...]
44	30 March 1855 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Swaton, Lincolnshire	John Lumby	William Towers deceased	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] frame, boarded and pin chairs [...]
45	27 March 1857 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Swineshead, North End, Lincolnshire	John Lumby	John Lister	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] night chair, [...] Windsor and pin chairs [...]

Table 5 *continued*

46	19 March 1858 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Heckington Fen, Lincolnshire	John Lumby	Richard Bowles	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 6 windsor chairs, [...] 6 pin chairs, [...] 9 chamber chairs [...]
47	31 July 1858 <i>Grantham Journal</i>	Mount Pleasant, Barrowby Road, Little Gonerby, Lincolnshire	Mr Dickinson	Mrs J. Hansley deceased	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] one Windsor arm chair, 6 turn-pin chairs [...]
48	30 December 1859 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Horbling, Lincolnshire	Lumby and Son	Thomas Halford	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 6 black chamber chairs, [...] 6 and 2 arm frame chairs, 2 mahogany hair-seated arm chairs, [...] smoking chair, frame and pin chairs, Windsor stools, foot stool [...]
49	16 March 1860 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Temple Bruer near Sleaford, Lincolnshire	Lumby and Son	Thomas Maw	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 3 mahogany hair-seated arm chairs, [...] 3 yew arm chairs, [...] Abernethy chair, 30 arm, frame, and pin chairs, [...] child's chair [...]
50	23 March 1860 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Algakirk Fen near Swineshead, Lincolnshire	Cooley and Sons	T. Ulyatt	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 5 frame chairs (hair seats), 4 pin chairs, 2 arm chairs, 7 and 1 windsor arm chairs [...] 3 stools, [...] 6 cane-seated chairs, [...] 6 chamber chairs, [...] 2 arm chairs, [...]
51	13 April 1860 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Pinchbeck North Fen, Lincolnshire	Lumby and Son	William Wells	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 3 sets of cane-seated and painted chairs, [...] 6 and 3 arm mahogany hair-seated chairs, [...] 6 pin chairs, Windsor stools [...]
52	31 March 1865 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Frampton, Lincolnshire	Lumby and Son	Charles Smith	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] sets of chamber chairs, [...] sets of 6 and 2 arm mahogany hair-seated chairs, [...] easy chair, [...] yew arm chairs, pin chairs [...]
53	22 September 1865 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Sibsey near Boston, Lincolnshire	W. G. Cooley and Sons	William Ufton	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] 6 mahogany chairs [...] 4 yew arm chairs, 6 pin chairs and high stool [...]

54	23 February 1866 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Scredington near Sleaford, Lincolnshire	William Godbehere Cooley and Sons	Edward Boss	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] night stool, arm and pin chairs [...]
55	23 March 1866 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Wigtoft Marsh, Lincolnshire	Cooley and Sons	Mr Johnson deceased	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] arm and pin chairs, 6 chamber chairs [...]
56	24 February 1882 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Benington near Boston, Lincolnshire	Cooley and Sons	William Belton	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] five chamber chairs a dozen chairs, [...] easy chair, [...] six pin chairs, high stool [...]
57	31 March 1882 <i>Stamford Mercury</i>	Sutterton Mill, Lincolnshire	Cooley and Sons	W. L. Woods	To be SOLD by AUCTION [...] chamber chairs, 2 Windsor arm chairs, 6 pin chairs, 6 and 1 arm hair-seated chairs [...] music stool, lady's wicker chair, [...] child's chair, [...]
58	19 October 1889 <i>Dundee Advertiser</i>	Granger Terrace, Dundee, Angus	David Ritchie	Mrs Smith	To sell [...] Chairs, Easy Chairs, [...] Easy Chair, 6 Hand Chairs, 2 Pin Chairs [...] Chairs, [...] Chairs, [...]

‘TURN-PIN CHAIR’ VERSUS ‘PIN CHAIR’

A shift in usage is seen over time. For job advertisements, thirteen of the seventeen used ‘turn-pin chair’ or its minor variants and the other four used ‘pin chair’. Only three job advertisements occurred after 1803. For the other sixty-one references, ‘turn-pin chair’ or its minor variants were used on twenty-nine out of thirty-three instances before 1838. After 1838, ‘pin chair’ was used in twenty-four out of twenty-eight instances. The last usage of ‘turn-pin’ was in 1858.

It is safe to conclude that the term gradually shifted from ‘turn-pin chair’ to ‘pin chair’ and was probably interchangeable for much of the period until the phrases and the chairs then fell out of use (or ceased to be made) altogether. Care must be taken because the sample size is small — only seventy-eight references by thirty-seven individuals or firms over 121 years (or 77 by 36 over 114 if one excludes the Dundee oddity).

