

Windsor Chairs, Children's Carts, German Stools, Rustic Chairs, Summerhouses and Perambulators: The Webbs (and Bunce and Carter), Dells, Priors and Trotmans

JULIAN PARKER

INTRODUCTION

This article brings together recent research which links the Webb firm of Hammer-smith (and a newly-discovered ancestral line of that firm at Dorney in Buckinghamshire, with descendants called Dell) to the well-known Windsor chair making Prior family of Hillingdon End and Uxbridge, founded by John Prior senior (1731–1816). It records a family of rustic chair makers, descended from John Prior's daughter Martha (1766–1813), called Trotman. The Trotmans started in the rustic chair and summerhouse business, probably under the guidance of Samuel Prior (1785–1863). In the Victorian period the Trotmans diversified into the manufacture and sale of perambulators and even the seeds of that business are to be found decades earlier within the wider family and trade. The Trotmans combined all this with a sideline in Baptist ministry.

Discoveries in the British Newspaper Archive are interleaved with new testamentary and genealogical evidence. Two newly-discovered John Prior billheads, an extraordinary Samuel Prior trade card and previously unrecorded types of Prior of Uxbridge Windsor chairs are published for the first time, together with a pair of unstamped chairs which are attributable to a Prior, and one chair by a possible imitator.

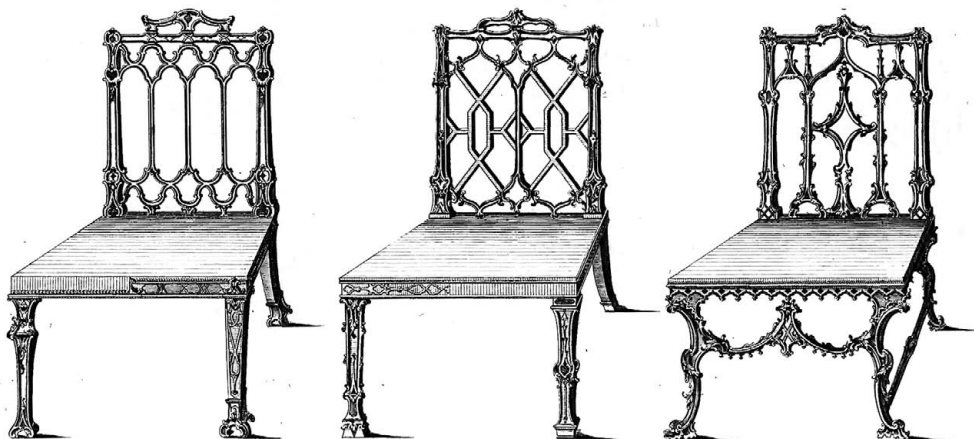
These talented craftsmen made and sold a broader range of products than might sometimes be appreciated and they incorporated newly published designs into their work. The author is indebted to Nettie Edwards, who is a six-times great granddaughter of John Prior senior, via the Trotman line. Much of what follows might remain obscure, had she not unselfishly shared the fruits of many years of first-class genealogical research. The proliferation of genealogical sites on the internet and the digitisation of archives make it possible to find material that thirty years ago would have involved many visits to far-flung archive offices. Nonetheless, some references which the author would ideally have examined are not online and have proved impractical to inspect during the coronavirus pandemic.

THE DESIGN BACKGROUND

In the light of the broad range of products made and/or sold by these families some designs may help illuminate the influences that bore on their work. Thomas Chippendale's 1754 *Director* contained at plates XXI and XXII six designs for Gothick chairs while plates XXIII and XXIV showed nine Chinese chair designs (of which three of each type are shown at Figures 1 and 2). Following much in that spirit, Robert Manwaring's 1765 *The Cabinet and Chair-maker's Real Friend and Companion* contained

N^o. XXI

Gothick Chairs.



T. Chippendale inv. et delin.

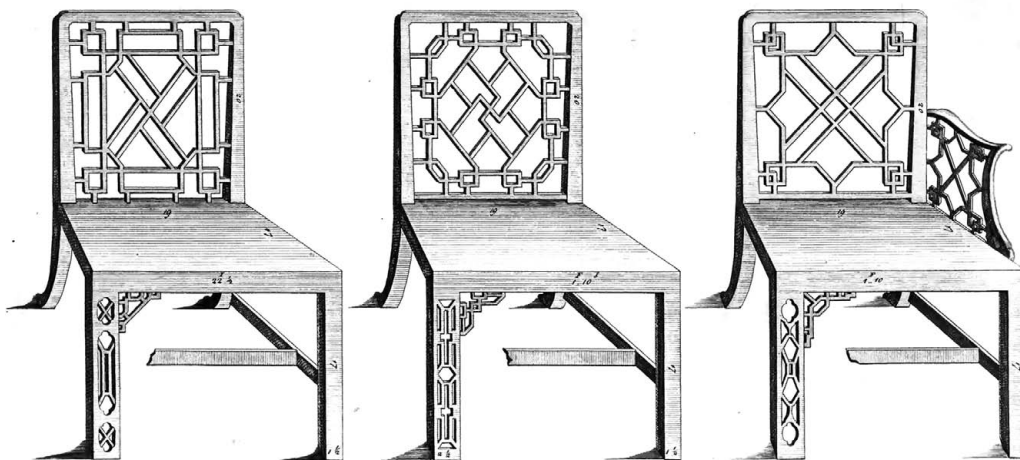
Published according to Act of Parliament.

M. Darty sculp.

- 1 Thomas Chippendale, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-maker's Director* (1754), Plate No. XXI: Three Gothick Chairs

N^o. XXIV

Chinese Chairs.

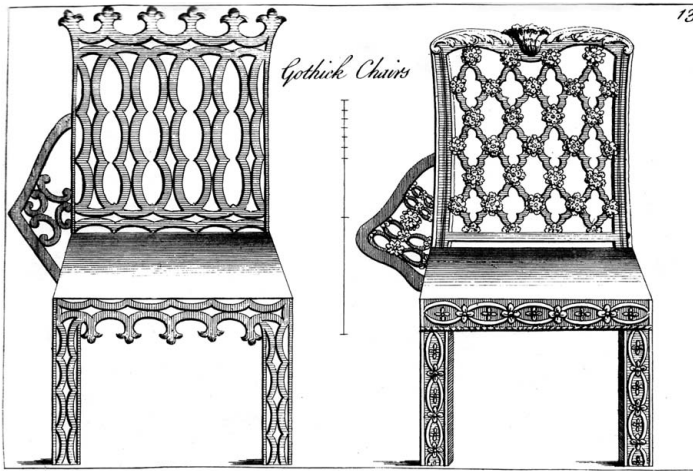


T. Chippendale inv. et delin.

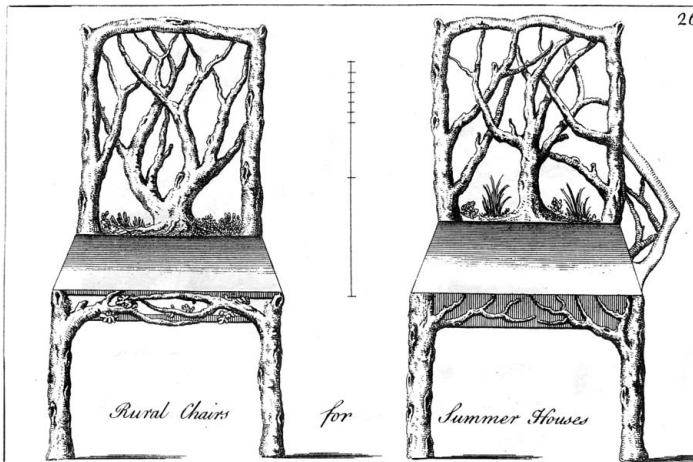
Published according to Act of Parliament.

M. Darty sculp.

- 2 Thomas Chippendale, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-maker's Director* (1754), Plate No. XXIV: Three Chinese Chairs



3 Robert Manwaring,
*The Cabinet and
Chair-maker's Real
Friend and Companion*
(1765), Plate 13:
Two Gothick Chairs



4 Robert Manwaring,
*The Cabinet and
Chair-maker's Real
Friend and Companion*
(1765), Plate 26:
Two Rural Chairs for
Summer Houses

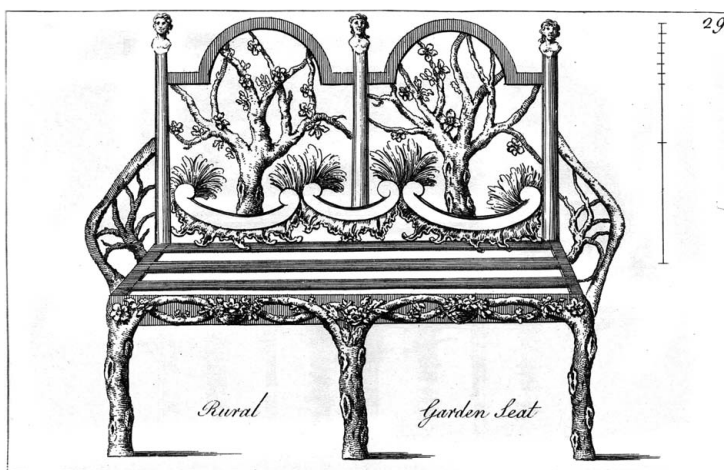
designs for twenty-two Chinese, Gothick and Rural chairs and four such settees (of which four chairs and two settees are shown at Figures 3 to 6).

Some contemporaneous trade cards of those in similar trades survive in the collection of Sarah Sophia Banks (1744–1818), which was given to the British Museum by her sister-in-law Dorothea, the wife of the botanist Sir Joseph Banks. There was an engraver working in London between 1770 and 1790 who made astute use of templates. A 1773 trade card of 'Lockⁿ. Foulger, Chair-Maker At Wallam Green. Makes all Sorts of Windsor Chairs, Garden Seats, Rural Settees &c.' shows six products.¹ Lockington Foulger (1738–1803) is recorded as a master turner in 1780 taking an apprentice called William Drawater.² Walham Green in Fulham was less than two miles from the Webbs at Hammersmith.

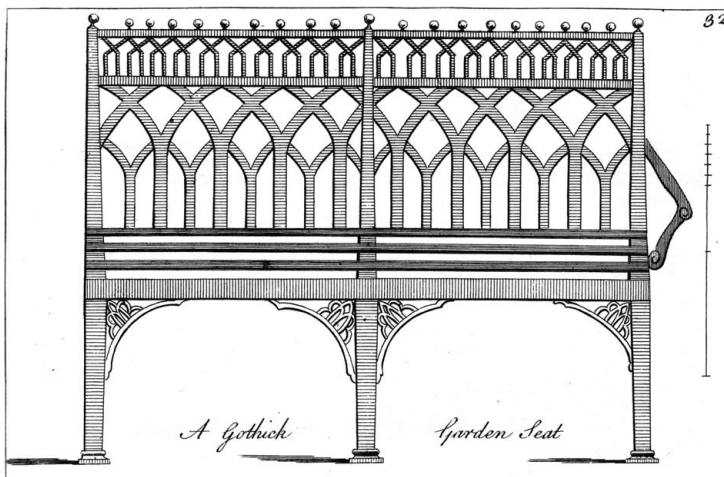
¹ British Museum, D,2.683, Banks Collection.

² The National Archives, IR1/30 f. 187.

5 Robert Manwaring,
*The Cabinet and
 Chair-maker's Real
 Friend and Companion*
 (1765), Plate 29:
 A Rural Garden Seat



6 Robert Manwaring,
*The Cabinet and
 Chair-maker's Real
 Friend and Companion*
 (1765), Plate 32:
 A Gothick Garden Seat



A trade card of 1785 of William Webb of Newington, Surrey (no relation) who made 'all Sorts of Yew Tree, Gothic & Windsor Chairs, China & Rural Seats, single & double Alcoves, Garden Machines & Childrens Chaises' shows eight products (Figure 7).³ All six depicted on Lockington Foulger's card appear on Webb's with two new additions: the chairs at top left and top right. The three-seater Gothic and Rural settees are swapped at the bottom of the card. The covered stool at the left, by deduction from this card and from Webb & Bunce's list of wares, discussed below, was called an Alcove.

³ British Museum, D,2.1514, Banks Collection. For William Webb, see Parrott (2008), pp. 116–27. A version of this card was glued to the underside of a chair photographed for Sir Ambrose Heal (and perhaps in his collection). Greatly decayed at the edges, this otherwise identical example had the words 'Likewiseskies &c' added at the base of the plate. The photograph, British Museum, Heal,28.230, was reproduced in Agius (1976), p. 12, and by other writers since. A photograph of the label can be seen at https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_Heal-28-230 The location of the chair is not known.



7 Trade card of William Webb, c. 1785. Banks Collection, D.2.1514.
© The Trustees of the British Museum



8 Trade card of Stubbs's Manufactory between c. 1788 and c. 1803. Heal, 28.219.
© The Trustees of the British Museum



9 (above) View of the interior of the Chelsea Bun House, watercolour, artist unknown, 1838. BM.1880,1113.2421. © The Trustees of the British Museum

10 (right) Arthur Devis (1712–1787) *Portrait of Sir Thomas Cave, Bt. and his family in the grounds of Stanford Hall, Leicestershire*, 1749. © Sotheby's



The 1788 trade card of John Stubbs's Manufactory 'in the City Road and in Brick Lane, Old Street' where 'all Sorts of Yew Tree, Gothic & Windsor Chairs, Alcoves & Rural Seats, Garden Machines & Dyed Chairs' were made, again displayed eight products (Figure 8): six were identical to the William Webb card but with a wheelchair substituted for the child's chaise in the middle at the top, and a ladder back rush-seated chair for the comb back Windsor on a three-wheel platform at the bottom right.⁴ The dates for all three cards are those noted by Sarah Sophia Banks.

⁴ British Museum, D,2.1513, Banks Collection.



11 *Richard, Mary and Peter, the Children of Peter and Mary du Cane*, from a triptych by Arthur Devis (1712–1787), oil on canvas, 1747–9. *Harris Museum, Art Gallery & Library, Preston*

A Gothic seat in fashionable use, together with a fine comb back Windsor armchair and other elegant side chairs, may be found in an 1838 watercolour of the interior of the Chelsea Bunhouse (Figure 9). The artist is unknown; the Bunhouse was pulled down the following year. On its last Good Friday 24,000 buns are said to have been sold.⁵ One can imagine the proprietor and staff sinking gratefully onto the bench and chairs afterwards.

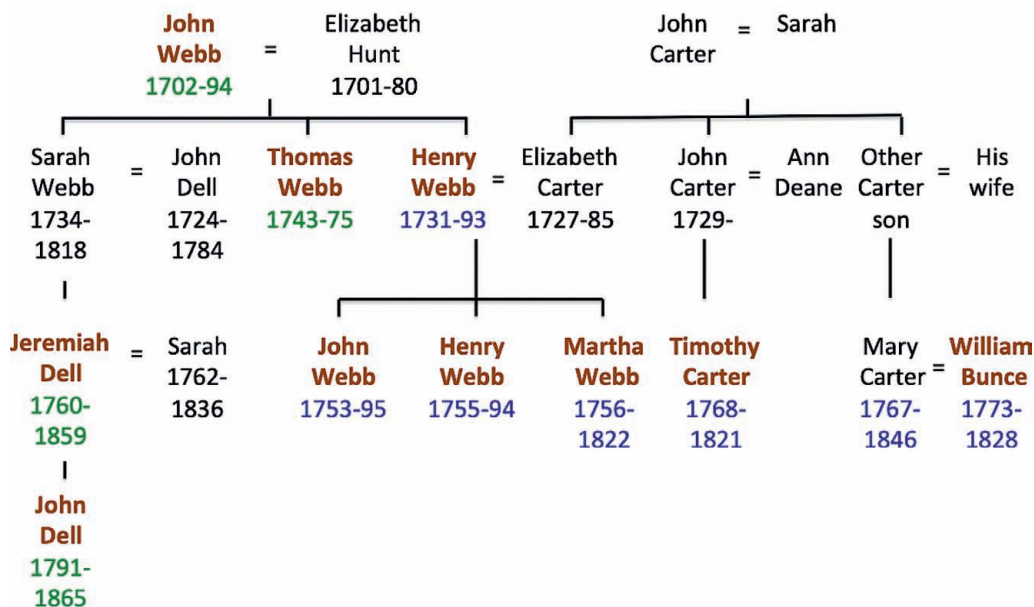
Children's chaises and their successors, perambulators, are part of this story. The child's chaise on the trade card is remarkably similar to one shown in the portrait of Sir Thomas Cave, Bt and his family in the grounds of Stanford Hall, Leicestershire by Arthur Devis (Figure 10).⁶ Another Arthur Devis painting of the Du Cane children at Braxted Park, Essex shows beautifully the elegance in which a well-off eighteenth century child could aspire to be carried about (Figure 11).⁷

⁶ Liddell (1989), p. 122.

⁷ From a triptych depicting Mr Peter Du Cane, Mary, nee Norris, his wife and their children. Du Cane (du Quesne, 1713–1804) was a merchant, Governor and director of both the Bank of England and the East India Company.

Worked
in Dorney

Chairmakers

Worked in
Hammersmith

12 Family tree of Webbs, Dells, Carters and Bunce. © J. H. J. Parker

All these designs, or their later derivatives, may have been made or sold by the Webbs, Dells, Carter, Bunce, Priors and Trotmans. For the reader's convenience two family trees and a timeline showing who worked where and when are provided (Figures 12, 13 and 17). The trees do not show all known persons: they show all those who made Windsor chairs or rustic chairs or children's carriages or perambulators or summerhouses or combinations thereof, and their main places of work.

