

Since publication in the R.F.S. Journal in 1994 of my article on the Glastonbury chair, some interesting examples of reproductions have come to light, and some further important references. I am grateful to Luke Millar and Rosamund Allwood who have both supplied material and given me access to their own forthcoming publications.

Fig. 3 shows one of a pair of chairs in the small church at Golden Grove, near Carmarthen, built by Gilbert Scott for the Earl of Cawdor between 1846 and 1848. The chairs, which are faithful reproductions of the 'original' as published by Henry Shaw, bear the label of S. Petvin of Street, near Glastonbury (Fig 4).



Fig. 3 One of a pair of chairs in the church at Golden Grove, Llandeilo, Carmarthen. Photographs by Luke Millar. Other information from Thomas Lloyd.



Fig. 4 The trade label of Samuel Petvin from under the chair in Fig. 3.

house in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, perhaps by an estate carpenter. It is made of pine and appears to have been originally painted and grained. An unusual feature is that the legs are splayed sideways. A set of four oak chairs of standard construction in the entrance porch at Corsham Court have a similar splay, as does a chair in walnut until recently at Melbury House in Dorset. The country house connection may be significant.

Although there are enormous numbers of Glastonbury chairs to be seen in Anglican churches there are still very few to which a maker or date can be assigned with any certainty. How and why this particular type achieved such a rapid and widespread popularity remains unclear. It is generally assumed that the publication of Henry Shaw's 'Specimens of Ancient Furniture' in 1853 stimulated the fashion. However, the chairs at St. Michael's Mount dateable to before 1811, and possibly some others in country houses, must have been copied directly or indirectly from Horace Walpole's chair.

The Art Union of December 1845 includes a long article in praise of the work of the Patent Woodcarving Company, and shows a lithograph of their reproduction of the celebrated Glastonbury Chair which was sold at Strawberryhill for upwards of £ 70². This is probably the earliest recorded usage of 'Glastonbury Chair' as a generic term. It also suggests very strongly that Walpole's chair, rather than that at Wells, was the ancestor of many early reproductions. The chair in Fig. 5 may well be one of these.

The full history of this uniquely English tradition may never be written; it seems, however, worthwhile recording every detail which may help towards our understanding of this phenomenon.

NOTES

¹ *c.f. Regional Furniture Vol IX, 1995, article by John Boram on Windsor chair parts supplied by Joseph Owen's, a Liverpool timber merchant and a forthcoming article by Luke Millar on Joseph Yeo, a Birmingham factor.*

² *The lithograph referred to is identical with Fig. 14 in my article of 1994. The full catalogue of The Patent Woodcarving Company is due to be published in Furniture History Vol. XXXIII 1997. The high price of 70 guineas paid for Walpole's chair in 1842 appears to have impressed the art world of the time and may partially account for its becoming 'celebrated'.*

Samuel Petvin appears as Carpenter and Joiner in Bragg's Directory of 1840 and as Cabinetmaker in Kelly's Directory of 1861. There is no documentary evidence of the purchase of these chairs but it seems likely that they are part of the original furnishings of the church as specified by the architect.

Fig. 5 is of a chair in the church at Cranborne, Dorset. This chair is of the same standard pattern as the last, except that the words 'Monachus Glastonie' on the top rail are missing. It is also notable that the roundel in the back is a separate piece of wood applied to the back of the panel, which is cut out to show the carving. Both these features suggest the chair may have been made using carved parts imported from elsewhere. There is growing evidence of this practice in the nineteenth century.¹

The chair illustrated in Fig. 6 is one of a pair in the church at Aldbourne, Wilts. The inscription on the arms is 'Presented by Francis Webb Neate Esq. 1855'. Francis Webb Neate, Gent, of Aldbourne, was married on 2nd May 1843 and his name appears in several local directories as one of the gentry of the area. No special occasion has been noted which might add significance to the date of this gift. Clearly the chairs were for the church, although the Glastonbury connection exists only in the form.

Figs. 7 and 8 are two views of a chair from a very different tradition. Although it has the overall shape of a Glastonbury chair it is completely different in construction. It is reasonable to suggest it may have been made for a 'Gothicke' summer-



Fig. 5 Glastonbury chair in the church at Cranborne, Dorset.



Fig. 6 One of a pair of chairs in the church at Aldbourne, Wilts. Both the carving and the proportions (in the thickness of the arms and legs) differ from the standard pattern, and the tusk tenons are absent.



Fig. 7 Glastonbury chair in pine, probably originally painted and grained, subsequently ebonised. In recent years it has been repainted more than once for theatrical purposes. It is a measure of the timeless quality of the design that it appeared equally appropriate in a setting of ancient Athens and the 16th century. The two left-hand legs are a replacement.

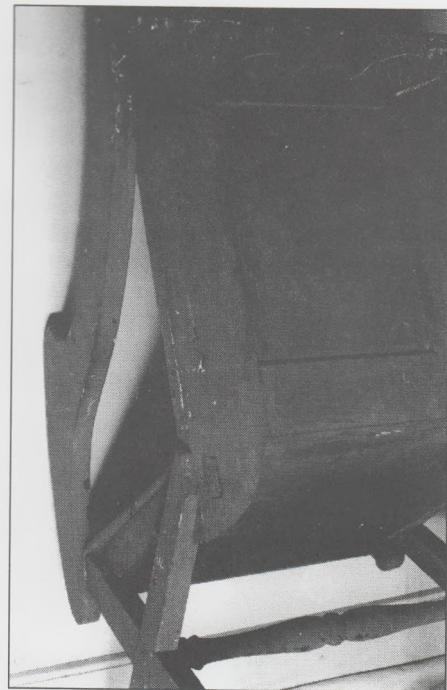


Fig. 8 Rear view of Fig. 5 showing construction.