An attempt has been made to assess the frequency with which all chair types appear in the advertisements (Table 6). The many individual phrases used have been grouped to make the picture clearer. The groups used are Turn-pin, Windsor, Framed, Mahogany, arm and hair-seated, Chamber, Joiners, Stool, Rush, Walnut, Cane and Other. Sometimes the groups are slightly arbitrary — Windsor stools are in the Windsor group not the Stool group, but the allocations made are clear from the table set out below.

Table 6

NO.	GROUP	PHRASE	FREQUENCY	GROUP TOTAL	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE PERCENT
1	Turn-pin	Turn pin	44			
1	Turn-pin	Pin	32			
1	Turn-pin	Fancy turn-pin	2			
1	Turn-pin	Turnpin arm	1	79	38.35%	
2	Windsor	Windsor	15			
2	Windsor	Windsor arm	10			
2	Windsor	Windsor stool	5			
2	Windsor	Yew Arm	3			
2	Windsor	Windsor, painted, stained	1			
2	Windsor	Windsor hollow seated	1	35	16.99%	55.34%
3	Frame(d)	Frame(d)	27			
3	Frame(d)	Very good or superior frame(d)	2			
3	Frame(d)	Arm frame	2			
3	Frame(d)	Frame (hair seat)	1			
3	Frame(d)	Elm Frame	1	33	16.02%	71.36%
4	Mahogany, arm & hair seated	Arm	6			
4	Mahogany, arm & hair seated	Mahogany hair-seated	5			
4	Mahogany, arm & hair seated	Mahogany	3			
4	Mahogany, arm & hair seated	Arm hair-seated	1			
4	Mahogany, arm & hair seated	Mahogany Frame	1	16	7.77%	79.13%
5	Chamber	Chamber	10	10	4.85%	83.98%
6	Joiners	Joiners'	5	5	2.43%	86.41%
7	Stools	Other stools – high, music or foot	5	5	2.43%	88.83%
8	Rush	Rush	1			
8	Rush	Rush-bottom	1	2	0.97%	89.81%
9	Walnut	Walnut-tree	2	2	0.97%	90.78%
10	Cane	Cane-seated	2	2	0.97%	91.75%
11	Other	Easy	4			
11	Other	Child's	2			
11	Other	Night Chair or Stool	2			

II	Other	Chairs	2			
II	Other	Lady's wicker	I			
II	Other	Wainscot	I			
II	Other	Abernethy	I			
II	Other	Boarded	I			
II	Other	Smoking	I			
II	Other	Painted	I			
II	Other	Hand Chairs	I	17	8.25 %	100.00 %
			206	206	100.00 %	

Turn-pin, Windsor, Frame(d) and Mahogany groups of chairs in one form or another make up 79 % of the 206 phrases employed, with Turn-pin and Windsor groups accounting for 55 % alone.

An attempt has been made to assess the overall number of chairs of all chair types which appear in the advertisements (Table 7). The many individual phrases used have been grouped to make the picture clearer, as in the previous table. The groups used are Turn-pin, Windsor, Framed, Mahogany, arm and hair-seated, Chamber, Joiners, Stool, Rush, Walnut, Cane and Other. Again, the groups are slightly arbitrary – Windsor stools are in the Windsor group not the Stool group, but the allocations made are clear from the table set out below. This table is really just a bit of fun and necessarily relies on assumptions that have to be made where the advertiser's language is imprecise. The following assumptions have been used. If a number is present, it is used. If no number is present and the word used is 'Chair', one chair is estimated. If no number is present and the word used is 'Chairs', two chairs are estimated for each type of chair mentioned in the plural. If a number is present but its allocation between types of chair is absent, an even allocation has been assumed, e.g. - thirty across three types is split 10, 10, 10. If some numbers are present and others are not, within a single insertion an estimate on the same basis has been applied to the absent element. In one case 'a large quantity' across two types was arbitrarily estimated at twenty-four, split 12 and 12. There are three examples of five dozen and thirty six and thirty chairs being precisely enumerated. Precise numbers are available for 35 % of the calculated number of chairs. 33 % are allocated where the overall number is fairly clear but the breakdown is not, and 32 % are wholly estimated: this is almost certainly an underestimate, since assuming only two chairs for unnumbered 'Chairs' is conservative in the context of advertisements which are mostly whole households of chairs being sold off.