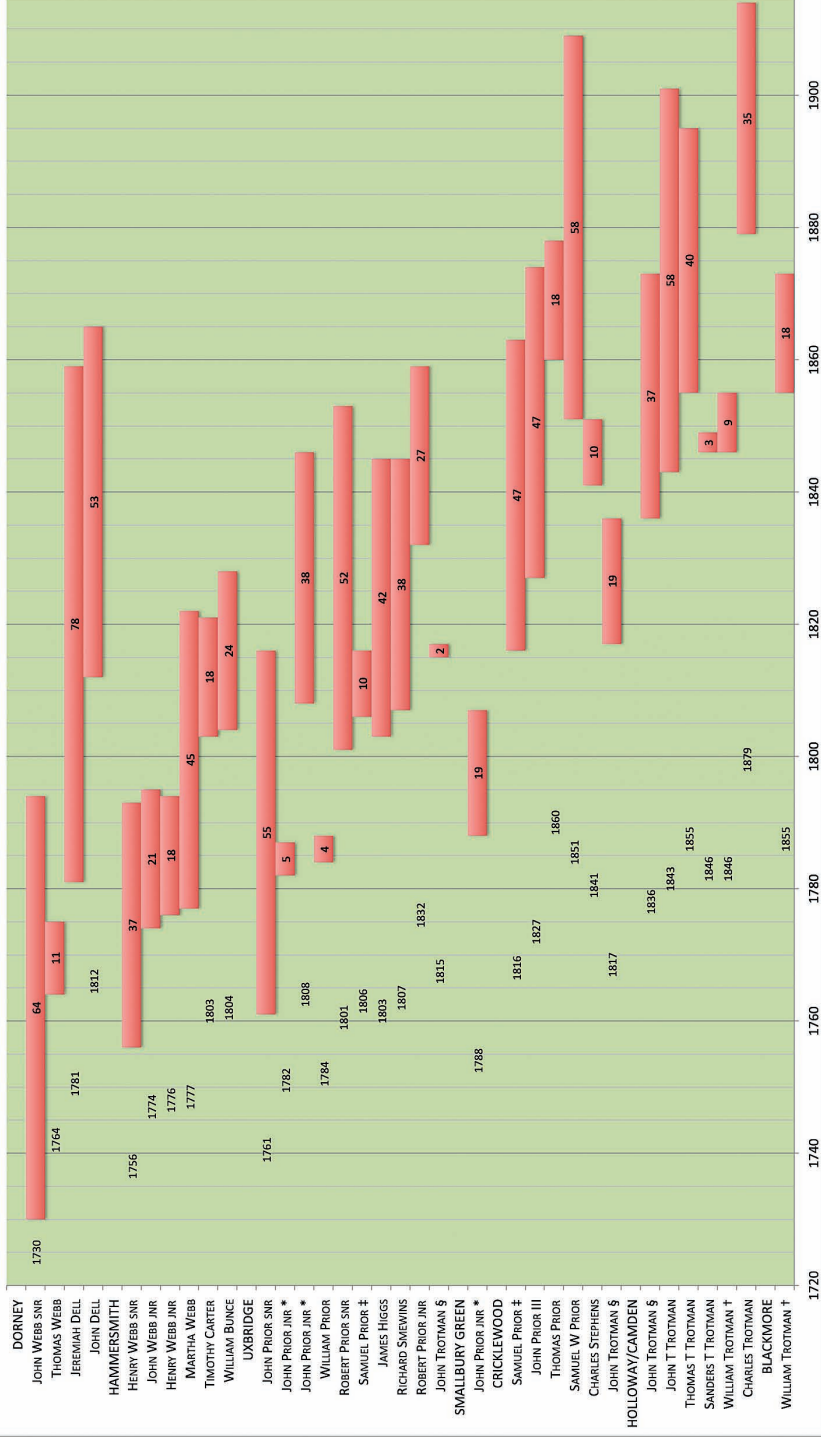
A WEBB REVEALED

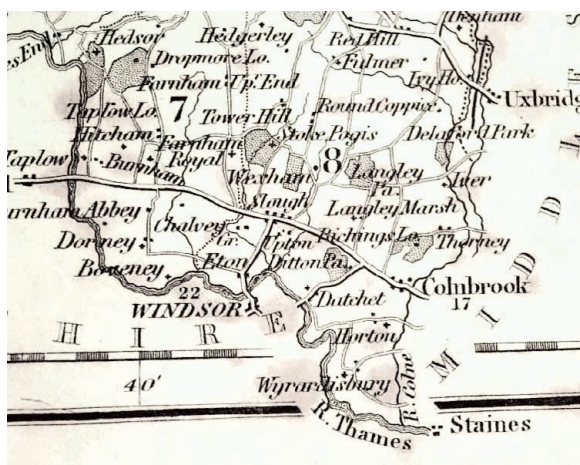
On 1 September 1702 John Webb was baptised in the Church of St James the Less at Dorney in Buckinghamshire.⁸ It is unclear whence he came — neither father nor mother is named on the baptismal record. When he grew up he was to have a significant impact on English chairmaking but his existence has scarcely been noticed. He was buried at Dorney on 20 May 1794 in his 92nd year. It is John Webb's will of 7 September 1793, proved on 27 May 1794, which tells us that he was a chairmaker and reveals that he was the father of Henry Webb (1731–93) and grandfather of Martha Webb (1756–1822), later the Webb of the Hammersmith firm Webb & Bunce,

⁸ Note on genealogical sources: the author maintains publicly-available family trees of chairmakers on Ancestry.co.uk under the user profile Julian Parker where detail of the genealogical evidence which supports this article may be found. Some data shown there is input after being located on findmypast.co.uk.

Who worked where when

Symbols mark the same individual in a different location or returning after an absence





14 Archibald Fullarton, engraved map for *Bell's Gazetteer*, 1833. From Dorney to Uxbridge

and her two chair making brothers, John and Henry.⁹ The sixteen unassuming words from John Webb's will, which glue the evidence together, read: 'I give to my Granddaughter Martha Webb the daughter of my late son Henry twenty pounds'.

John Webb married, on 25 February 1731 at Old Windsor, Elizabeth Hunt (1701–80) of Burnham, two miles north of Dorney (Figure 14). John and Elizabeth had nine children between 1731 and 1747, of whom three died in infancy. All nine were baptised in Dorney. Only three daughters would survive both parents. Two sons, Henry and Thomas (1743–75), lived to adulthood and became chair makers, like their father. No record of either son's apprenticeship survives, as is common for those apprenticed to their fathers.

John Webb was churchwarden at St James the Less. On 5 April 1750 there was a petition of Sir Charles Palmer Bt. Patron of Parish church of Dorney, John Griffiths, clerk, vicar, Edward Sedding and John Webb, churchwardens, that in the said parish church there are four bells and the three smallest are very bad and that a large church clock and dial is very much wanting in the parish of Dorney & the above Palmer etc and with the consent of most of the parishioners intend to sell the smallest bells and to buy a church clock and dial and a small bell to give the time of Divine Service and for the clock to strike upon and use any surplus for further repair of the church.¹⁰

The eldest daughter, Sarah (1734–1818) married John Dell, whose occupation is not known. Their son, Jeremiah Dell (1760–1859), became a Windsor chair maker at Dorney, worked there until a very great age, and was his grandfather's executor: 'I give to my said grandson Jeremiah Dell twenty pounds and all my working tools belonging to the Chairmaking Business for the trouble which he may have as my

⁹ The National Archives, PROB 11/1246/72, will of John Webb, 27 May 1794, transcribed in full at <https://lincolnshirechairs2019.blogspot.com/2020/05/the-will-of-john-webb-chairmaker-of.html>

¹⁰ Buckinghamshire Record Office, Archdeacon's Faculty Book, D-A/X/9/176, summarised at <https://www.dorney-history-group.org.uk/st-james-the-less-dorney/> in the Record of Church Furnishings. The 'faculty [was] granted by John Bettsworth Doctor of Laws Commissary and official throughout the whole archdeaconry of Bucks.'

Executor'. Jeremiah Dell did his duty. On 2 June 1794, the *Reading Mercury* announced:

DORNEY, BUCKS.
TO be SOLD by AUCTION,
By Mr. SMITH,
(By order of the executors) on Wednesday the 4th of
June, 1794 on the premises,
The HOUSHOLD [sic] FURNITURE, Implements of
Husbandry, a Stump of Hay, a Cow and Calf and
other effects, late the property of
Mr. JOHN WEBB, deceased.
To be viewed on Tuesday and the morning of sale,
beginning at eleven o'clock.

Jeremiah Dell's uncle, Thomas Webb, seems never to have left Dorney: he is recorded as a chairmaker in the burial register at St James the Less on 5 January 1775.

Jeremiah Dell too stayed in Dorney. As late as the 1851 census, he is shown as 'Chair maker, Master, employ^g 1 man' — the latter was probably his son John (1791–1865), who lived next door to his father at Dorney Common and is shown as a chair maker in the censuses of 1841, 1851 and 1861, after which the Webb/Dell chairmaking in Dorney seems to have ceased. Long before that the family chairmaking skills had also moved to Hammersmith.

Henry Webb may well have been apprenticed at fourteen for seven years to his father and so his first opportunity to leave Dorney would not have been before 1752. *The Dictionary of English Furniture Makers* has him in Hammersmith from 1763 and *Wakefield's Directory* for 1794 listed him as 'Webb, H., Windfor and Garden Chair Maker, Creek, Hammersmith.'¹¹ A Webb and Bunce advertisement in the *Morning Post* of 6 June 1805 acknowledges 'distinguished proofs of public favour and patronage, for more than seventy years past', which would date the foundation of the firm to before 1735. When the premises in Hammersmith were sold in June 1828 the sale notice in the *Morning Advertiser* read 'where the business of a Windsor Chair-maker has been carried on for near a century'. Some poetic licence is displayed in both cases: both must refer to John Webb's work at Dorney since Henry would have been four or younger!

Much material relating to Henry Webb's business and life was published in *Regional Furniture* by Robert Parrott in 2008, but some of the family history remained unresolved.¹² The baptismal and burial register of St Paul's Hammersmith is now available online. Elizabeth Webb, 58, wife of Henry Webb, Chairmaker, was buried at St Paul's Hammersmith on 25 August 1785. Henry Webb [senior] Windsor Chair Maker was buried there on 5 June 1793, with the register noting that he died of dropsy. Henry Webb [junior], chair maker, 39, was buried there on 12 November 1794. John Webb chairmaker, 41, was buried there on 2 March 1795, having died of consumption (tuberculosis). One can only thank the incumbent for thinking to include occupations

¹¹ Wakefield (1794), p. 327.

¹² Parrott (2008), pp. 127–38.

15 Old St Paul's Church,
Hammersmith, artist unknown.
*Hammersmith and Fulham Local
Studies and Archives*



in the register. One would expect, therefore, a baptismal record in 1727 for Elizabeth, 1753 or 1754 for John and probably 1755 for Henry.

There is a bequest in Henry Webb's codicil of 28 May 1793: 'Also I Give and Bequeath to my Niece Mary Carter the sum of £20 to be paid to her within 12 months next after my Decease'. One possibility, therefore, is that Elizabeth's maiden name was Carter. One Henry Webb was married by banns to Elizabeth Carter at New Windsor on 16 October 1752. New Windsor is even closer to Dorney than Old Windsor where John Webb and Elizabeth Hunt married in 1731. Elizabeth was the daughter of John and Sarah Carter of Boveney (mid-way between Windsor and Dorney) and was baptised in Burnham on 18 April 1727. One John Web [sic] son of Henry and Elizabeth, born on 16 September, was baptised in Kensington on 30 September 1753. One Henry Web [sic] son of Henry and Elizabeth was baptised in Kensington on 16 March 1755. All these dates match the burial register information from St Paul's Hammersmith. The starting of the business in Hammersmith must have followed shortly thereafter: Martha was baptised at St Paul's, Hammersmith on 5 December 1756. There were two other sons who did not survive, Abraham, baptised and buried at St Paul's Hammersmith in February 1758 and William likewise in October 1766.¹³

Martha Webb must have been a resilient and resourceful woman. In less than two years between June 1793 and March 1795, she buried her father, her grandfather, her second brother and her oldest brother, all chairmakers (Figure 15). In the face of that grief, she kept the family chairmaking business going for more than twenty years. As Robert Parrott shows, Henry must have prospered and was well off by the time he died. An interesting series of further vignettes has recently emerged: in his will, proved 5 June 1793, Henry Webb left a bequest as follows:

¹³ Robert Parrott's article mentions a twin of Abraham Webb's called Eleanor of whom there is no contemporaneous record in Hammersmith. There was another couple called Henry and Elizabeth Webb who lived in Putney and Wandsworth whose children appear to have been Mary, baptised 25 January 1756, Henry Deacon, baptised 16 March 1757 both in Putney, and Eleanor, baptised 6 March 1765, buried 16 March 1765, in Wandsworth. There does not appear to be any connection to the Webb chair makers of Hammersmith.

Also I Give and Bequeath to the Churchwarden and overseers of the Poor of the Hamlet of Hammersmith aforesaid and their successor Churchwarden and overseers of the Poor for the time being Fifty Pounds Residue of the said Stock in the same Fund [the new Four per Cent Bank Annuities] in Trust to receive and take the Dividends thereof from time to time as the same shall become due and payable and lay out the same in Bread to be free distributed unto and amongst such poor persons of the said Hamlet as they shall think most worthy of free Relief and at such times and in such manner as they shall in their discretion think proper.¹⁴

Henry Webb had been one of these overseers of the poor, along with one of his executors, James Lasbrey. They were both mentioned in judicial documents authorising local taxation to meet claims for damages in the wake of the Gordon Riots in 1780.¹⁵ (The clandestine convent at Hammersmith had been attacked during the anti-Catholic rioting.) After Henry Webb died, Lasbrey may have taken his eye off the ball a little because a dividend for Consolidated Stock due in October 1793 to 'Henry Webb, Hammersmith, Chair-maker' was recorded unclaimed in 1815, and again in 1823, at risk of being transferred to the Commissioners for the Reduction of the National Debt.¹⁶ Nevertheless, by the 1830s the churchwardens had rescued the stock and converted it into '£52 1s 5d in the three-and-a-half per cents'.¹⁷

The birth of, and parents of, Henry Webb's niece Mary Carter remain elusive, but the search for her uncovered a different chair maker relative, suspected but previously without a directly demonstrable link, Henry and Elizabeth's nephew Timothy Carter. Elizabeth Webb neé Carter had a brother, John, baptised at Burnham on 18 December 1729. John married Ann Deane at Burnham on 8 October 1754. One of their sons was Timothy Carter (1768–1821) who was baptised at Burnham on 27 September 1768. Timothy married Hannah Grimmet by licence at St Paul's Hammersmith on 17 May 1803. In his marriage bond of the previous day he is described as 'Windsor Chair Maker'. The land tax record for 1803 shows that for his first year in Hammersmith he rented premises from Martha Webb.¹⁸ His entry in Holden's *Directory* for 1805 to 1807 reads 'Carter Timothy, Windsor chair-maker, King st. Hammersmith'. Three daughters survived at the time of Timothy Carter's will in 1821, Mary, Susanna and Joan. Mary is a great-niece by marriage of Henry Webb but she cannot be the legatee of the codicil to his will as she is from a different generation and was born fourteen years after his death. Timothy Carter's will leaves both his victualling and his chair making businesses to his wife and another executor to provide for her and the children and to sell if they think fit.¹⁹ They did think fit and so on 13 October 1823 the *Morning Advertiser* offered:

¹⁴ The National Archives, PROB 11/1234/3, will of Henry Webb, 5 June 1793, transcribed in full at <https://lincolnshirechairs2019.blogspot.com/2020/05/the-will-of-henry-webb-of-hamlet-of.html>

¹⁵ LMA, Middlesex Sessions of the Peace: Court in Session: MJ/SP/D/029.

¹⁶ Bank of England (1815), p. 375; Bank of England (1823), p. 406.

¹⁷ Faulkner (1839), p. 179. In 1923 Webb's bequest was consolidated with fifteen others into the Hammersmith United Charities.

¹⁸ LMA, Land Tax, Hamlet of Hammersmith, 1803, MR/PLT/4860.

¹⁹ The National Archives, PROB 11/1655/364, will of Timothy Carter, 22 April 1822, transcribed in full at <https://lincolnshirechairs2019.blogspot.com/2020/05/will-of-timothy-carter-chairmaker-of.html>

To Chair-makers, Timber Dealers, Brokers, and Others.—Lease and Goodwill of a Chair-makers and Timber Dealer's Business.—By Mr. GOMME, on WEDNESDAY, Oct. 15, and following Day, at Eleven, on the Premises, near the Creek Wharf, Hammersmith, by order of the Executrix and Executor of Mr. Carter, Chair Manufacturer and Timber Dealer, deceased,

ALL the Manufactured and Unmanufactured Stock and Utensils in Trade, 9000 feet of half-inch peartree and peartree veneer, capital inch, 1½, 2 inch, 2½, and 3 inch, cherry, pear, ewe [sic], cafrica, elm, sycamore, and other hard woods. The manufactured Stock consists of spars, bows, elbows, legs, cherry, ewetree [sic], and rustic chairs, tables, stools, garden seats, alcoves, settees, Bath and childrens' chaises, two turning lathes, six work-benches, four vices, three cramps, a large quantity of hard wood timber, various dimensions, a 51 inch brewing copper, with cock and boss, and upper back, four quarter mashtun, two 20 feet coolers, yeast stillianing,²⁰ lead pump, copper jigger pump, crane, and other implements, a young black mare, a cart, chaise and cart harness, bridles and saddles, &c.—On the same day, at Twelve, will be sold the Lease of the long established [sic] Chair-maker's Premises, 15 years unexpired, at a moderate rent of £18 per annum.—On the second day, at One, will be sold thirty years unexpired Term of Seven Houses, opposite the Salutation, Hammersmith, producing a nett income of £46 16s. To be viewed. Catalogues and Particulars had on the Premises; at Mr. Faulkner's, Coach and Horses, New Church, in the Strand; Mr. Anderson, Kensington Coffee-house; the-Printing Office, Brentford; and of Mr. Gomme, Auctioneer, &c. Hammersmith.

What did the Webb firm make and sell? The only clues from Henry Webb's lifetime, are set out in Robert Parrott's article. There were twenty four 'forest stools' painted white at £5 8s. and six '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 ten foot sofa and four 'German' chairs, painted green, at a cost of £4 14s. 6d. In 1782 and 1789 chairs were provided for Osterley Park, Middlesex and in 1791 Lord Ducie received '6 large Fluted back German chairs' at 2s. each.²¹ And finally, there are a bill and receipt of 1789 from Henry Webb to the Earl of Egremont at Petworth House, Sussex, for six 'fan back' chairs, painted green, costing £2 14s. plus 1s. carriage.²²

Where did William Bunce come from? 'Bunce William upholsterer 8 Russel-street Covent Garden' appears in Thomas Sheraton's 'List of most of the Master Cabinet-makers, Upholsterers, and Chair Makers, in and about London, For 1803'.²³ Whilst he might be a promising candidate to be Martha Webb's business partner, not least because his executor is one William Carter, his will of 2 September 1831 is incompatible with his being the William Bunce sought.²⁴ More promising is the discovery of the

²⁰ A stillion is a tilting rack for casks. Stillaging lets yeast settle in the belly of the cask and not be pulled out into the beer when it is dispensed.

²¹ Beard (1986), p. 953

²² Parrott (2008), p. 127.

²³ Sheraton (1803), p. 435. The list also included 'Stubbs, Chair maker 20, Old Street', p. 440, and 'Webb, William, Chair-manufacturer, Newington, Surry', p. 440. Similar details appear in Kent's *Directory* for both 1794 and 1803.

²⁴ William Bunce, upholsterer, 8 Great Russell Street, Wright's Lane, Kensington and Camberley, Surrey, The National Archives, PROB 11/1790/15. A William Bunce appears at Russell Street in the Westminster Rate books between 1765 and 1821, although the earlier 1765–69 entries may relate to the father of the William who appears from 1789 onwards until 1802 and again in 1811 and 1821.

marriage on 30 May 1801 in the Church of St Marylebone, Westminster, of William Bunce of St Mary, Lambeth, to Mary Carter 'of this parish, spinster'. The witnesses are Martha Webb and Susanna Carter. This must be our man: his bride Mary, one suspects, is Henry Webb's Carter niece. It may also explain why Martha Webb took William Bunce into partnership. This is the William Matlock Bunce whose will of 22 May 1832, leaving all to his wife and sole executrix, Mary, describes him as 'of the hamlet of Hammersmith in the parish of Fulham ... Garden Furniture Manufacturer.'²⁵ Holden's *Directory* (printed in 1802) for 1802 to 1804 lists 'Webb Martha, Windsor chair manufactory [sic], Hammersmith'. The Hammersmith land tax record for the relevant premises shows Martha Webb as proprietor and occupier in June 1802 and as proprietor in June 1803 when the occupier for the first time becomes 'Webb & Bunce'.

A trade card dated by Sarah Sophia Banks to 1803, the words surmounted by the royal arms, reads

Webb and Bunce,
(Successors to the late M^r. Henry Webb)
Windsor and Garden Chair
Manufacturers to Her Majesty,
and his R. H. the Duke of Clarence,
Hammersmith,
Rustic Furniture for Gardens Parks, Hermitages,
Cottages &c. made portable for Exportation

NB no connection whatsoever with any other Tradesman in the above Districts²⁶

Whilst this seems to be the earliest Webb document which mentions the words 'Windsor chairs', the evidence now assembled makes it likely that they had been in the family range of products since the Dorney days. A series of increasingly oleaginous advertisements appeared from 1805 onwards. From the *Morning Post*, 6 June 1805:

HAMMERSMITH, corner of Webb's-lane, near the Bottom of Hammersmith only. — WEBB and BUNCE, Garden and Park Furniture Manufacturers to His Majesty, His Royal Highness the Duke of Clarence, and Royal Family, most respectfully inform the Nobility, Gentry, and their numerous Friends, that they have prepared a more numerous STOCK of FANCY and ORNAMENTAL FURNITURE for PARKS and GARDENS, than any Manufactory in the Kingdom, now for SALE, take the liberty of apprising, at this early period, in consequence of the great demands last season, and humbly solicits their early orders. We acknowledge to have received very distinguished proofs of public favour and patronage, for more than seventy years past, for which we are highly grateful, and return our most unfeigned thanks, convinced, that as strict attention to honour, correctness, and punctuality, can alone entitle to a continuance of that patronage and favour we most respectfully pledge ourselves never to deviate from. We are with gratitude and truth, the very humble Servants of the Public. WEBB and BUNCE. N.B. Specimens and Drawings for inspection. Merchants supplied with Portable Furniture on reasonable terms.

From the *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* of 6 November 1805:

²⁵ Parrott (2008), p. 134.

²⁶ British Museum, D,2.4151, Banks Collection. The royal patrons referenced were George III's Queen, Charlotte, and their third son, later William IV.

To MERCHANTS and CAPTAINS of SHIPS.

WEBB and BUNCE, Garden and Park Furniture Manufactory to the Royal Family, most respectfully inform their numerous Friends, that they have an immense quantity of Windsor Chairs, peculiarly calculated for hot climates, ready for exportation; also Portable Temples, &c. undertake to deliver Goods, free of expence, to any part of the River. Merchants and Captains wishing for Patterns by addressing a line to their Manufactory, Hammersmith, will be instantly attended to. We acknowledge the very distinguished proofs of public favour and patronage, for more than seventy years past, for which we are highly grateful, and trust a strict attention to honour and punctuality can alone entitle to a continuance of that favour we pledge ourselves never to deviate from. We are, with gratitude and truth, the very humble servants of the Public, WEBB and BUNCE.

In this journal in 2018 John Boram showed that ‘from 1764 onwards [until 1797] the [Gillows] dispatch records list 134 orders (46% of the total) relating to the export of 3008 Windsor chairs of which 2792 (93%) were painted (mainly green ...). Only 26 entries comprising 564 Windsor chairs clearly specify their West Indies destination, mainly Jamaica’.²⁷ Webb & Bunce were Gillows’ competitors; as was William Webb of Newington, who included the tag ‘N: B: for Exportation’ on his trade card (Figure 7). A handbill in the Banks Collection dated 1809 reads:

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, CUMBERLAND, SUSSEX, and CAMBRIDGE; the Duchess of BRUNSWICK, and their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Princess SOPHIA of GLOUCESTER.

IMPRESSED with the liveliest emotions of gratitude, beg leave to return their unfeigned 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 in soliciting a continuance, as they are enabled to execute Orders for the following Articles, *agreeable to quality*, on more reasonable terms than any other Manufactory in the Kingdom and which are now ready for Inspection, viz.

Garden and Park seats, on improved Plans
Park Paling
Alcoves of all descriptions and to any order
Ornamental Treillis for Windows
Virandoles &c

Children’s Chaises, of all descriptions
Rustic Hermitages, Chairs, Tables, Bridges,
Gates, &c.

Close Panneled Alcoves
Cove Seats and Portable Temples
Cabrioles or light Chaises
Bath Chaises with shafts or without, on an
easy and elegant plan, *recommended by
the Faculty*
Variety of Flower Stands
Grecian and German Sofas, Chairs, and
Stools

²⁷ Boram (2018), p. 47.

Windsor Chairs for Kitchens, Studies, &c.
Camp Stools, Chairs, &c.
Bath Chairs, for infirm Persons, and most
useful to preserve Health

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, Webb 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 by the infirm and convalescent, being made in such a variety of ways to suit all Persons having the *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.

*J. Boyle, Printer, Vine-Street, Piccadilly, London.*²⁸

The range of the firm was very wide indeed. One wonders who supplied the donkeys.

The *Morning Post* on 23 February 1813 and *The Sun (London)* on 29 August 1815 both carried substantially the same advertisement. This transcription is of the latter:

WEBB and BUNCE'S REPOSITORY for all Kinds of CARRIAGES upon an easy Plan adapted for Invalids of every Description, sanctioned by their MAJESTIES and all the ROYAL [sic] FAMILY.

A FACT.—Health and Longevity being sought after by the prudent part of Mankind, BUNCE, at the Suggestion of numerous Professional Gentlemen, informs the Nobility, Gentry, and others, that he has now ready for sale a GREAT QUANTITY of his IMPROVED BATH CHAISE and CHAIRS, which are now brought to such high Perfection that any Person having the least tendency to ill health, may receive the benefit of the Air in them with as much ease as reclining on a Sofa; they give that gentle and easy Exercise so essential to Health, and occasions free Respiration, which is not to be met with in any other Carriages; they are of the greatest benefit to Gentlemen afflicted with the Gout, or any kind of Contractions of the Limbs; they are recommended by Physicians of the first eminence. The fact is, that no Family would be without them, Winter or Summer, if they did but know the salubrious effects occasioned by the use of those most excellent Vehicles. The Nobility, Gentry, and others, may be supplied at One Hour's Notice as likewise his Chair Machine for the House so particularly recommended by the Faculty for Pregnant Ladies, or such Patients whose case requires Exercise in the House, when the Weather will not permit to go abroad. Bunce begs leave to inform the Faculty and others that he has studied an easy bed-chair for the comfort of the Sick while confined to the Bed; he has another very useful article for Invalids, the stool called a Tee Comfort. Verandas, Garden, and Park Furniture of every description, made in the best manner, and all other articles in his general business. Orders received at Webb and Bunce's old Manufactory, Hammersmith, where Merchants and Captains of Ships may be supplied with any of those very useful Articles for exportation, and a very handsome Profit allowed them.—Please to direct the Coachman to drive to the corner of Webb's lane – A Flag staff is on top of the Dwelling House.

One likes to think of Bunce inventing a bed-chair whilst himself confined to bed, though that may not have been his meaning.

²⁸ British Museum, D,2.1503, Banks Collection.

Only two stamped chairs from the Webb & Bunce period are known to have survived. One, illustrated by Parrott, was previously with the dealer Michael Harding-Hill; the other is in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum.²⁹ The Webb & Bunce administration may have been less energetic than their advertisements. On 14 November 1818 a gloomy notice appeared in the *Morning Advertiser*:

To Rustic Chair Makers, Brokers, and Others, Hammersmith. — By Mr. CROOK, on the Premises, the corner of Webb'-lane, Hammersmith, on MONDAY next, Nov. 16, at Eleven precisely, on account of the number of lots, by order of the Sheriff of Middlesex,

ALL the genuine Household Furniture, Two Eight-day Clocks, Piano-forte, &c.; stock of rustic seats, garden, Windsor, Bath, and other chairs, poney chaises of various descriptions, large quantity of chair stuff, and a variety of other effects. To be viewed to-morrow and morning of sale, and Catalogues had on the Premises; and of Mr. Crook, Auctioneer, 51, Skinner-street, Snowhill.

Everything would seem to have been sold up. The reference to the Sheriff indicates that judgment had gone against either Webb or Bunce in the Court of Kings Bench where insolvency proceedings took place.³⁰ A bill must have been left unsettled. Not for the last time, it becomes clear how precarious commercial and personal life could be.

Robert Parrott shows that Webb & Bunce had premises in Chelsea.³¹ Pigot's 1822 *Directory*, under 'Garden and Rustic Seat Manufacturers', has 'Webb & Bunce, King's-road Chelsea and Hammersmith'. Horwood's Plan reveals that Chelsea was still predominantly fields in the late 1790s.³² By James Wyld's map of 1825 much had been built (Figure 16).³³ The land tax records for St Luke's Chelsea, signed off in June each year, have been examined. In 1817 Webb & Bunce first appear as occupier of premises in King's Road owned by Thomas Smith with a notional rent of £30 and an assessment of 15s. 0d. Between 1818 and 1821 Webb & Bunce are found in Gloucester Place with a one-seventh share in 1818–19 and a one-fifth share in 1820–21 of a row of properties owned by the Lord of the Manor with a notional rent of £36 and a shared assessment of £1 4s. 0d. By June 1822 and subsequently, the place previously rented by Webb & Bunce shows Lazarus Jacobs as the occupant. By tracing the footsteps of successive land tax assessors from Jubilee Place via King's Road and Gloucester Place to Queen Street one may deduce that Gloucester Place was probably the extension of Queen Street north of King's Road. By the time the firm's entry appeared in Pigot's *Directory* they had already retreated to Hammersmith.

There, on 20 June 1822 Martha Webb was buried at St Paul's Church. William Bunce appears to have recovered from the 1818 insolvency and continued trading. The land tax records from 1823 onwards show his or his wife's name on all properties

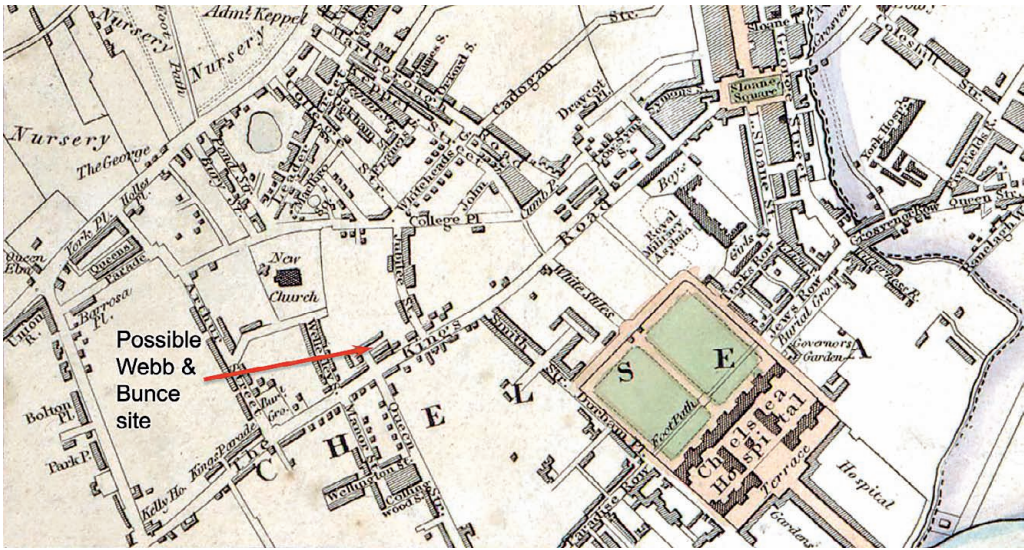
²⁹ V&A, W.13-1973; see <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O372116/windsor-armchair/> This masonic chair is also illustrated in Crispin (1992), p. 148, and in Kirkham (1988), figs 30 and 31.

³⁰ Duffy (1985), pp. 59–61. Insolvency at this date involved individual debts over £15. The Bankruptcy Court dealt with those over £100.

³¹ Parrott (2008), p. 134.

³² Richard Horwood, *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, and parts adjoining Shewing every House* (1792–1799), www.romanticlondon.org

³³ James Wyld, *A new Plan of London and Westminster with the borough of Southwark* 1825, Bibliothèque nationale de France, <https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40696240m>



16 Chelsea from *A new Plan of London and Westminster with the borough of Southwark* 1825, published by James Wyld

which were previously either owned by Martha Webb or by the Webb & Bunce firm. The inference must be that just as Martha Webb inherited the properties of her father and then of her brothers in the 1790s, so she in turn left them to her business partner, married to her cousin Mary. The *Morning Post* of 24 August 1824 carried an advertisement from 'Webb and Bunce's Old Manufactory' that was virtually identical to those of 1813 and 1815. The donkeys may have proved troublesome to maintain, for Bunce now offered 'some most excellent Pony Chaises, the same as what they serve the Coachmakers with'. With the upgrade to ponies, only the chaises and harness were for hire, 'at two days notice', and not the beasts themselves.

It does not help a firm to have whimsical clients who do not pay their bills. The *Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal* of 31 May 1825 sets the scene:

COURT OF COMMON PLEAS, May 28.

BUNCE V. BLAKE, BART.

Mr. Sergeant Vaughan stated that this was an action for work and labour done for the defendant, Sir Francis Blake, Bart, who resided near Staines. The plaintiff was a rustic chair manufacturer at Hammersmith, and sought to recover a large amount, being between £400 and £500. The defendant had paid £84 into Court, but that would not of course satisfy the plaintiff's demand. In 1823, the defendant wanted drawings of rustic buildings and other rustic curiosities, a more capricious minded man never existed, for he was never satisfied next day with what gave him delight on the preceding; but if he would erect buildings, pull them down, and build them up again, he ought to pay for the inconstancy of his taste, or vagaries of his fancy. From June, 1823, till the following December, six or eight of the plaintiff's men were employed on a rustic building large enough to contain 40 persons. This building was attached to the large premises, and no sooner was it constructed, than the defendant changed his mind, and had the roof taken off, and put on again in a different

manner. One part of the building was intended for the ladies, and was therefore made rather dark. — (*Laughter.*) — Another part overlooked the part contiguous to it, and was therefore remodelled. As the building went on, the defendant expressed his satisfaction from time to time at what was done, but the next day undid the object of his former admiration, and ordered the whole to be rebuilt. A more *outré* taste could not be exhibited, or a more whimsical building presented to the view. It was impossible for him or any man to say what labour had been expended on such capricious variety of building. He was told that in another building of similar description, on which a spire had been erected, the defendant ordered the spire to be reversed, and had the base placed where the top should be. The jury had a representation of the grotesque architecture before them for their edification. A man might, if he pleased, stand on his head instead of his feet; but if he indulged his whim by reversing the natural order of spires, he should pay the expence of having it done. — Then, as to the manner of payment, the defendant was as whimsical in that as in other matters. What did they think of a bill for £5 payable at three months after date, from Sir Francis Blake, Baronet ? And yet it was in bills of this kind that he occasionally paid sums on account to the plaintiff. Thomas Pither, the first witness called, was foreman to the plaintiff. In 1823, Sir Francis Blake called at their shop and ordered a rustic fence to be made. He also gave directions for building a rustic dog-house. — (*Laughter.*) — It was a fancy article, lined inside with straw; the dog was measured for it. *Continued Laughter.* He had also four rustic sofas. The Lord Chief Justice. — In plain English, I suppose you call them garden Chairs ? Witness;— Yes ; there were six rustic flower stands, and other rustic articles, all charged £26. The rustic fence was charged £28 and was painted three times in oil colours. Mr. Serjeant Pell said that he intended to dispute the charges for all these articles. He had a great number of witnesses to dispute the price of every item. The Lord Chief Justice — Was ever such rustic cause as this tried in any court in the world ? Why, instead of trying one cause, we shall be trying one hundred; if the price of every rustic chair and stool is to be disputed, it will be an action on each. Disputed items ought to have been settled before the cause came into court; the time of the Court and the public cannot be wasted on such a cause as this: the better course will be to submit it to arbitration. After some consideration between the parties, the case was referred to the arbitration of Mr. Barnewall. This case finished the Middlesex sittings, and the Court rose.

The end for Webb & Bunce came not long thereafter. The following advertisement, from the *Morning Advertiser* on 12 and 14 June 1828, appeared at the order of the mortgagee, Thomas Page, whose name appears as proprietor in the relevant land tax records from 1829 onwards: mortgage and interest thereon may have been unpaid for some time. The sale listing makes plain how very extensive an undertaking the firm must have been.

Freehold and Copyhold Estates, Foundry-yard, and Webb's Lane, Hammersmith.—By Mr. GOMME, in Four Lots, on TUESDAY, June 17, at One, on the Premises, in the large Wareroom of Lot Four, corner of Webb's lane, Hammersmith, (by Order of the Mortgagee, in Execution of a power of absolute Sale),

AN Improvable Freehold Estate, with two Houses thereon and a Gateway, desirably situate on the Southside of the High-street, nearly opposite Webb's-lane, Hammersmith, commonly called the Foundry-yard, commanding a frontage, next the High-street, of 36 feet, by a depth of 330 feet, little more or less, abutting and forming a front in Hampshire Hog-lane, together with eleven Cottages, producing £150 per annum, leaving 180 feet frontage for the like description of Cottages, and which is capable of great improvement, with all the yards, sheds, erections, pumps, &c. Also a Copyhold Estate, equal in value to Freehold, situate

and being on the North-side of the High-street, at the corner of Webb's-lane, commanding a frontage of 77 feet 6 inches, by a depth of 82 feet Northward, comprising all that well-known valuable and extensive Dwelling-house, shew and workshops, warehouses, sheds, erections, and out-buildings, formerly in the occupation of Messrs. Webb and Bunce, and recently occupied by Mr. W. M. Bunce, where the business of a Windsor Chair-maker has been carried on for near a century, and is suitable for any trade or profession where roomy premises are required. Likewise a Copyhold Cottage, in Webb's Lane, comprising four rooms, a wash-house, shed, and large garden enclosed, 62 feet 6 inches in width, now in the occupation of Mr. Wheatley, at the yearly net rent of £18. And a Copyhold Frontage, eligible for building Cottages of a similar description, commanding a frontage of 175 feet, by a depth averaging 42 feet, little more or less, with the addition of a piece of ground, behind front buildings in Webb's-lane, South-end, measuring 35 feet in length, and 20 feet in depth. To be viewed till the Sale. Particulars to be had at the Printing-office, Brentford; Old Bell, Holborn; of G. H. Malme, Esq., Abingdon-street, Westminster; at the White Horse, Shepherd's Bush; at the place of Sale; and of Mr. Gomme, Auctioneer and Appraiser, Hammersmith.

On 22 October 1828 the sad end of William Bunce, chair maker of Hammersmith, was laid out in the *London Courier and Evening Gazette*:

An Inquest was yesterday held in Whitecross-street Prison, before Mr. Shelton, on view of the body of Robert Bunce [sic]. Thomas Wade, examined—I am surgeon of the prison. The deceased was brought in on the 1st August last, with the assistance of two men. I saw him the same day in the Infirmary. He was in a very emaciated and feeble state in his person, wasting very much in personal strength, and unable to move out of his bed. He said he had been so for several months. I have attended him regularly from then until the present time. The deceased declined in strength and appetite gradually, but under a low nervous fever. He continued in that state until Sunday the 19th, when he died. Coroner—Do you think he had medical and proper attendance given him? Witness—Yes. He had an affection on the chest. He has received every attention from those about him. Mary Bunce—I am wife to the deceased, and reside in Waterloo-street, Hammersmith. The deceased was a chair-maker. He was taken from his bed the 1st of August last, in a very dangerous state. Coroner—By what accident? Witness—By a man named Page, for a writ of sixty-two pounds, issued against him by the Sheriff of Middlesex. I am convinced it was a false arrest, there being no money due him at the time. Coroner—How was he moved? Witness—He was carried away by two men in a stage-coach. Coroner—Did you come with him? Witness—No; I was so overpowered I could not; but I have attended him every day since he has been from home. He has received every attention. Coroner—How long had he been ill previous to his removal? Witness—Since the 1st of May, and would have recovered but for his being removed. The Coroner, having read over the evidence, left it to the Jury to give their verdict. The Jury, having consulted, returned a verdict of 'Natural Death'.

Although his neighbours might have read about 'Robert' Bunce, the records of the City of London Coroner's Court are explicit that this was William Matlock Bunce.³⁴ He was buried at St Paul's Hammersmith on 27 October 1828, aged 55. The junction of Waterloo Street and King Street was about 220 yards east from the corner of Webb's Lane. William Bunce's thirteen-line will of 1816 was not proved by his widow until

³⁴ LMA: CLA/041/PI/01/010/087.