Table 7

NO.	GROUP	PHRASE	EST CHAIRS	EST CHAIRS GROUP	PERCENTAGE	CUMULATIVE PERCENT
I	Turn-pin	Turn pin	146			
I	Turn-pin	Pin	93			
I	Turn-pin	Fancy turn-pin	0			
I	Turn-pin	Turnpin arm	3	242	33.99 %	

Table 7 *continued*

2	Windsor	Windsor	61			
2	Windsor	Windsor arm	21			
2	Windsor	Windsor stool	16			
2	Windsor	Yew Arm	9			
2	Windsor	Windsor, painted, stained	2			
2	Windsor	Windsor hollow seated	6	115	16.15%	50.14%
3	Frame(d)	Frame(d)	90			
3	Frame(d)	Very good or superior frame(d)	6			
3	Frame(d)	Arm frame	9			
3	Frame(d)	Frame (hair seat)	5			
3	Frame(d)	Elm Frame	2	112	15.73%	65.87%
4	Mahogany, arm & hair seated	Arm	18			
4	Mahogany, arm & hair seated	Mahogany hair-seated	30			
4	Mahogany, arm & hair seated	Mahogany	29			
4	Mahogany, arm & hair seated	Arm hair-seated	7			
4	Mahogany, arm & hair seated	Mahogany Frame	2	86	12.08%	77.95%
5	Chamber	Chamber	48	48	6.74%	84.69%
6	Joiners	Joiners'	20	20	2.81%	87.50%
7	Stools	Other stools – high, music or foot	7	7	0.98%	88.48%
8	Rush	Rush	4			
8	Rush	Rush-bottom	6	10	1.40%	89.89%
9	Walnut	Walnut-tree	19	19	2.67%	92.56%
10	Cane	Cane-seated	9	9	1.26%	93.82%
11	Other	Easy	6			
11	Other	Child's	2			
11	Other	Night Chair or Stool	2			
11	Other	Chairs	18			
11	Other	Lady's wicker	1			
11	Other	Wainscot	2			
11	Other	Abernethy	1			
11	Other	Boarded	2			
11	Other	Smoking	1			
11	Other	Painted	3			
11	Other	Hand Chairs	6	44	6.18%	100.00%
				712	100.00%	

Turn-pin, Windsor, Frame(d) and Mahogany groups of chairs in one form or another make up 78% of the 712 estimated chairs sold, with Turn-pin and Windsor groups accounting for 50% alone. So there's not much variation compared to the previous table.

One observation that can validly be made about this analysis of the phrases used is that it tells one what a turn-pin or pin chair was *not* as it is always distinguished from other types quite deliberately in each reference. It is also worth noticing that there is only a single reference to a turn-pin chair with arms. They are a rarity: three were sold from the Swan Inn, Burgh in the Marsh on 1 April 1836. William Sergeant points out that rush-seated armchairs are indeed rarities within his collection and he has rarely encountered them.⁴

The sales advertisements are concentrated in Lincolnshire even more overwhelmingly than the job advertisements: fifty-three out of fifty-eight (91%). There are two in Suffolk and one each in Essex, Leicestershire and Angus. What is also very clear from reading the locations of the sales is that they are nearly all concentrated in the area delineated by Grantham, Corby Glen, Market Deeping, Spalding, Boston and Sleaford. There are some as far away as Mareham le Fen and Burgh le Marsh, and Rand near Wragby, but these are alone. One may reasonably conclude that a turn-pin chair (later simply a pin chair) was, in all likelihood, a day-to-day vernacular chair, rarely with arms, made usually of turned ash as to the legs and frame, and having a rush mat seat, made at first in East Anglia in the late eighteenth century, and later predominantly in south Lincolnshire until the late 1830s, particularly around Boston, and sold mostly throughout south Lincolnshire. It was used principally, but not exclusively, alongside Windsor, mahogany and frame chairs, and probably fell out of general production in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is notable that all the later references to pin chairs come from advertisements for auction sales; no newspaper references to pin chair makers were found later than 1823.

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² Atiyah (1979).

³ Camp (2003).

⁴ Personal communication.

PHOTO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is grateful to William Sergeant for providing the following images from the Lincolnshire Chair Museum collection. All images are copyright of William Sergeant.



1 From Boston/Spalding area, possibly made by a member of the Spikins family of chairmakers



2 From the house of the previous owner's grandparents, near Sleaford, possibly from the workshop of Hugh and Ann Mason of Sleaford



- 3 Acquired at auction from Perkins George Mawer, Market Rasen; consigned through a house clearance of a local property



4 One of a pair bought from Seaview Antiques in Horncastle, originally from a house in Spilsby



5 Found by a Horncastle dealer in a car boot sale at Stickney, north of Boston



6 Armchair sold at Golding Young, probably Boston or Spalding