22 May 1832.³⁵ Mary Bunce, niece of Henry Webb and cousin of Martha, was buried at Holy Trinity, Gray's Inn Road in the parish of St Andrew Holborn on 23 October 1846, aged 79 (indicating that she was born in 1767). A Dickensian notice appeared in *The Morning Advertiser* on 10 December 1856:

IN CHANCERY.—COCKING against KENNERLEY. -The Heir-at-Law and customary Heir of MARY BUNCE, Widow, deceased, late of Hammersmith, in the county of Middlesex, whose maiden name is supposed to have been Carter, and who died in the Workhouse of Saint Andrew, Holborn, or about the 28th day of October 1846, is by his Solicitor, on or before the tenth day of January 1857, to come in and prove his Heirship at the Chambers of the Master of the Rolls, Rolls-yard, Chancery-lane, Middlesex, in order to establish his right or claim, if any, to redeem certain freehold and copyhold property, situate at Hammersmith, in the county of Middlesex, in mortgage to Thomas Page, the testator in this cause, by virtue of an indenture dated the 9th day of November, 1826, for the sum £2,459 14s. 6d., or otherwise the claim of persons now claiming such right will proceeded with.—WEDNESDAY, the 14th January, 1857, at 12 o'clock at noon, at the said Chambers, is appointed for hearing and adjudicating upon the claims.—Dated this 5th day of December, 1856,—GEO.HUME, Chief Clerk, ROBSON and BAUGHAN, 13, Clifford's Inn, Plaintiff's Solicitors.³⁶

The workhouse doubtless seemed a world away from the glory days of supplying furniture to Kings and Queens: did Mary Bunce ever hear tell of John Webb, her great-uncle by marriage who made his chairs in Dorney so long before?³⁷

A QUESTION OF PRIORITY: FROM DORNEY TO HILLINGDON END

Leaving the struggles of the Bunces, successors to the Webbs in Hammersmith, it is to St James the Less in Dorney that the trail returns. There, on 26 October 1760, John Prior, chairmaker of Dorney, married Martha Ware.³⁸ This is nearly eight years earlier than the previous earliest known reference to his chair making which is in a billhead dated 9 July 1768, reproduced in Dr B. D. Cotton's *The English Regional Chair*.³⁹ There is some evidence that Martha Ware came from Burnham, which is still only two miles from Dorney. At the time of her burial at St John the Baptist, Hillingdon on 15 April 1827, Mrs Martha Prior is shown as aged 87. This would give a birth c. 1740. No baptism for her has been traced, but one Samuel Ware married one Martha Messenger on 1 March 1738 at St Peter's Church, Burnham, with the bride and groom coming from Burnham and Chesham. Since both Samuel and Martha are names that regularly re-surface in the Prior and Trotman baptisms, it seems probable that these are Martha Ware's parents, in the right place at the right time (Figure 17).

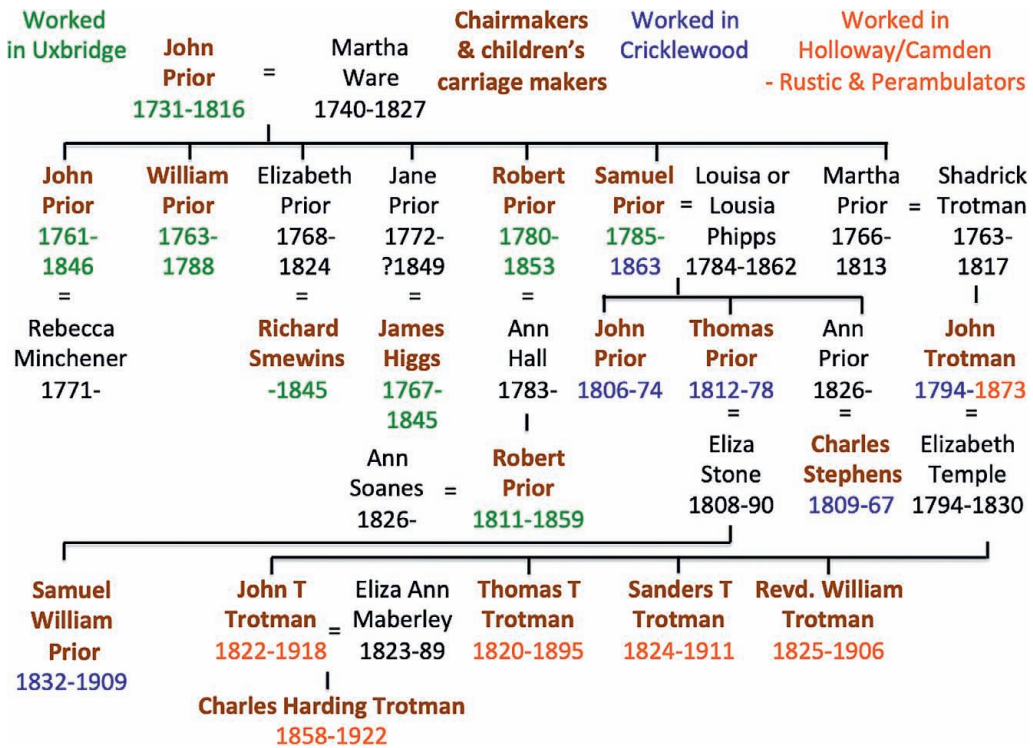
³⁵ The National Archives, PROB 11/1799/230.

³⁶ The National Archives, *Cocking v. Kennerley*, Court of Chancery, 1850, C 14/1104/C67 and C 14/1104/C68; 1857, C 15/381/H70, currently unavailable through coronavirus-related closure. Cocking was Selina Cocking, granddaughter of Thomas Page, whose daughter Selina married Thomas Cocking.

³⁷ Faulkner (1839), p. 52 shows that the death of Bunce was not the end: 'Messrs. Longley and Sutton, successors to the late Mr. Webb, carry on an extensive trade in Windsor chairs, rustic seats, and alcoves'. The *Morning Advertiser* on 12 May 1859 advertised an auction of Hammersmith freeholds and copyholds, one occupied by Longley and Sutton.

³⁸ Phillimore Marriage Registers, 1531–1913, Buckinghamshire Marriage Registers, Volume 5, p. 54.

³⁹ Cotton (1990), p. 76, fig. TV 146.



17 Family tree of Priors and Trotmans. © J. H. J. Parker

Dorney was a small place. In the election of the Knights of the Shire of Buckingham between 21 April and 6 May 1784, John Webb was one of only five voters in Dorney in the Burnham Hundred.⁴⁰ The records known as the *Posse Comitatus* give a feel for its size, even nearly forty years later in 1798. Buckinghamshire is the only county for which these records survive to a significant extent. It is a survey of men between the ages of fifteen and sixty, who were neither Quakers, nor clergymen, nor already serving in a military unit, capable of acting in a military capacity in the event of invasion by France. The tally for Dorney was fifty three men, made up of thirty one labourers, nine servants, five farmers, four of no occupation, two carpenters, one tailor and a lone chair maker, Jeremiah Dell.⁴¹

Slightly more than a generation previously, it is hard to imagine that John Prior, if he was connected to Dorney well enough to marry in its church, would not be well acquainted with the village's master chairmaker John Webb. John Prior was the same age as John Webb's son Henry: both were born c. 1731. No proof has been unearthed but it would be no surprise if John Prior and Henry Webb were fellow apprentices to John Webb between about 1745 and 1752.

⁴⁰ Nicholls (1785), p. 58.

⁴¹ Beckett (1985), p. 163. Also available at the Dorney History Group website: <https://www.dorney-history-group.org.uk/the-posse-comitatus-1798-with-dorney-extracts/>

Like John Webb, John Prior's parents have so far proved elusive. His family had a clear connection with Dummer and Tadley in Hampshire, which is about thirty-five miles from Dorney. That is known because Robert Pryor of Dummer, bricklayer, in his will of 1801, leaves £500 'to my kinsman John Prior of Uxbridge' subject to a life interest in the income from the capital sum of Robert Pryor of Dummer's sister Elizabeth.⁴² In legal terms, John Prior of Uxbridge was the remainderman for the capital sum after Elizabeth's death. In John Prior's own will of 1816 he left his interest in his kinsman's capital to his wife Martha for her lifetime, with the money thereafter to be divided amongst his eight surviving daughters and three surviving sons.⁴³ It is frustrating that neither will defines the degree of kinship.

There is also some evidence, which cannot presently be shown to be definitively in error, but which appears less likely, that John Prior may have had ancestry in and around Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire. There is a wood turner, Charles Prior (1787–1863) who married in Hillingdon in 1810, who lived and worked at least between 1826 and 1863 in Old Brentford, and whose ancestors can be shown to have lived in Hemel Hempstead. Further research may show either that there is some as yet undiscovered relationship between the Priors of Hampshire, those of Hillingdon and Uxbridge, and those of Hertfordshire, or that the surname and similarity of trade is wholly coincidental.

Within a year of their marriage, John and Martha Prior were in Hillingdon End, a settlement on the road leading south-east out of Uxbridge. An abstract from 1824 of deeds from 1761 to 1791, relating to three messuages at Hillingdon End formerly belonging to John Prior, deceased shows that it must have been a busy time. An agreement of 20 December 1761 between John Campion (or Campeon), victualler of Hillingdon End, and John Prior, chairmaker, recites that John Prior had erected several buildings upon the estate of John Campeon at Hillingdon End during his tenure and occupation. A later abstract of May 1768 records the sale of the land to Richard Cooke of the parish of St George, Hanover Square, incorporating 'all those three messuages or tenements with the yards and gardens behind the same situate and lying at the Up End in the Parish of Hillingdon'.⁴⁴ This places John Prior in Uxbridge for enough time before December 1761 to have put up substantial buildings.

A 1770/71 billhead from John Prior, Windsor chair maker and turner, of Uxbridge, for work done for Lord Paget, receipted on 22 June 1771 has been found (Figure 18).⁴⁵ The billhead reads:

⁴² The National Archives, PROB-11-1368-94, will of Robert Pryor of 11 January 1802, Bricklayer of Dummer, Hampshire.

⁴³ The National Archives, PROB-11-1592-441, will of John Prior senior of 23 May 1817, transcribed in full at <https://lincolnshirechairs2019.blogspot.com/2020/05/the-will-of-john-prior-of-hillingdon.html>

⁴⁴ LMA, ACC/0538/2nd Dep/2158, Abstract of deeds relating to three messuages at Hillingdon End formerly belonging to John Prior, Dec'd.

⁴⁵ LMA, ACC/0446/H/22/10. In October 1771, John Dryer, chairmaker, of Hillingdon End, and Thomas Watkins of Hillingdon Lady Boarding School stood bail for one Nathaniel Cowdrey, accused of assault. This may be an unknown chairmaker or 'Dryer' may be a clerical error for 'Pryer'. LMA, MJ/SP/1771/10/013.



18 1771 Billhead from John Prior to Lord Paget, ACC/0446/H/22/10. © London Metropolitan Archives

Mr: The Right Hon^{ble} Lord Paget

Bought of John Prior,
WINDSOR CHAIR MAKER & TURNER;
Uxbridge, Middlesex

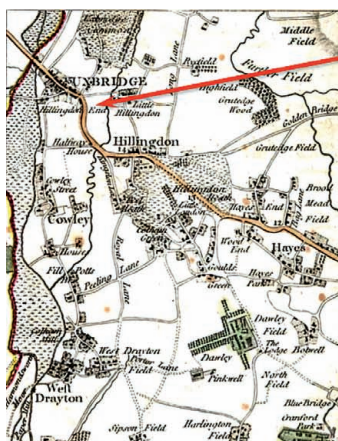
			£ — s — d
1770	August. 20.	Omitted in the Last Bill for 233 Rack Staves at 2d	1 = 18 = 10
	Novem. 10.	for mending the Garden Chaise & painting —	0 — 7 — 6
1771	Aprill 12	for Making a pole finding Iron work & painting the Garden Chaise —	0 — 10 — 0
			<u>£2 — 16 — 4</u>

June 22 1771 Rcd in full Mr John Prior —

Henry Bayly, 10th Baron Paget (in 1784 created, appropriately enough, 1st Earl of Uxbridge) lived at Dawley House, about three miles south-southeast of John Prior's workshop. Dawley House was sold and demolished before the end of the 1770s. The grounds are shown in Cary's 1786 map, south-southeast of Hillingdon and south-west of Hayes (Figure 19). The garden chaise, which needed painting, a pole and ironwork, probably resembled those used by the Cave and du Cane children (Figures 10 and 11). The rack staves would be for making hay racks for the stables or other forms of storage.

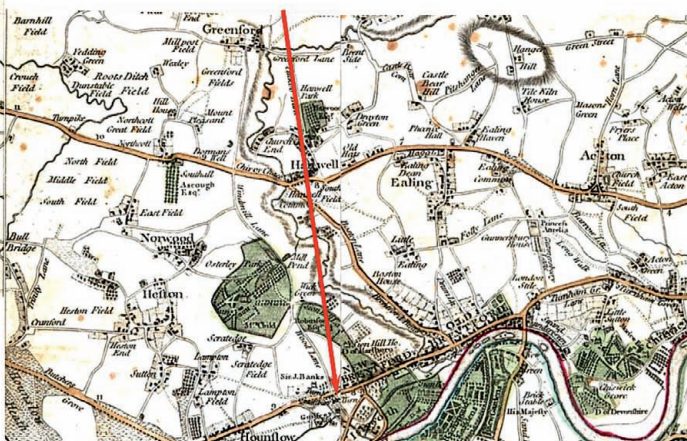
John Prior prospered at Uxbridge: his property holdings grew. On 29 October 1778 he acquired the freehold of a piece of ground and cottages there for £120, and then a further, apparently adjacent, parcel of land for £25 in 1795.⁴⁶ To understand the

⁴⁶ LMA, ACC/0503/0406 and 0407.



Collage map compiled from scan of John CARY. *Actual Survey of the Country fifteen miles round London*, London: for J. Cary, 1786.

Hillingdon End where John Prior snr. worked from 1761, about 8 miles by road from Smallbury Green, near Brentford End, where John Prior jnr. worked from 1788 to 1807.



19 From Hillingdon End, Uxbridge to Smallbury Green. © J. H. J. Parker

fortunes and growth of the Prior family a *dramatis personae* will assist. John Prior senior, 85, was buried at St John the Baptist's Church, Hillingdon on 2 June 1816. His will of 5 June 1807 with its codicil of 26 September 1814, proved on 23 May 1817, had such extraordinary ramifications in the lives of his children that it is essential to summarise here its structure and principal contents. The will and codicil run to 4,581 words.

John and Martha had fourteen children between 1761 and 1785:

- i) John junior (1761–1846) Windsor chair maker, hurdle maker and garden chair maker, m. Rebecca Minchener (1771–?);
- ii) William (1763–88) chair maker, who predeceased John senior;
- iii) Maria (1764–?) m. a man called Malcomb whose first name and trade are unknown;
- iv) Martha (1766–1813) m. Shadrack Trotman (1763–1817), millwright;
- v) Elizabeth (1768–1824) m. Richard Smewins (?–1845), chair and hurdle maker;
- vi) Thomas (1769–?) whose fate is unknown but he is not mentioned in his father's will;
- vii) Anne (1771–1790) who predeceased John senior;
- viii) Jane (1772–?1849) m. James Higgs (1767–1845), chair maker;
- ix) Mary (1774–1849) m. George Nash, a baker and one of John senior's two executors;
- x) Sarah (1776–1851) m. William Best (1777–1852), glue maker and cement dealer;
- xi) Rachael Sophia (1778–1826) m. Robert Austin (1779–1824), felt maker and hatter and the other of John senior's two executors;
- xii) Robert (1780–1853) Windsor chairmaker and hurdle maker, m. Ann Hall (1783–?);

- xiii) Charlotte (1782–?), who was unmarried at the time of her father's death; and
- xiv) Samuel (1785–1863) m. Louisa Phipps (1784–1862).

Probably by clerical oversight, John's wife Martha, who seems to have been a retailer of shoes, is never referred to by name, only as 'my said Wife'. There are also significant groups within the will. These are:

- i) 'my three sons' — the three chair making and hurdle making sons, John, Robert and Samuel;
- ii) 'my two sons' — Robert and Samuel, the pair of whom were 'severally' occupying premises at the time of John's death owned by him but separate to and different from the business premises occupied by John, which premises were to be offered under the will to Richard Smewins, their brother-in-law, and also a chair and hurdle maker; it is unclear whether these premises were a workshop or housing, but as the evidence will show, the former is more likely than the latter; and
- iii) 'all my sons and daughters' — eleven survivors in all: three sons as above and eight daughters.

John Prior's objectives by his will were as follows:

- i) equity between all surviving children: various daughters had had lifetime advances of up to £200. John junior had been advanced a loan of £150 but, unlike the advances to the daughters, it was interest bearing. Shadrick Trotman, husband of Martha, had been advanced £100, against which Shadrick had issued a promissory note, also interest-bearing. John senior set out to ensure that all eleven either kept what they had already had, or got a top-up to make their share £200. He hoped to achieve this for the eight daughters by distributing the proceeds of relatively liquid assets (money, debts owing to him, investments and securities for money). For the three sons he devised a more complex and ultimately disastrous arrangement which was predicated upon the stock-in-trade and the working implements being worth £600 or thereabouts, which could be distributed to the three sons as their £200. The stock and tools were to be independently valued. Any deficit under £600 was to be made up, if it could be, out of the more liquid assets. In the event of a surplus over £600, the three sons would have to pay in the excess (with interest) into a pot which would first be used to give his wife Martha an income, and after her death, to make sure all eleven children received £200;
- ii) subject to eventually achieving i), most assets in the meantime (including interest on the loan to John junior and the promissory note from Shadrick Trotman) were to be put to making sure that his wife Martha had an income for life (she kept the stock in her shoe retail business): that included renting John senior's workshop to John, Robert and Samuel jointly so that they could carry on the chair and hurdle making businesses;
- iii) after her death, everything was to be sold up to achieve i), if that had not already been achieved, subject to two very important options:
- iv) John junior, Robert and Samuel collectively had an option within six months of Martha's death, to buy 'the Messuages or Tenement and Premises which I now

- occupy and at which *I* carry on my several Trades or Businesses of a Chairmaker and a Hurdlemaker' (author's emphasis);
- v) Richard Smewins, daughter Elizabeth's husband, also a chair maker, had an option, within six months of Martha's death, to buy 'my Messuage or Tenement and Premises in Hillingdon End aforesaid *in the several Occupations of my said two sons Robert and Samuel and the said Richard Smewins*': it is plain that these premises were not the same as those offered to John junior, Robert and Samuel.

Thus far the patriarch under his will of 1807.

By September 1814, it is clear that John Prior senior could see that one of his cherished objectives, that his three sons should work together in the business, was under threat. The codicil contains clauses which require the three sons a) to work together, b) not to take advantage if one or other of the three should die, c) to admit any child or widow of any dying brother to a co-partnership on equal terms, and d) to prevent any brother or his heirs from gaining any financial advantage, even if the dying brother's children or widow declined to join, by requiring the survivor(s) to pay out in full a third to the estate of any dying brother, but that once such a payment out had been made, the declining child(ren) or widow should have no continuing claim on the remaining two thirds.

By these testamentary efforts to ensure fair play, John Prior senior might as well have tied his all sons together in a leather sack, with a rooster, a monkey, a dog and a viper, and thrown them in the Tiber. Such was the 'poena cullei' in Rome for parricide and after what happened next, one suspects that one or other Prior son might be forgiven for contemplating such an unfilial deed. Their father seems to have cared not a jot that his eldest son, John junior, was old enough to be the father of his two young brothers, to whom he was, by these decrees, to be so tightly bound, nor that the said youngsters might not fancy being bossed about by their older brother with his out-dated techniques. A scheme that looks, on paper, an untrammelled vision of Regency paternal fairness, led to woe and destruction within a remarkably short time.

It could not last: nor did it. How did the Priors arrive at such a pass? Little is known of the second son William. Assuming that he was apprenticed at fourteen to his father, he would have finished his apprenticeship in about 1784. In insurance policies of 1784 and 1786, he is mentioned as 'chair maker' occupying property 'near the church, Uxbridge' that was owned by William Best, a carpenter of Uxbridge.⁴⁷ William Best may have been the father of the William Best who later married William Prior's sister Sarah. So it would appear that William Prior had some separately occupied space shortly after gaining his freedom. It may not have been his own workshop: he was buried at St John the Baptist Hillingdon on 28 March 1788, with the legend 'Journeyman Chairma^r'.

Later that year, John Prior junior married Rebecca Minchener, on 14 June 1788 at Cookham in Berkshire. The Sarum Marriage Licence Bonds have him as chaisemaker (according to the transcription, which is intriguing) of the parish of Isleworth,

⁴⁷ LMA, CLC/B/192/F/001/MS11936/321/493019 and CLC/B/192/F/001/MS11936/335/515416. ROYAL AND SUN ALLIANCE INSURANCE GROUP.

Middlesex and her as a minor (she was born in 1771), daughter of John Minchener, innholder, Cookham. John Prior junior was not living at Uxbridge. He is found in 1788 land tax records for Isleworth for the first time as a tenant of Mr Palmer in Smallbury Green, near Brentford End, which is at the northern extremity of the parish of Isleworth, just west of the where the river Brent flowed into the Thames, and about eight miles east-southeast of Hillingdon End. Separate workshops, for father and eldest son, then, which was not to end until 1807.⁴⁸

Smallbury Green was sandwiched between two of the grandest suburban houses of the age: Osterley and Syon. Across the Thames was the King's palace of Kew, and within its gardens Sir William Chamber's Great Pagoda, completed in 1762 (Figure 19). Not a bad spot for a manufacturer of outside chairs and children's carriages to site himself. Prior's workshop was also within sight of Spring Grove, the country retreat of Sir Joseph Banks. Banks, President of the Royal Society, was the King's leading advisor at Kew Gardens and developed his own botanical garden at Spring Grove. On 6 July 1804, the *Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal* reported that on 'Tuesday evening their Majesties, in a post chariot, followed by the Princesses and attendants, in three coaches and four, took an airing, and honoured Sir Joseph Banks with a visit, at his house at Spring Grove, near Hounslow. The Royal Party returned to Kew about nine o'clock'. Another notice from the *Kentish Gazette*, on 21 August 1804, conveys something of the context in which chinoiserie garden furniture could still appeal to those in touch with fashion:

CURIOUS PLANTS, — A ship has recently arrived in the River from China, having on board a great number of Plants, most of them new to Europeans, which have been collected by a botanic gardener, which his Majesty, ever attentive to the interests of science, sent out some years ago to reside in China; they are expected, in the course of a few days, at the Royal Gardens at Kew, where Sir Joseph Banks is to inspect them, previous to his leaving Spring Grove, for his summer residence in Lincolnshire.

In the *Universal British Directory* of 1791, no Priors appear.⁴⁹ *Wakefield's Merchant and Tradesman's General Directory for London Westminster, Borough of Southwark and Twenty Two Miles Circular from St Pauls for 1794* has the following entries:

Prior, John, Sen. Windfor Chair Maker and Turner, Uxbridge.

Prior, John, junior, Wind. and Garden Chair Maker, Brentford-end.⁵⁰

John Prior senior was 63 and his son 33. There is also perhaps a difference in emphasis. Both told the directory compiler they made Windsor chairs: the father added his turning skills; the son chose rather to mention garden chairs.

On 9 August 1794 John and Martha Prior's daughter Jane married James Higgs at St Paul's, Hammersmith; the witnesses included Sarah, Sophia and John Prior who signed with a flourish. Whether it is father or son is hard to be certain. Both bride and groom are recorded as being 'of this parish'. That is of interest, because it hints at continuing contact between the Priors of Uxbridge and Hammersmith, parish of the

⁴⁸ *Victoria County History, Middlesex*, vol. 7, p. 113, and vol. 3, pp. 85–94.

⁴⁹ Barfoot (1791), p. 230. The entry for Uxbridge names no individuals.

⁵⁰ Wakefield (1794), p. 249.

Webb family of chairmakers. The earliest documentary proof that James Higgs was a chairmaker is found on 7 January 1803 at the baptism at St Margaret's, Uxbridge of their first child, John, where James Higgs's occupation is shown in the register as 'Chairma^r.'

Three documents from 1797 reveal more about the Priors. On 11 January 1797 at the Old Bailey

WILLIAM BUTLER and WILLIAM NASH were indicted for feloniously stealing, on the 16th of December, twenty pieces of timber, called beech-quartering, value 5s. five pieces of timber, called inch-beech board, value 5s. fourteen pieces of timber, called inch and a half plank, value 14s. a piece of timber, called half inch board, value 6d. and another piece of timber, called one inch and a quarter ash-timber, value 2s. the property of John Prior.

JOHN PRIOR *sworn*. — I am a chair-maker, at Hillingdon-end; I have known the prisoner Butler, seven years, and the other half a year; Butler was servant with me seven years, and Nash came to me after the harvest; in the night of the 16th of December, I was alarmed, but did not go out for fear of any body bursting in, the next morning I missed the timber.

WILLIAM ROBERTS *sworn*. — I am servant to the prosecutor; I had seen this timber a little before, in the morning; I went to Kensington Gravelpits, I overtook the waggon with the timber in it; I went to Marlborough-street, and got two constables, and they apprehended the prisoners.

WILLIAM HERON *sworn*. — I am a waggoner; I had this timber, at two o'clock in the morning, of the two prisoners, Nash and Butler; they told me I was to bring it to London, and they would meet me there.

Q. Do you remember being stopped, and the timber taken from you? — A. Yes; Roberts stopped me and claimed the timber.

ROBERT HILLS *sworn*. — I keep a timber-yard, in George-street, Grosvenor-square; I know nothing of this timber.

JOHN WARREN *sworn*. — I am a constable belonging to Marlborough-street: On Saturday the 17th of December, I apprehended the prisoners in George-street, Grosvenor-square, they were unloading the timber, they had taken out two pieces; I told them that they were my prisoners, they asked me what it was for, and I told them.

Prior. I know this to be my timber, I know it by the length, and by a remarkable shake in the timber; I cut this piece out myself, and it is a little matter cracked.

Prisoner Nash. All timber is shook in the heart of it.

Prior. This piece of ash I have had by me a long time.

Roberts. I know the ash by the rind gall at the top.

Butler's defence. I am not guilty, I went to help Nash, that is all I know about it.

Nash's defence. I bought it of Mr. Prior, I have bought a great deal of timber from him.

Court. (To *Prior*.) Q. Did you ever sell any to Nash? — A. I never sold him any beech in my life, nor ash.

Butler, GUILTY (Aged 34).

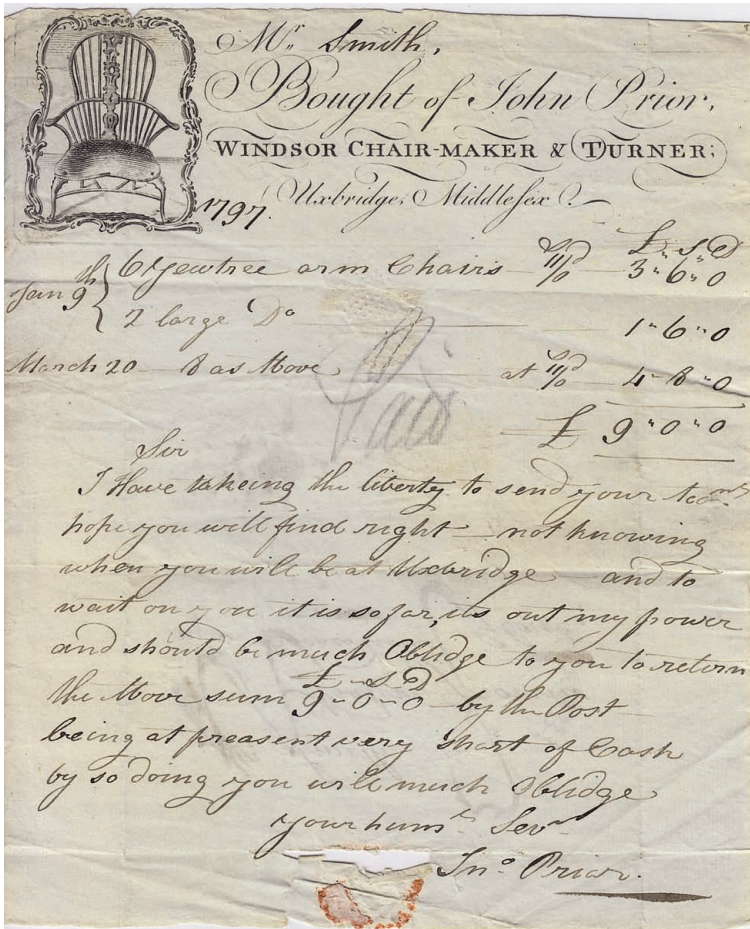
Nash, GUILTY (Aged 30.)

Confined two years in the House of Correction, and fined 1s.

*Tried by the second Middlesex Jury, before Mr. Justice HEATH.*⁵¹

On February 1797, Jeremiah Lattemore, or Lattiemore, chair maker of Hillingdon End, composed a will leaving 'all my Money Cloaths Goods working Tools and all

⁵¹ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 22 May 2020), January 1797, trial of WILLIAM BUTLER WILLIAM NASH (t17970111-23).



20 1797 Billhead
with letter from
John Prior.
© J. H. J. Parker

other of my Effects to my well beloved Wife Amelia' (whom he married in 1778 at Hillingdon: he is likely to have been twenty-one by then so was probably born 1757 or earlier). Lattemore's will, proved at London on 14 April 1804, was witnessed by John Prior, Thomas Lake and Elizabeth Prior. John could be either father or son; Elizabeth was John junior's wife. Lattemore may originally have been apprenticed to a wheelwright, which is of interest because the Prior family made children's carriages and chaises and other chairs with wheels.⁵² A man with a wheelwright's skills would have been useful.

The author acquired in December 2019 on eBay from a dealer in ephemera, a billhead of John Prior senior, addressed on the reverse to 'Mr. Smith / Norton Gowns / near Broadway / Glouc.,' The side with the printed billhead contains both an invoice and a short letter (Figure 20):

⁵² The National Archives, PROB-11-1407-148, Will of Jeremiah Lattemore of 14 April 1804, Chair maker of Hillingdon End, Middlesex. Thomas Robinson of Soundridge, Hertfordshire, Wheelwright, in 1767 took as apprentice Jeremiah Lattemore for a premium of £12 12s. 0d. (National Archives, IR1/25 f 122).

Mr. Smith,
 Bought of John Prior,
 WINDSOR CHAIR MAKER & TURNER ;
 Uxbridge, Middlesex
 1797

			£	s	d
Jan 9 th	{	6 Yewtree arm Chairs	@11 ^s /0 ^d	3	6 0
		2 large D ^o		1	6 0
March 20		8 as above	@11 ^s /0 ^d	4	8 0
				<u>£9</u>	<u>0 0</u>

Sir

I have takeing the liberty to send your Acc^{nts}. hope you will find right — not knowing when you will be at Uxbridge — and to wait on you it is so far, its out my power and should be much Oblidge to return the above sum $\frac{£}{9} - \frac{s}{0} - \frac{d}{0}$ — by the Post — being at preasent very short of Cash by so doing you will much Oblidge

Your hum^{le}. Ser^t.
 Jn^o. Prior.

Given that Holden's triennial directories for 1802 to 1804 and 1805 to 1807 both list 'Prior John, windsor chair maker, Brentford' (1802) and 'Brentford end' (1805), it would appear likely that in 1797, John junior was still running a separate business from John senior and that it is the latter whose plaintive begging letter is to hand. The letter met its mark as the word 'Paid' is pencilled in the middle of the billhead.

John Prior's yew tree armchairs were eleven shillings each and the large ones thirteen shillings each. Dated prices are rare. It is known from William Sergeant's article in this Journal in 2018 that Joseph Newton of Fenton in Lincolnshire was charging seven shillings and sixpence plus carriage in 1725 and 1729.⁵³ In the intervening seventy years the price appears to have gone up by about half.

What can be known of Mr Smith, the slow payer for sixteen yewtree armchairs? On 14 October 1801, the *Hereford Journal* (and a week earlier, the *Sun* of London) advertised:

TO BREEDERS OF STOCK.
 TO SOLD BY AUCTION,
 On Tuesday, the Third day of November, 1801,
 and Two following Days,

At WILLIAM SMITH'S, at Norton-Grounds, near Campden, in the county of Gloucester [sic], (who is leaving the Farm,)

THE whole of his STOCK ; comprising One Hundred and Thirty-one Herefordshire, India, French, Scotch, and Cross-bred Cows, Bulls, Heifers, Oxen, and Weaning Calves, (principal part of which are Herefordshire,) viz. Eighteen Fat Cows, Fifteen Cows in Calf, Twenty-seven Heifers in Calf, Sixteen Oxen, Four Yearling ditto, Eight Yearling Heifers, Twenty-

⁵³ Sergeant (2018), p. 93.

one Weaning Cow Calves, Four Weaning Ox ditto, Five Bull Calves, Three Bulls. —And Eight Hundred and Twenty-five New Leicestershire Sheep, viz. Four [sic] Hundred and Fourteen Ewes and Theaves, Ram'd ; One Hundred and Eight Shearhogs, Fat; Two Hundred and Eighty-three Lambs, Eight Rams, and Twelve Ram Lambs.

The above Herefordshire and Leicestershire Stock is bred from a selection of the improved Stocks the most eminent Breeders in the respective counties, according to the following system:—That the united properties of softness and firmness of texture, and lightness of offal, must yield the greatest and most valuable quantity of Animal from a given quantity of Vegetable Food ; requiring no merit from a state of maturity, obtained by a forcing and expensive food applied for a length of time.

The Proprietor requests the public to ask calculation, if good Breeding Stock was ever bought too dear ? or if bad can be worth the money ?

The Stock may be viewed any day, but it will be numbered and arranged for that purpose on the Monday before the sale. N B. Stabling for several hundred horses will be procured, and every possible accommodation provided for the company.

Catalogues, with descriptions and references, to be had at the King's Head Inn, in Smithfield, London; the Printing-Office, at Waterford, Ireland ; and at the Place of Sale.

The Sale to begin at Ten o'clock precisely each morning, which will be punctually observed. And on Friday and Saturday following, will be Sold by Auction, at the said place, the whole of the *Household Furniture*; Catalogues of which will be distributed in the neighbourhood in good time.

☛ This Advertisement will not be repeated.

On 13 November 1801 the *Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal* told the story of the sale:

On Tuesday the 3d inst. commenced Mr. Smith's sale of cattle and sheep on Norton Grounds, in the county of Gloucester. This sale engaged the attention of breeders of every description, from all parts of the kingdom. Mr. Smith, the owner, displayed his usual singularity, by selling them himself, and a method of performing it. The breeds of cattle were principally the Hereford, and those of the sheep were the New Leicester. The great prices which they brought sufficiently determine the public opinion of their value; the best cows sold from £30 to £50 each, and the best ewes from 5 to 6 guineas each.

Mr Smith was plainly a man of substance if his stock sale in Gloucestershire was worth advertising at Smithfield and Waterford. The tone of Mr Smith's advertisement and the sardonic comment on his style of sale leaves one feeling that John Prior did well to get paid for his yewtree armchairs before the chairs themselves were sold off the weekend after the sheep. A splendid cow would have bought you seven dozen or so of John Prior senior's chairs, a decent ewe about ten.

John Prior, or Pryor, junior appears as a tenant in the land tax records at Smallbury Green in Isleworth as late as 1807 under a variety of landlords and landladies by which time his notional rent was £12 per annum. By 1808 there is a different tenant where John Prior had been for many years. What brought him back to Uxbridge? It may not be coincidental that John Prior senior made his will in June 1807. He was 76. A bout of ill-health is not an uncommon cause of will-writing. One suspects he may have asked his eldest son to come back from Brentford End and that John junior returned after an absence of not far off twenty years.

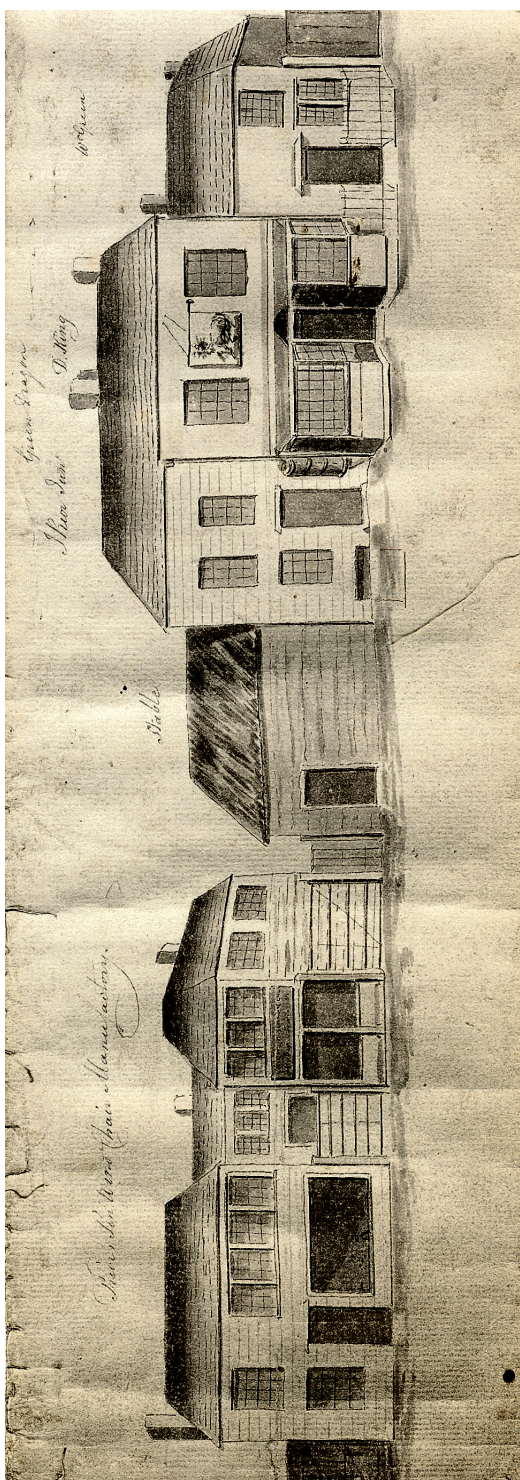
John Prior senior's land tax record contains some interesting hints about different periods of activity. The land tax assessments for 1767 and 1780 to 1833 have been

examined (the years 1801, 1823 and 1827 being unavailable). Land tax was assessed upon an individual's property estimated by local assessors after enquiry. It was levied at varying rates upon a notional rent for the property owned. John Prior is variously spelled Pryer, Prior and Pryor. Between 1780 and 1811 he rented a property from a family variously spelled Stats, States, Stails, Staits, Straits, Stale, Slate and State. The sum assessed was 10s. on Prior's rent of £2 10s. between 1780 and 1796. Between 1797 and 1799 it was 8s. 9d. on a rent of £5. From 1800 to John's death in 1816/17 it was 14s. on a rent of £8. There was no revaluation of the values for land tax purposes between its instigation in 1692 and its abolition in 1963. An increased 'rent' and assessment must therefore mean that the property itself had improved in some significant way leading to an increased assessed property value and thence notional rent and assessment. From 1812 until 1822 the proprietor is shown as Stone and after John Prior's death for the last four years the occupant is shown as Mr Nash (John Prior's son-in-law and executor, George). 1823 is missing but after 1824 the property no longer seems to have a connection to the Prior family.

Prior himself is shown as the proprietor of a property from 1780 onwards (which he had already probably owned or had an interest in since the early 1760s). 1794 is the first year in which he himself is shown as both proprietor and occupier. Before that the series of occupants is Matt Phipps in 1780, Mr Bodey (or Boody or Body or Boddy) from 1781 to 1788, and from 1788 to 1792, Mr Jennings (who was plainly easier to spell). Throughout that time the notional rent was £2 and the assessment due 8s. In 1793, the occupier for that year was Wm. Reid, but the notional rent had trebled to £6 and the assessment increased to £1 4s. There it stayed in 1794, John Prior's first year as both proprietor and occupier, but the notional rent increased to £8 in 1795 and 1796 and the assessment to £1 12s. From 1797 to 1799 the notional rent was £22 and the assessment £1 18s. 6d. In 1798 the notional rent increased for the last time to £25 and the assessment to £2 3s. 9d. There both stayed until 1833.

In 1800 and 1802–5 the occupier is 'Himself & Others'. The John Prior shown as the occupier between 1817 and 1820 must be John Prior junior, as his father was dead. For 1821–22 'Mrs Prior' is both proprietor and occupier. 1823 is missing. For 1824–26 'Widow Prior' is both proprietor and occupier. 1827 is missing. In 1828 'Late Mrs Prior' is proprietor and occupier and, for the first time, the detail 'Cottages &c' is shown. From 1829–33, the end of the available records, the proprietor is Samuel Hull junior (whose father appears elsewhere in the Hillingdon land tax records from at least the 1790s) and the occupier is 'Late Mrs Prior' with successively 'Land & Cottages' (1829) and thereafter 'Land' as the added detail. The Hulls were a local Quaker family. Samuel Hull senior (1763–1819) was a miller and mealman. Samuel Hull junior (1798–1880) succeeded his father in those businesses and also built up a portfolio of properties which he rented. One of those was to be the Prior workshop. As will be seen below, the reason for the change from John Prior junior back to Widow Prior was that he had got into financial trouble.

It seems likely on considering the above assessments that some tentative deductions may at least be proposed. Before 1794, John Prior senior cannot, perhaps, have been using all his space as he had tenants. None of them appear in Wakefield's Directory for 1794 so their occupations are currently unknown. Over the relatively short period from 1792 to 1798, the notional rent goes from £2 to £25 in a series of uneven leaps.



21 W. J. Burgiss, section from a panorama of Uxbridge High Street, c. 1810. Courtesy of Hillingdon Libraries

One suspects that very considerable improvements to the establishments were made in this period. Given that John Prior senior had been running his chair-making business on or near this site for more than thirty years, the refurbishment may well have been necessary but it is no wonder that in 1797 in his letter to Mr Smith of Norton Grounds, he was feeling the pinch in his cash flow. A panorama of Uxbridge High Street, drawn by W.J. Burgiss in around 1810, shows an extensive workshop premises, to the left, which is described above as 'Prior & Son. Wind. Chair Manufactory' (Figure 21). To the right is the house of John Prior junior, which shows that he had by this time returned from Brentford End.⁵⁴

John Prior senior's third son, Robert, appeared as a witness at the Old Bailey on 30 October 1811, the victim of theft. The court record sheds some light on the family businesses although it is unclear whether the Mrs Prior referred to is Robert's mother or wife. The former was 71 at this point, and was to be left the stock-in-trade of the shoe shop a few years later. The proceedings were as follows:

THOMAS RAWBONE and JOSEPH GRAINGE were indicted for feloniously stealing, on the 8th of October, a pair of shoes, value 10s. the property of Robert Prior, privately in his shop.

ROBERT PRIOR. I live in Hillingdon-lane, I am a Windsor chair maker, and shopkeeper. On Tuesday, October the 8th, about half past seven in the evening, the two prisoners came into the shop, Rawbone said he wanted a pair of light shoes to run a race that evening for a guinea by moon-light; he tried three or four pair on; Grainge sat on the counter, and directly they went out I suspected them. In about half an hour after Edward Brown produced to me a pair of high shoes, I believe they are mine. I missed a pair of high shoes from off a shelf by the door. Mrs. Prior was in the shop, she is not here.

EDWARD BROWN. I am a constable of Uxbridge. I took the prisoners about three hundred yards from Mr. Prior's shop. I met Mr. Prior in the street, he told me that he had been robbed of a pair of high shoes; he described the men, I took them by that description. I searched them, I found a pair of high shoes in Rawbone's pocket; Rawbone said he bought them; Mr. Prior claimed them in the prisoner's presence.

Rawbone said nothing in his defence.

Grainge's Defence. I am a soldier, I was recruiting in the town. I met the prisoner in the afternoon, he is a stranger to me. In the course of the evening he told me he was going to buy a pair of shoes; he went to Mr. Prior's shop; he tried a great many pair on; I did not know that he had a pair of shoes about him.

RAWBONE - GUILTY, aged 29,

Of stealing, but not privately.

Confined Six Months in the House of Correction, and Whipped in Jail.

GRAINGE - NOT GUILTY.

First Middlesex jury, before Mr. Common Serjeant.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Reproduced three times: in Cotton (1990), p. 77, fig. TV 150, in Gilbert (1991), p. 116, fig. 181, and in Crispin (1992), p. 112.

⁵⁵ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 18 May 2020), 30 October 1811, trial of THOMAS RAWBONE JOSEPH GRAINGE (t18111030-59).

On 9 November 1813, John Prior, chair maker (either father or son), Robert Austin, hatter and George Nash, baker (both either sons- or brothers-in-law of the said John Prior), all of Uxbridge, are listed as creditors of John Hodder of Marylebone, Birmingham and Swansea, gentleman, whose insolvent petition is listed in *The London Gazette*.⁵⁶

On 2 June 1816 John Prior senior's long life ended. His will was proved on 23 May 1817. Six months later and within eighteen months of his death, on 29 November 1817, a notice appeared in *The London Gazette*:

THE Partnership between John Prior, Robert Prior, and Samuel Prior, all of the Parish of Hillingdon, in the County of Middlesex, Chair and Hurdle Makers, at the Parish of Hillingdon aforesaid, under the firm of John, Robert, and Samuel Prior, is this day dissolved by mutual consent, as from the 25th day of December last past. — Witness our hands the 10th day of November 1817. John Prior. Robt. Prior. Samuel Prior.⁵⁷

Samuel Prior had plainly had enough of his brothers, or perhaps it was the other way about. The dissolution was backdated to Christmas Day 1816, not even seven months after John Prior senior's death. Samuel moved eleven miles east north-east to Cricklewood and set himself up there.

A lone billhead survives from the John and Robert Prior days.⁵⁸ Samuel Hull, father and son, have already made their appearance. Given that Samuel senior died in 1819, this bill from 1820 must be made out to Samuel junior. It reads:

Mr. Samuel Hull

Bought of J & R Prior, WINDSOR CHAIR MAKER & TURNER;
Uxbridge, Middlesex
Wholesale Retail & for Exportation

1820		s — d
March 20	2 bundles Espallier Stakes	3 — 2
April 3	7 Harbor [i.e.: arbour] Poles	2 — 4
The 10	30 Small D ^o	2 — 0
	7 bundles pea sticks	2 — 8
11	11 Harbor Poles	4 — 6
		<u>14 — 8</u>

On 16 January 1821 a further notice appeared in *The London Gazette*:

THE Partnership between John Prior and Robert Prior, both of the Parish of Hillingdon, in the County of Middlesex, Chair and Hurdle Makers, at the Parish of Hillingdon aforesaid, under the firm of John and Robert Prior, is this day dissolved by mutual consent, as from the 4th day of May last past.—Witness our hands the 13th day of January 1821.

John Prior.

Robert Prior.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *The London Gazette*, 9 November 1813, issue 16804, p. 2222, 'John Prior and others, creditors of John Hodder'.

⁵⁷ *The London Gazette*, 29 November 1817, issue 17309, p. 2421.

⁵⁸ Reproduced in Cotton (1990), fig. TV 150, p.76, and in Gilbert (1991), fig. 182, p. 116. The original is in Hillingdon Libraries Archive.

⁵⁹ *The London Gazette*, 16 January 1821, issue 17669, p. 124.

The dissolution was backdated to 4 May 1820. The remaining brothers' partnership therefore ran from 25 December 1816 to 4 May 1820, just over three years and four months. Their father's hopes were not to be realised in the way he had so carefully tried to orchestrate. Events were not to prove kind to John junior and Robert. John junior, it will be recalled, had borrowed £150 from his father which, together with interest on the advance, was due to John senior's estate. Perhaps it was the financial pressure of the debt or simply that business on his own account was neither profitable nor brisk. He was not to be saved from ruin. On 12 October 1822 the *Windsor and Eton Express* advertised:

HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE, FIXTURES,
AND
CHAIR-MAKERS' STOCK-IN-TRADE,
UXBRIDGE, MIDDLESEX.
TO SOLD BY AUCTION,
By NEWMAN and MURRAY,
Upon the Premises,
On FRIDAY, OCTOBER the 18th, at Eleven o'clock,
For the Benefit of the Creditors of Mr. John Prior;

THE STOCK consists of Windsor chairs and stools of various patterns and sizes, children's chaises and waggons, four-wheel garden chairs, several painted rustic garden seats, Gothic chairs and tables, German stools, a large quantity of chair tops and bows, elm, cherry, and yew tree boards, turned chair legs, banisters, and stretchers, cherry-tree, box, and yew-tree; hurdles, stakes, and alder poles, five work benches and six vices, two turning lathes, grindstone, and various other articles.

The FURNITURE and FIXTURES comprise a four-post bedstead and furniture, feather bed and bedding; dining and pillar and claw tables, pier glasses, chairs, carpets, Bath and Rumford stoves,⁶⁰ sixteen gallon copper, painted deal partitions, with framed doors, &c. &c.

May be viewed the day preceding and morning of sale.—Catalogues may had at the Inns in the neighbourhood ; on the Premises ; and of Messrs. Newman and Murray, auctioneers and appraisers, Uxbridge and Hayes.

Whilst it is sad that John junior fell on hard times, the furniture historian is grateful for the diligence of Messrs Newman and Murray in a dated listing of the products he made. It is clear now why he may have chosen to describe himself as 'chaisemaker' at the time of his wedding thirty-four years before. It is interesting to compare John junior's stock with the Webb & Bunce list of c. 1805 set out above: the seating elements show a very comparable range.

In Pigot's directories for 1823 and 1826, both John junior and Robert each appear twice, on separate lines, for what are now known to be separate firms, once as 'Chair Makers — Windsor' and once as 'Hurdle Makers'. For John junior had to continue to work in spite of his insolvency. His arrangement with his creditors, a significant

⁶⁰ 'A Bath stove is a large grate that goes in the opening of a fireplace; it is very similar to what would later be called a hob grate. Bath stoves had appeared in the second half of the eighteenth century and represented an improvement in fireplace design, though they did not work as efficiently as the more recent Rumford stove or fireplace [...]' Austen (2013), p. 397. Sir Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford, FRS (1753-1814) was a physicist and inventor.

presence amongst whom will have been his father's executors and brothers-in-law, George Nash and Robert Austin, took fifteen months to negotiate. On 24 January 1824 the *Windsor and Eton Express* announced:

NOTICE TO CREDITORS. Creditors of John Prior, Uxbridge, Chair maker, who has executed the deed of assignment and release, may, on application to Mr. Wyatt Grainge, of Uxbridge, after the First day of February next, receive a Dividend of Nine Shillings in the Pound, on their respective debts. January 23, 1824.

One of the brother-in-law executors, Robert Austin, was buried on 1 June 1824 at St John the Baptist, Hillingdon, age 45, and was followed to the grave on 27 September 1826 by his wife Rachel Sophia, a Prior sister, age 48. They had eight children, some of whom were still very young, who stood to inherit their mother's share in due course.

On 8 April 1827, Martha Prior, widow of John Prior senior died, age 87. She was buried at St John the Baptist, Hillingdon a week later. The will of her late husband, nearly eleven years dead, required, within six months (by 8 October 1827, therefore), that all three chair making brothers exercise their option to acquire John Prior senior's workshop, if they so wished, and also that the premises occupied by Robert, Samuel and Richard Smewins some twenty years previously at the time of the will in 1807, be offered to Richard Smewins or his wife Elisabeth. The latter was already dead: buried at St John the Baptist, Hillingdon on 29 April 1824, some three years before her mother. The fate of Richard Smewins is unknown. But from what follows neither option was exercised. This is unsurprising: Samuel had been away in Cricklewood for ten years; John junior had lost everything very recently; and no brother appears to have wished to work in partnership with any other brother after 1820.

George Nash was the surviving executor. He pressed on with his duties. On 13 October 1827, less than a week after the expiry of the option date, in the *Windsor and Eton Express* he placed two advertisements, both repeated a week later. Firstly:

ELIGIBLE INVESTMENT.
VALUABLE FREEHOLD PROPERTY,
At the Entrance of the Town of Uxbridge.
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
By HERON and TRUMPER,
On THURSDAY, the 25th of OCTOBER, 1827, at Two o'clock,
At the KING'S ARMS INN, UXBRIDGE, Middlesex,
IN FOUR LOTS,
By order of the surviving Devisee in Trust of late
Mr. John Prior, deceased ;

COMPRISING all that extensive Range of BUILDING, Workshops, Messuages, Yards, and Gardens, situate at Hillingdon End, Uxbridge, which have for so many years been occupied by Messrs. Priors, as Windsor and garden chair manufacturers; together with the two Cottages adjoining. The whole of which will be divided into lots suitable for any business requiring room, or for the erection of genteel residences; and presents a singularly eligible opportunity for the investment of capital. The whole is Freehold and Tithe Free.

May viewed any time previous to the sale ; printed particulars with conditions may be had on the premises; of T. W. Walford, Esq. solicitor, Uxbridge ; and Heron and Trumper's office, Uxbridge, Middlesex, where a plan of the respective lots may be seen.

And secondly:

FREEHOLD ESTATES,
NEAR THE TOWN OF UXBRIDGE, MIDDLESEX.
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
By Mr. MURRAY,
At the KING'S ARMS INN, UXBRIDGE,
On THURSDAY, the 25th day of OCTOBER, at Two o'clock.
By direction the surviving Devisee in trust for sale, under the
will of the late Mr. JOHN PRIOR,
IN FIVE LOTS,

TWO genteel brick and tiled MESSUAGES with gardens, situate fronting the road, near to Uxbridge Common, in the tenures of Mr. George Pearman, and Mrs. Minshall, at a rental of sixteen pounds per annum.

Two well built Tenements, a Smith's Shop and Premises, Two Timber and Tiled Cottages, with barn, stables, and yard, situate at Hillingdon End, on the verge of the Park of R. H. Cox, Esq. in the several occupations of John Servant, Thomas Clark, and John Arthur, or his undertenants, at rents amounting to £31 16s. per annum. This property is all Freehold, and is pleasantly situated near to the town of Uxbridge, in the parish of Hillingdon, and county of Middlesex.

May be viewed any time previous to the sale, by leave of the tenants. Descriptive particulars, with conditions of sale, may be had at the inns in the neighbourhood; at Garraway's Coffee house, Change Alley, Cornhill; of T. W. Walford, Esq. Solicitor, Uxbridge; and of Mr. Murray, Auctioneer, General Agent and Appraiser, Uxbridge, Middlesex.

George Nash was dead within a month. The husband of Mary Prior was himself buried at the Providence Chapel, Uxbridge on 20 November 1827, aged 57. It is unclear who succeeded George Nash as executor and devisee in trust. Whoever it was found themselves still the owner of John Prior senior's main workshop. The reserve cannot have been met in October 1827, because on 29 November 1828 a further auction was billed in the *Windsor and Eton Express*:

CAPITAL BUILDING MATERIALS,
Erections of Workshops, Sheds, Cottages, &c.
HILLINGDON END, UXBRIDGE, MIDDLESEX.
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
By HERON and TRUMPER,
On THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4. at Two o'clock,
On the Premises at HILLINGDON END,
Late in the occupation of Messrs. Prior, Chair Makers:

Lot I. THE Whole of the Erection of a large substantial timber and tiled Workshop, 45ft. by 20ft. with good sound rafters, beams, plates, girders, floors, tiles and other materials.

Lot II.—The whole of the Erection of a large timber tiled Workshop, with lean-tos, and all partitions and materials belonging to the building.

Lot III. —The whole of the Erection of a large timber and tiled Front Shop, with the partitions, floors, and all materials belonging to the building.

Lot IV. —The whole of the Erection of the Back shop with Double Span Roof, tiles, girders, joists, and all materials belonging to the building.

Lot V. —The Erection of a timber and tiled Cottage, at the east end of former building, with all the materials belonging to the building.

Lot VI.—The Erection of Two Cottages, with all the materials belonging to the same.

Lot VII.—A capital Lead Pump and Pipe.

Lot VIII.—A large Stone Cistern, on brick piers.

May viewed any time previous to the sale. —Printed particulars may be had at Heron and Trumper's Auction and Estate Office, Uxbridge, Middlesex.

The land tax records show that the buyer was Samuel Hull junior.

Within a week, Robert Prior was back in the witness box at the Old Bailey, giving evidence about his stolen monogrammed handkerchief. On 4 December 1828, in front of the

Third Middlesex Jury — before Mr. Justice Littledale. EDWIN *alias* EDWARD HARRIS, *alias* EDWARD NUTTING, and WILLIAM WOODWARD, were indicted for feloniously breaking and entering the dwelling-house of Charles Tolley, on the 25th of October, at Hillingdon, and stealing therein 5 spoons value 30s. his property; 1 handkerchief, value 6d., the goods of Robert Prior; and 2 shirts, value 6s., the goods of Thomas George Stamper.

MR. BOLLAND conducted the prosecution.

CHARLES TOLLEY. I am a chair-maker, and live on Uxbridge-common; my wife died a fortnight or three weeks after this robbery; she took in washing for different people. On Friday, the 24th of October, I was at home — my family consisted of nobody but my wife and myself; we went to bed about ten o'clock; I fastened the doors myself — we arose about six o'clock in the morning — and on coming down stairs I found the back-door wide open — a large hole was cut out of it with a circular centre-bit that enabled them to open the door; I missed two baskets of linen, which belonged to Mr. Stamper, Mr. Prior, and others — some of it was our own; I lost two silver table and six silver tea-spoons, two pairs of metal sugar-tongs, and a pair of shoes; the spoons were marked T — I had had them thirty years; I went and informed the constable — he came and examined the house; I saw the spoons on the following Monday, in pawn, at Mrs. Harford's shop at Windsor; I saw some linen before the Magistrate at the King's Arms, where the prisoners were examined — it was part of the linen stolen that night; I saw two shirts belonging to Thomas George Stamper, and a handkerchief of Mr. Robert Prior's; I had seen the spoons about a week before the robbery in a corner-cupboard; my wife had the care of the shirts; I had not noticed them.

GEORGE RADNOR. I am assistant to Mrs. Harford, pawnbroker, of Windsor. On the 25th of October, before twelve o'clock in the morning, Harris came and pawned two silver table-spoons and six silver tea-spoons, they have the letter T on them; I asked him if it was his own property — he said it was; I asked his name — he said Thomas Taylor, and that he lived at Woodward's, at Langley; Tolley saw the spoons on the Tuesday.

Prisoner HARRIS. Q. Am I the man who pawned the spoons, or did I come to buy a hat that day? A. You came to pawn the spoons.

Prisoner HARRIS. I went to his house that day about half-past five o'clock to buy a hat — he said he had but one in the shop. Witness. He never came to buy a hat to my knowledge; nor did I see him at half-past five to my knowledge.

CHARLES TOLLEY. These spoons are mine, I have not the least doubt of them — I had seen them about a week before the robbery; I rent the house myself; my wife's name was Mary.

Prisoner HARRIS. Q. Did you say before the Magistrate that you had not seen the spoons for a month before? A. I said no such thing.

Q. The Magistrate asked if you could swear to them you said No; but you believed your wife could? A. No; nothing of the kind passed.

WILLIAM REID. I am constable of Hillingdon. I know Tolley's house — it is in Hillingdon parish; the prisoners were brought to me on the Tuesday, in custody from Brentford, to

Hillingdon; I took a shirt off each of their backs; I produce them, and Woodward had this handkerchief round his neck.

Prisoner HARRIS. They said their shirts were marked, neither of them are.

Prisoner WOODWARD. They could not swear to the shirts or handkerchief.

WILLIAM REID. The shirts were positively sworn to by Mrs. Tolley.

ROBERT PRIOR. Mrs. Tolley washed for me — she had a week's washing of our's at the time of the robbery; there was a handkerchief of mine marked with my initials, in the middle, with the same coloured silk as the handkerchief; I saw this handkerchief before the Magistrate, and swore to it — I have no doubt about it; it was delivered to Mrs. Tolley to wash on the Tuesday previous — it was marked R.P. — the letters have been picked out, but there is sufficient left to show where they have been; I did not deliver the things to Mrs. Tolley myself.

BENJAMIN SMITH. I was before the Magistrate when Mrs. Tolley was examined — this deposition (looking at it) is in the Magistrate's hand-writing, and is signed Richard Henry Cox — I saw him sign it, and saw Mrs. Tolley put her mark to it; I am clerk to Mr. Walford, the attorney for the prosecution; her examination was taken in the prisoners' presence, and it was read over to her in their presence — she made her mark to it, and the Magistrate signed it in their presence; she was sworn before she gave her evidence.

The deposition was here read as follows:-

MARY TOLLEY, wife of the above named Charles Tolley, on oath saith, that she put the above named spoons into her cupboard, down stairs; the spoons now produced are the same; that she takes in linen to wash — that the night before her house was broken open, there was the following linen, as near as she can remember: three neck handkerchiefs, one table-cloth, one table-napkin, two frilled shirts, and one calico night-shirt, belonging to Mr. Stamper; there was a yellow silk handkerchief belonging to Mr. Prior; the two shirts now produced she believes to be the property of Mr. Stamper, and are those which were stolen from her house: the silk handkerchief now produced she believes to be the property of Mr. Prior, and the same that was stolen from her house; two plain shirts, one muslin handkerchief, one lace cap, two night-caps, a petticoat, and an under flannel waistcoat, a child's shift, one large table-cloth, three aprons, two towels, and four pair of stockings, were also stolen.

The mark of X MARY TOLLEY.

Sworn before me this 28th of October, 1828, R. H. Cox.

WILLIAM REED. The sheets and handkerchief which were taken from the prisoners, were shewn to Mrs. Tolley — the house is in Middlesex.

CHARLES TOLLEY. My wife only washed for one Mr. Stamper — he is a clergyman; he [sic] Christian names are Thomas George.

HARRIS' *Defence*. On the Saturday at twelve o'clock, when the pawnbroker says the spoons were pawned, I was at Belfont at dinner — I did not get to his shop till half-past five o'clock in the afternoon, when I went to buy a hat; he said he had but one and that was too large.

WOODWARD'S *Defence*. I know nothing of the spoons — I went to Windsor next morning, and we both came back together.

HARRIS — GUILTY — DEATH. Aged 21.

WOODWARD — GUILTY — DEATH. Aged 21.⁶¹

⁶¹ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 12 May 2020), December 1828, trial of EDWIN alias EDWARD HARRIS, alias EDWARD NUTTING WILLIAM WOODWARD (t18281204-56).

The death sentences were commuted to transportation. Harris was transported for life, Woodward for life or twenty-one years, to Van Diemen's Land. They sailed on 24 March 1829 on board the *Lady Harewood* and arrived in Australia on 28 July 1829. Robert Prior had made an inadvertent contribution to exports but not the type he solicited on his billhead with his brother.⁶² Charles Tolley married Mary Mount at Uxbridge on 11 July 1765. He may therefore have been working with John Prior senior and his sons from the earliest days.⁶³

Robert Prior may be forgiven if he were distracted whilst giving his evidence: his own creditors were closing in. On 23 December 1828 bankruptcy proceedings against him began. *The London Gazette*:

Whereas a Commission of Bankrupt is awarded and issued forth against Robert Prior, of the Parish of Hillingdon, in the County of Middlesex, Chair Maker and he being declared a Bankrupt is hereby required to surrender himself to the Commissioners in the said Commission named, or the major part of them, on the 30th day of December instant, the 6th day of January next, and on the 3d day of February following, at 11 o'clock in the Forenoon on each day, at the Court of Commissioners of Bankrupts in Basinghall-Street in the City of London, and make a full discovery and disclosure of his estate and effects; where and when the Creditors are to come prepared to prove their debts, and at the second sitting to choose Assignees and that at the last sitting in the said Bankrupt is required to finish his examination and the Creditors are to assent to or dissent from the allowance of his certificate. All persons indebted to said Bankrupt, or that have any of his effects, are not to pay or deliver the same but to whom the Commissioners shall appoint, but give notice to Messrs. Poole, Greenfield and Co., Solicitors, Gray's Inn Square, London and Messrs. Riches and Woodbridge, Uxbridge.⁶⁴

After a doubtless cheerless Christmas, in the New Year of 1829, it was Robert Prior's turn to watch all that he had worked for go under Mr Murray the auctioneer's hammer. On 10 January 1829 the *Windsor and Eton Express* published the notice for the forthcoming sale:

HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE,
 FIXTURES, & CHAIRMAKER'S STOCK IN TRADE,
 HILLINGDON END, UXBRIDGE, MIDDLESEX.

TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
 By Mr. MURRAY,
 ON THE PREMISES,

On FRIDAY, JANUARY 16, at Eleven o'clock,
 By direction of the Assignee of Mr. Robert Prior, a Bankrupt;

COMPRISING four-post and other bedsteads and furniture, bordered feather beds, mattresses, and bedding; single chests of drawers, pillar and claw and dining tables, dressing and pier glasses, mahogany bureau, barometer, the usual kitchen requisites, &c. &c.

⁶² Transportation records at <https://convictrecords.com.au/ships/lady-harewood/1829>

⁶³ Phillimore Marriage Registers, 1531-1913 Middlesex Marriage Registers, Volume 2, Hillingdon Marriages, p. 47.

⁶⁴ *The London Gazette*, 23 December 1828, issue 18534, p. 2381; *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 29 December 1828, 'Meetings of Creditors Tomorrow First Meetings. R. Prior, Hillingdon, Chair-Maker 11'; *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 02 February 1829, 'Robert Prior Third Meeting'.

The Stock consists of a capital rustic arbour, with floor and boarded roof, seats, &c. complete; several rustic garden seats, flower stands, and tables; 4-wheel garden chairs, childrens' chaises and waggons, Windsor chairs and stools of various patterns and sizes, in cherry and yew-tree; a large quantity of ash and yew tree chair tops and bows, cherry and yew-tree boards, inch and half chair plank and sundry useful timber, a variety of turned chair legs, three work benches and vices, two turning lathes, grindstones and frames, a capital color stone, two deal counters with drawers, shelves and fittings-up of shop, &c. &c.; also, a quantity of men's, women's, and children's shoes.

May be viewed the preceding and morning of sale.—Catalogues may be had at the inns in the neighbourhood; upon the premises; and of Mr. Murray, Auctioneer, and Land and Timber Surveyor, Uxbridge, Middlesex.

The furniture historian is again grateful to Mr Murray for a dated list of Robert Prior's stock. It is very comparable to John junior's stock of 1822 and with the Webb & Bunce list of c. 1805. During 1829, poor Robert Prior's bankruptcy ground its way through the legal system. His certificate of bankruptcy was granted in March.⁶⁵ In June, the commissioners assigned to his case met to audit his accounts.⁶⁶ And in July, in order to determine a dividend of his estate and effects, they requested his creditors to give proof of the debts owed to them.⁶⁷ On 3 July 1829, at the Court of Commissioners in Basinghall Street, Robert was finally 'considered for dividend' although how much in the pound his creditors received is unclear.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, he was thereafter free to make his living, with former creditors unable to raise past claims against him.

On 14 May 1829 the *London Evening Standard* published this intriguing notice:

It is not true, as stated last week, that his Majesty had ordered a number of chairs to be placed in the enclosure in St. James's Park, for the accommodation of the public, to sit at a penny each. The fact is, that it is a mere speculation of several Frenchmen recently arrived in this country, who have by some means obtained permission of the Commissioners of Woods and Forests, to introduce the chairs, after the manner of the public gardens in France, for their own emolument. There are now in the Park 100 Windsor chairs of rather superior workmanship, and another 100 is to be introduced immediately; and should the scheme succeed, it is the intention of the speculators to increase the number to 600. The company are to be allowed to occupy them at 1d. each, during their pleasure; and to remove them to any part of the inclosure they may think proper. It is said that the chair speculation in France is a most profitable concern.

The Priors would doubtless have welcomed such a commission, although as the footnote shows, the scheme may have come to nothing.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *The London Gazette*, 10 March 1829, issue 18557, p. 461; Perry's Bankrupt Gazette, 14 March 1829.

⁶⁶ *The London Gazette*, 19 May 1829, issue 18577, p. 926.

⁶⁷ *The London Gazette*, 12 June 1829, issue 18584, p. 1102.

⁶⁸ *Perry's Bankrupt Gazette*, 27 July 1829.

⁶⁹ *London Evening Standard*, Thursday 7 May 1829, p. 2 (under the Court Circular): 'Yesterday a large number of neat chairs were taken into the enclosed part of St. James's Park, where they are to be let out, as in Paris, for the accommodation of the public at one penny each'; and Tuesday 26 May 1829, p. 4: 'St. James's Park. — The scheme of acquiring a penny each from every person who wished to rest his limbs in a chair in St. James's Park, is likely to turn out a complete failure, the Commissioners of Woods and Forests having given orders for 160 circular benches to be placed in the most shady situations round the various trees, for the accommodation of the public, gratis. On Saturday several were fixed, and on Sunday we noticed the penny chairs were almost deserted. The remainder of the seats will be placed as soon as they can be got ready'. Another dastardly French plot foiled.

Quite how John junior and Robert carried on is not wholly clear. The analysis of the land tax records from 1824, via the 1828 sale at auction, through to 1833 shows that the occupier of the premises, which year in, year out, show the same notional rent of £25 and sum assessed of £2 3s. 9d., shift from John Prior junior to his mother, to his late mother. The proprietor from 1829 onwards is Samuel Hull. John junior or Robert, or both, may possibly have rented space after their financial disasters from the local man who bought their father's premises. At this stage, such a notion is purely speculative. On 11 November 1836 there was a break-in at John Prior junior's warehouse in Hillingdon when seven chairs were stolen; he identified them from the witness box at the Old Bailey on 14 May 1838: the defendant James M'Bear was found not guilty of receiving stolen goods.⁷⁰ John junior and Robert Prior appear thrice as successive entries at Hillingdon End, Uxbridge, both as Windsor chair makers, as hurdle makers, and as turners in wood, in Pigot's 1839–40 *Directory*. They appear for the last time in Kelly's *Directory* for 1845.

John Prior junior, 80, of independent means, and his wife Rebecca, 70, are shown at Morton's Rents, Hillingdon End in the 1841 census. Also at Morton's Rents were his sister Jane, 65 (actually 69) and her husband James, whose occupation is not stated: he had been a chair maker. James died in 1845. On 28 February 1846 the *Bucks Gazette* recorded the death 'on the 19th inst, at Uxbridge, Mr. John Prior, formerly of the Uxbridge manufactory for the original Windsor chairs, at the advanced age of 85 years.' He was actually 84 and was buried at St John the Baptist, Hillingdon on 25 February 1846.

Robert Prior had a son, also Robert (1811–1859): the two of them appear in the same household in Hillingdon end in the 1841 census, both 'Chair M.' In the 1851 census the households are separate: Robert Prior senior, 70, turner living with Ann in Morton's Rents, Hillingdon End; Robert Prior junior, with his wife, also Ann, three children and a servant in Windsor Street, Uxbridge. The death of Robert Prior junior, buried on 27 November 1859 at St John the Baptist, Hillingdon, brought chair making by the Priors of Uxbridge to an end.

On 14 April 1860 Robert Prior's widow Ann, who became a toy dealer, sold his workshop via the *Windsor and Eton Express*:

WINDSOR STREET, UXBRIDGE, MIDDX.
To Turners, Chair-makers, & General Wood-workers.

TO BE LET, with immediate possession, Part a DWELLING HOUSE, with good WORKSHOPS, where the above Business has been carried on for many years by the late Mr. Robert Prior, and where a good trade may now be done. The stock, three lathes, benches, tools, three iron vices, iron taps and dies, rustic timber, unfinished chairs, &c., will be required to be taken to, and will exceed £35. Apply to Mr. W. C. Brown, auctioneer, &c., Uxbridge.

As late as 1917, Thomas Pakeman, at ninety years of age, and recollecting the Uxbridge High Street of his childhood, wrote of 'the ancient inn, the Eight Bells ...

⁷⁰ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 22 August 2020), May 1838, trial of JAMES M'BEAR (t18380514-1182). The fenced price of six (presumably) side chairs was £1, or 3s. 4d. each. An armchair was offered for 6s. 6d.

[and] the Green Dragon Pond. Next was a chairmaker, where they used to make rustic garden seats and chairs, and they were very nice people, and as far as I can recollect, their name was Prior'.⁷¹

CRICKLEWOOD

What of Samuel? He married Louisa (or Lousia — she is spelled both ways) at St Mary the Virgin, Harefield, four miles north of Uxbridge, on 26 November 1806. The witnesses were brother Robert, sister Elizabeth and sister Jane Higgs (married to James who was, of course, a chair maker). Samuel and Louisa had four children: John (1806–74), chair maker, rustic chair maker and 'rustic woodworker & rustic worker, master'; Martha (1809–79) who lived with her parents into their old age; Ann (1811–?) who married in 1837 Charles Stephens (1809–1867), chair maker (1841 census), rustic chairmaker (1851 census) and carpenter (Pahran, Victoria, Australia, rate book 1864; they were to emigrate during the 1850s); and Thomas (1812–1878), tailor, painter and 'rustic worker, wood'.

Not all Samuel Prior's workmen were family. One young man who worked for him may be found, alas, on trial at the Old Bailey. In June 1829 Edward Turner, eighteen, and his accomplice, Thomas Crowther, nineteen, stood trial for highway robbery. A catalogue record at the National Archives records Turner as 'Former chair-maker to Samuel Prior of Kilburn Road, London'.⁷² The pair stood accused of highway robbery 'feloniously assaulting Thomas Davis, on the King's Highway, on the 6th of May, at St. Marylebone, putting him in fear, and taking from his person, and against his will, 1 hat, value 15s.; 1 handkerchief, value 4s.; 1 watch, value 30s.; 1 silver pen and pencil-case, value 6s.; 1 ring, value 5s.; 3 knives, value 3s.; 1 pair of scissors, value 1s.; 1 pair of gloves, value 1s.; 1 ring and keys, value 1s.; 1 sovereign, and 1 half-sovereign'.⁷³ The youths were found guilty and sentenced to death. A petition for clemency was heard but to no avail. They were hanged on 22 July 1829.

Having mislaid a former employee through hanging, Samuel went on to get involved in a fracas with a body snatcher. On 14 November 1831 the *Reading Mercury* told the tale:

On Tuesday afternoon between three and four o'clock, John Smith, one of the Bow-street horse patrol, stationed at Mill-hill, near Hendon, observed two men of very suspicious appearance coming towards town in a horse and cart. They were dressed as costermongers, and had a quantity of onions and other vegetables hanging over the sides of the cart as a blind. Smith was convinced that all was not right, and jumped up into the cart and attempted to secure them; but they made most desperate resistance, and one them effected his escape, but was closely pursued, and after running to Kilburn, was there stopped and taken into custody by Mr. Prior, a chair maker, who ran out of his shop on hearing the cry of 'Stop thief,' and tripped up the fellow's heels as he ran past him. On examining the cart, two sacks closely tied up were found at the bottom of it, covered over with a heap of straw, which on

⁷¹ *Uxbridge & West Drayton Times*, 'Uxbridge Reminiscences High Street — Further Notes', 6 November 1917.

⁷² The National Archives, HO 17/35/105.

⁷³ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 10 June 2020), June 1829, trial of EDWARD TURNER THOMAS CROWTHER MARY STEPHENS (t18290611-205).

being opened, their contents presented an appalling spectacle of two naked human bodies that to all appearance had been very recently disinterred. On the delinquents being taken to Hendon, they were immediately recognised as two notorious characters, named Robert Bonner and Charles Wilsden (the latter being the one who made his escape, and was retaken), who have been previously in custody on charges of similar nature, and also for uttering counterfeit money. They had in their possession the necessary implements for carrying on their diabolical trade. They were examined before the bench of magistrates at Edgware, and were remanded to allow time to ascertain from whence the bodies had been taken. They are supposed to have been obtained from the lower part of the county of Hertford.

It seems only fair that a Prior should for once be on the receiving end of the attentions of the Court. It was Samuel and Louisa's son John who fitted the bill; from *The Sun* (London), 12 January 1833:

PIGEON SHOOTING. — *John Prior* was charged with killing some pigeons, the property of Sarah Hook. Mrs. Hook, a respectably-dressed woman, stated that she resided at a cottage at Cricklewood, in Hendon. On the 3d of January she was feeding some pigeons, which she kept, when a stone, wrapped in a cloth, was thrown amongst them. The pigeons immediately flew, and settled on the chimney-pots of a publican of the name of Worthy, when the prisoner fired at them several times, and shot nine out of ten of them. The servant-maid of Mrs. Hook confirmed her testimony, and identified the prisoner, who is a chair-maker, as the person who alarmed the pigeons by throwing the stone at them. The prisoner admitted the fact, and said that he received orders from the publican to shoot them. This statement was confirmed by the publican, who alleged that the pigeons were in the habit of settling on his house, and he wanted to get rid of them. Mr. RAWLINSON said it was an outrageous thing to drive the pigeons to the house for the purpose of slaughtering them in the manner described. The worthy Magistrate would have inflicted the full penalty of £10, but for the intercession of the prosecutrix. The prisoner was obliged to pay a fine of £2, and to give security for his future good behaviour. Peter Grig was committed to Newgate for stealing two sticks of *horse-radish*, value 3d.

It is interesting that sparsely settled Cricklewood was located by reference to the Middlesex parish in which it lay, Hendon, as well as to the much nearer Kilburn. Both Cricklewood and Kilburn, to the south, were located on the fringes of the medieval parishes, of Hendon, Willesden and Hampstead, along the Roman road of Watling Street, passing out of London from Marble Arch towards the West Midlands. In contrast to the ancient nucleated villages around the hill-situated parish churches, the low lying roadway gave access to a gradually developing landscape of unpretentious villas.⁷⁴ It was yet another handy location for the enterprising rustic woodworker. Samuel Prior, it seems, found it hard to stay away from the Courts. Both he and Louisa gave evidence at the Old Bailey on 21 September 1835. The following lengthy account helps us understand the domestic circumstances of an early nineteenth-century chair maker, and we hear his own voice, and that of his wife, in the notes taken directly, although not entirely verbatim, by the court reporter.

⁷⁴ Baker (1989), p. 47.

Fourth Jury, before Mr. Justice Williams.

MICHAEL COLLINS was indicted for burglariously breaking and entering the dwelling-house of Samuel Prior, about the hour of 12 in the night of the 26th of August, at Hendon, with intent to steal, and stealing therein, 1 handkerchief, value 6d.; 3 shirts, value 12s.; 6 yards of calico, value 3s.; 1 petticoat, value 4s.; 1 pair of stays, value 8s.; 1 coat value 10s.; 1 sheet, value 3s.; 3 pillow-cases, value 3s.; 2 pairs of drawers, value 4s.; 1 curtain, value 6d.; 1 spoon, value 20s.; 3 pairs of shoes value 8s.; 1 cap, value 6d.; and 3 unmade shirts, value 15s.; the goods of the said Samuel Prior.

LOUISA PRIOR. I am the wife of Samuel Prior, who lives at Cricklewood, near Kilburn, in the parish of Hendon; we keep a house there. On the night of the 26th of August, I went to bed—I was not the last person up, but I fastened the doors and windows about ten o'clock—we have a bar to the back door, and the shutters were barred and bolted—I was not disturbed in the night—I got up next morning about half-past five o'clock—I was the first person up—It was daylight then—I went into the back kitchen and found the shutter taken down, and laid down in the back house, the window wide open, and the door also—the shutter had been cut, and a hand put in to remove the catch of the window, and pull it down—I found the parlour all in confusion—I missed five shirts, (two were made, and three unmade), a pair of stays, a silver spoon, a pair of woman's, and two pairs of men's shoes—I had seen all the things overnight, in the drawers, except the shirts, which were on a horse in the kitchen—I never saw the prisoner till he was at the office—I saw part of my things again at nine o'clock that morning at a public-house, in the presence of the horse-patrol—there were three pairs of shoes and three shirts—I knew them again.

Cross-examined by MR. PHILLIPS. Q. Were you the last person up in the house? A. No—my daughter and niece were left up when I went to the bed—they are not here.

RICHARD WAKE. I lived with Mr. Bonnet, a farmer, opposite Mr. Prior's. On the morning of the 27th of August I was called by master to go into the field, at about half-past eight o'clock—there is a road across the field—I saw the prisoner in the field—I came up to him, and asked him where he was going—he said, "To London"—I said, "This is not the way to London"—he said he did not know his way, and he thought there was a way there—he had got a basket—I asked him what he had got in his basket—he said, "A pair of shoes"—my master came up at the time, he said he had a pair of shoes in his basket, and he said a bundle of rags as well—he mentioned the shoes first—my master came up and pulled the basket on one side, and I could see a pair of shoes and a bundle in it—my master said by the shoes he had in his basket he had got a girl, as they were women's shoes—he made no reply—I then directed him to the main road—he was not in the way to London, he was not in any road—I knew of this robbery at that time, and went to Mr. Prior's, and learnt what had been lost—I then went after him—I followed him up a lane leading to Hampstead—I saw him again, and was certain he was the same man—when I came within sight of him he ran and I after him, for about 200 or 300 yards—he then got over a gate—I tumbled over the gate in getting over, and lost sight of him for a moment—but on searching the ditch I found him concealed under a lot of briars and brambles, quite out of sight, in about ten minutes—I said, "Come out"—he said, "What do you want of me?"—I got him out, and kept him, and by the assistance of some neighbours gave him in charge of the horse-patrol—I found this basket in the ditch with him—It contains the same things now as when I found it.

Cross-examined Q. This was about half-past eight or nine o'clock in the morning? A. Yes—I do not remember the day of the week—my master said he would send him to the treadmill—directly he got into the road I directed him, he set off running, and I pursued him—he ran about five minutes after my master had threatened him—I might be 100 yards from him when he began to run—the prosecutor's is not above 300 yards from where I stopped him in the field.

SAMUEL BONTON. I am a horse-patrol. I received the prisoner in custody from Wake, from nine to a quarter past nine o'clock on the 27th of August—I found nothing on him but a cigar—I received this basket from Wake with its contents, and I took a shirt and pair of drawers off the prisoner's person which I have also put into it—he has been in custody ever since.

SAMUEL PRIOR. I went to bed rather before my wife—she came down first in the morning—It was twilight when she went down, which was about a quarter past five—I had been awake about a quarter of an hour before she got up, and had heard no disturbance or noise—she came up and gave me information, and I came down—I found the parlour shutters cut in two with a chisel—they had got in at the parlour shutters and went through the house and opened the back door.

Cross-examined Q. Whatever depredation was committed, was before a quarter after five?

A. No doubt of it—the prisoner was taken four hours after that—more things were not taken away than one person could carry—several things have not been found—this was on Thursday morning.

MRS. PRIOR. Here is a pair of shoes belonging to my husband, he had pulled them off in the parlour the night before—here is another pair belonging to my daughter—I know them—I was with her when she bought them about two months before—this cap belonged to one of our men—I know it—the shirts I know—there is none of my work on them—this is unfinished, but I cut it out—I cut them all three out—the other articles belong to us—this handkerchief is ours, it was on the prisoner's neck when taken.

Prisoner. The shirt I had on he looked at the bosom of, and said it was not his but mine.

MR. PRIOR. The shirt the prisoner had on, I said I did not know when it was on, as the frill was taken off, but the shirt was taken off at the office, and I knew it then to be mine—there is no mark on it, but some green paint on one of the sleeves, which I know it by—I had done that myself.

Prisoner's Defence. I ran away because the gentleman said he would send me to the treadmill for trespassing on his ground—I saw them waiting on the road for me, and did not like to go to them.

MARGARET M^CCARTHY. I know the prisoner, he lived at No. 9, Carrier Street, St. Giles's, last August—I lodged in the house with him for seven months—On Wednesday, the 26th of August, he went to bed at nine o'clock, and got up at six in the morning—we heard of his being taken up in the evening—I am sure it was the night before he was taken up that I speak of—I am certain he slept in the same room as I slept—two more women, his mother, his sister and another young girl and myself, all slept in the same room—Calmal slept in the room—I saw the prisoner go out in the morning—I heard the clock in the next room strike, and we could see the church clock from our back window.

MARY CALMAL. I am single, I have lived in Carrier-street nine months. M^CCarthy has slept in the same bed with me for seven months—I have known the prisoner a long time—he slept on Wednesday night in the same room as I did—I was there when he went to bed, and he was fast asleep at nine o'clock—It had struck six before he left the house in the morning—I saw him going out—I was up before him—I saw him getting up, and saw him go out—his mother and little brother slept there that night, and a young woman, his sister—she is married, her name is Mary Collins—his mother is not here.

MARY COLLINS (*through an interpreter.*) My husband's name is John Calligan. On Wednesday night, the 26th of August, I slept in the same room as the prisoner—I went to bed at nine o'clock—I got up about a quarter of an hour after him next morning—It wanted a *quarter to ten* when I got up—I heard the clock strike six when he was getting up and leaving the room—he was in bed an hour before me the night before.

(David Donaghue, labourer, 13, Crown-street, Soho; Cornelius Collins, labourer; and Alexander Brien, Labourer, Bainbridge-street, Bloomsbury, gave the prisoner a good character.)

GUILTY.—DEATH Aged 19.⁷⁵

Given the cries of joy with which furniture historians and collectors of early Windsor chairs greet traces of original green paint, it is worth noting that the paint colour on the stolen shirt was, quite properly, green. The death sentence was commuted. Collins, transported for 21 years, became one of 270 convicts carried from Portsmouth, sailing on 18 February 1836, to New South Wales on board the *Strathfieldsaye*, landing at Port Jackson, a long way from the scene of his Cricklewood crime, on 15 June 1836.⁷⁶

It is something of a relief to turn to an extraordinary trade card of Samuel Prior that has recently been found (Figures 22 and 23). On the face it reads:

SAM^l PRIOR,
Manufacturer of Rustic, Gothic and Grotesque
GARDEN SEATS, SUMMER HOUSES; WINDSOR CHAIRS &c.
Cricklewood, near Kilburn, Edgeware Road.
Hurdles and Hurdle-Stuff of every description.

The card was engraved by W. West, 41 Margaret Street.⁷⁷ On the reverse is written:

~ Jackson Esq^e to S Prior
1840
May 2 high back arm-
 4 chairs 1 - 0 - 0
 6 Sq^e Top Chairs
 to foll^w 5/6 1 - 13 - 0
47 Bryanstone Sq^e £2 - 13 - 0
Paid same time Sam^l Prior

The card shows six samples from the Samuel Prior range:

- i. a two-seat curved slatted bench on double x-frame legs with turned roundel decorative terminals;
- ii. a summerhouse of elegant proportions, with rustic tracery and geometric ornament, with two arched niches either side of a three-sided half-hexagon bench made to seat four people, sheltered in an alcove;
- iii. a rustic armchair (perhaps the 'square top' variety) with crook arm stands and curved seat on x-frame legs with turned roundel decorative terminals;
- iv. a side chair with a back of Gothic arch tracery, outswept legs, the front legs connected by an x-frame stretcher;

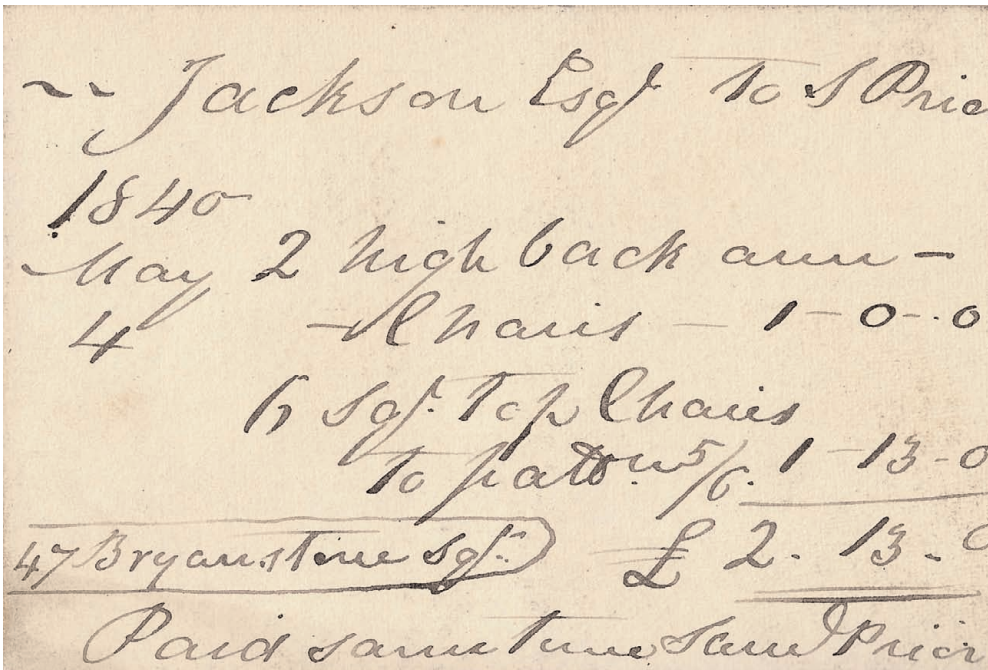
⁷⁵ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 12 May 2020), September 1835, trial of MICHAEL COLLINS (t18350921-1929).

⁷⁶ Transportation record at <https://convictrecords.com.au/ships/strathfieldsaye/1836>.

⁷⁷ William West (1770–1854) was an engraver, and publisher of theatrical and, possibly, pornographic prints. Spedding (2011), p. 20.



22 Trade card of Samuel Prior – recto. © J. H. J. Parker



23 Trade card of Samuel Prior – verso. © J. H. J. Parker

- v. a serpentine grotesque beast, of prominent eye and slightly open mouth, the scaled undulations of which provide three convenient rests for seats of differing sizes, one square and two isogonal octagons, alternating long and short sides, the whole mounted on feet that have a hint of lion's paws about them; and
- vi. an isogonal octagonal table, alternating long and short sides, echoing the serpentine beast's largest seat, with five rustic legs, one columnar, one pair bowed and one pair crossed on a roundel pivot, the method of operation of which defies at least the author's imagination.

These designs are the successors in spirit of the mid-eighteenth century rustic designs (Figures 1 to 6) and the trade cards of William Webb of Newington and John Stubbs of Old Street (Figures 7 and 8).

The author has been unable to identify with confidence what a 'German stool' might be, or indeed a 'German chair' or 'German sofa'. What follows is put forward tentatively and for further discussion and research. Tim Garland suggested to the author that slatted seats and arms might be a feature. Henry Webb, as early as 1767 and as late as 1791, Webb and Bunce in 1809, and John Prior junior in 1822 were not the only makers of 'German stools'. In 1806 the full product range at Thomas Lawson's 'Original Wholesale and Retail, Windsor and Fancy Chair and Sofa Manufactory, Lister-Gate, opposite Broadmarsh, Nottingham' was as follows:

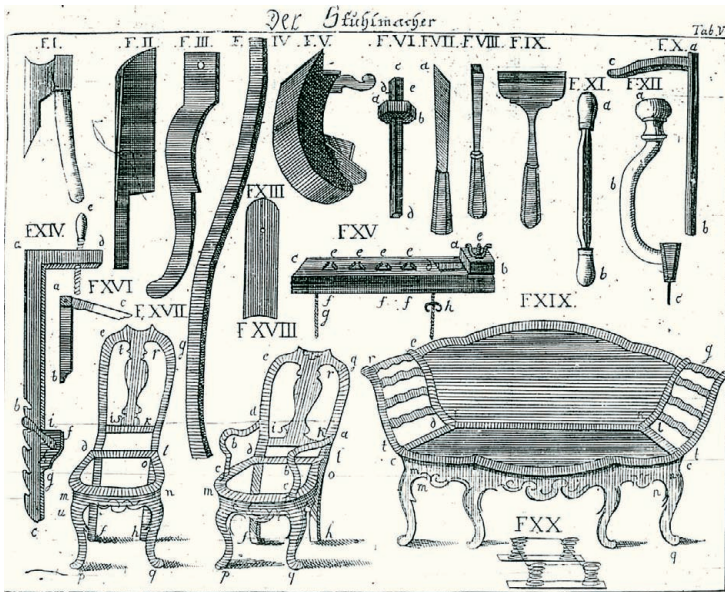
Windsor chairs, (yew tree)
 Ditto, for painting,
 Cottage chairs, various patterns,
 Bamboo chairs, dyed black, or dark red, and polished,
 Ditto, for painting Bamboo,
 Chairs, japanned, bright black,
 Counting-house stools and work stools,
 Common strong house chairs,
 Chamber or parlour chairs,
 Children's table chairs, and small ditto,
 Fancy sofas, to match chairs,
 Chinese seats and alcoves, for gardens,
 Drawing-room chairs and fishing stools,
 Rural garden seats
 Grotto summer-house chairs
 German stools,—with every kind of Windsor and fancy chairs, sofas &c.⁷⁸

In 1809 Mr Blackburn of Kirkgate, Leeds, offered exactly the same list, to the word.⁷⁹ In 1811, Luke Shewring of East Reach, Taunton, and Temple Street, Bristol, begged leave to inform the public that alongside his Windsor, Fancy and Dyed chairs were 'Rustic Garden Settees of any Length, and German Stools'.⁸⁰ And finally in December 1825, the stock in trade auction of Mr F. Ingram's 'Rustic House' on the City Road, London, included, alongside the Windsor chairs and 'japanned, gothic,

⁷⁸ *Derby Mercury*, 12 June 1806.

⁷⁹ *Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 September 1809.

⁸⁰ *Taunton Courier, and Western Advertiser*, 16 May 1811.



24 *Der Stuhlmacher*
(The Chairmaker)
from Peter Nathan
Sprengel, *Handwerke
in Tabellen*,
Berlin, 1776

and bamboo garden chairs', a number of 'camp and japanned German stools'.⁸¹ Thereafter the term 'German stool' disappears from the newspaper record linked to these contexts. All contexts are consistent with garden and outside use, where slatted arms and seats allow the rain to disperse and evaporate more easily.

Peter Nathan Sprengel in *Der Stuhlmacher* (The Chairmaker) (1776), part of his multi-volume *Handwerke in Tabellen*, includes a diagram of a German chairmaker's tools and some of their work (Figure 24). The bench on the right has slatted arms. A slatted cast-iron garden chair of x-frame design by Karl Friedrich Schinkel cast at the Lauchhammer foundry about 1825 may be found in the collection of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.⁸² A nineteenth-century German cast-iron slatted x-frame garden stool appeared at Christie's New York in 2013.⁸³

Michael Harding Hill's exhibition of Windsor chairs, held at West Wycombe Park in 2012, included a low back, x-frame forest chair with painted decoration (Figure 25). He described it as an

'X' frame chair with Windsor elements, such as the arm bow, splat, sticks and underarm supports. Circa 1800. This very rare chair was probably a veranda or garden chair. The paint is original and is in the late 18th/early 19th century style. I have never seen a chair of this style before and, as far as I know, it has not been previously recorded. Although 'X'

⁸¹ *Morning Advertiser*, 10 December 1825. John Ingram traded from 29 City Road between 1804 and 1839. His was a large concern, with £5,500 insurance cover in 1806. Although the trade card of John Stubbs mentions City Road, directories place him in Brick Lane between 1779 and 1800, and then in Old Street until 1814. BIFMO.

⁸² Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin Inventory number: MK 90/2390 <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/3YNBWVIY7HIROLOBTXLG4LCUMH6SYDNC>

⁸³ <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/a-german-cast-iron-garden-stool-19th-century-5725914-details.aspx>



25 Early Georgian low back x-frame forest chair with painted decoration, exhibited at West Wycombe Park, 2012. Photo: Antony Crolla © *World of Interiors*

frame chairs have existed from the 16th century, the inspiration for the unusual leg arrangement is clearly from a Regency 'X' framed stool.⁸⁴

The similarity in feel to Samuel Prior's rustic armchair with crook arm stands and curved seat on x-frame legs with turned roundel decorative terminals is palpable. It would not have been beyond his skills to make a chair such as the one shown at West Wycombe Park. Whether he might have called it a German stool with a Windsor back is for the reader to judge. If the author is right in these deductions, Lockington Foulger, William Webb and John Stubbs called the stool shown at the middle bottom of their trade cards a German stool.

Samuel appears as 'Prior, Saml., rustic chair &c., maker, Cricklewood' in Pigot's 1839 *Directory* for Middlesex, 'Chair Maker' in the 1841 census, 'Rustic seat manufacturer' in the *Post Office Directory* for 1851, and 'Rustic Chair Maker' in the *Post Office Directory* for 1855, as well as in the 1851 and 1861 censuses. He died in 1863, aged 77, and was buried at St Mary's, Hendon on 17 April. John seems to have succeeded his father in the family firm and from time to time his brother Thomas helped. John's occupation is 'Chair Maker' in the 1841 census, and 'Rustic Chair Maker' in the 1851 and 1861 censuses. Thomas's occupation in 1841 and 1851 is 'Tailor'. In 1861 it is 'Painter'. In the 1871 census, John is shown as 'Rustic Worker, Master' and Thomas, next door, as 'Rustic worker, wood'. Between 1868 and 1871, John advertised on three occasions for a cook and housemaid to join the 'small quiet family' in which a single 'man servant [was] kept'.⁸⁵ In 1873 he sought a 'married middle-aged couple, without any family, the man to assist in farm-work, and make himself generally useful'.⁸⁶

John died in early 1874 and Thomas in March 1878. But the line did not quite end there. Thomas and his wife Eliza had a son, Samuel William Prior (1832–1909), the fourth and last chair-making generation after his great-grandfather, John Prior senior, born more than a century before him. His occupations in the censuses are these: Rustic Chair Maker (1851), Rustic Summer House Builder (1861), Summer House Builder (1871), Summer House Builder (1881), Carpenter (1891) and 'Carpenter, own account, at home' (1901). One senses a gradual reduction in demand for rustic summer houses.

PRIOR EXPERIENCE NEEDED: THE ELEGANT RUSTICITY OF THE TROTMANS

Elsewhere in the woods, Martha Prior (1766–1813) married Shadrack Trotman (1763–1817), millwright at Wraysbury, Buckinghamshire on 2 April 1792. They had nine children between 1793 and 1809. It was their second child and first son, John Trotman (1794–1873) who followed his grandfather and four of his uncles' trade and became a chair maker. John married Elizabeth Temple at Cowley (less than a mile from Uxbridge/Hillingdon End) on Christmas Day 1816. They had five children, Maria (1817–85), Thomas Temple (1820–95), John Temple (1822–1918), Sanders Temple (1825–1911) and William (1825–1906). All four sons at one time or another were chairmakers. Although no documentary evidence has yet come to light, in view of

⁸⁴ Harding-Hill (2003), pp. 78–9.

⁸⁵ *London Evening Standard*, 18 May 1868. *Daily Telegraph*, 14 July 1870. *London Evening Standard*, 8 March 1871.

⁸⁶ *Kilburn Times*, 8 February 1873.

what follows, it seems possible that John Trotman may have been apprenticed to his uncle Samuel: he would have been fourteen in 1808 and completed seven years by 1815 or thereabouts.

Dr B. D. Cotton makes reference to Samuel Prior being at Cricklewood already in 1816.⁸⁷ The Trotmans were non-conformists and Baptists, which may account for the fact that none of the five children's baptisms has been traced. Maria's 1851 census record indicates that she was born at Hillingdon, Thomas's Willesden, John's Hendon, and William's Hendon also. Sanders later emigrated to Geelong, Victoria, Australia in 1849 and his birthplace is not known. Given that he was born between John and William, Hendon is likely. Willesden is but a mile from the Kilburn end of Cricklewood; Hendon three miles north-northwest. Although the Trotmans were non-conformists, the enumerators may have been placing whatever they were told into a parish category. The Edgware Road (passing through Cricklewood) was the boundary between the parishes of Willesden and Hendon. The indications are, therefore, that between 1817 and 1820, the Trotmans moved to a location not far from John Trotman's uncle Samuel Prior.

In Pigot's 1836 *Directory* John Trotman is listed as 'Shopkeeper & Rustic Chairmaker' of Alfred Terrace, in Upper Holloway, Islington (four miles east of Cricklewood and five miles east-southeast of Hendon). That may well have been the very start of this business, as a later advertisement of 17 May 1867 in the *Islington Gazette* shows:

TROTMAN'S RUSTIC WORK, a great variety on view. Thatched Summer House, Pagoda Roof Zinc Ditto; Yew, Oak, and Swiss Tables, Oak Benches, Yew Seats and Stools, Flower Vases, and Baskets, Garden Wheelbarrows, &c., ready for delivery, always on view, at TROTMAN's Manufactory, 12, Alfred-place [sic], Upper Holloway. Established 30 years.

In the 1841 census, John Trotman and family were at Alfred Terrace, which formed a short section of the Holloway Road. Second and fourth sons, John and William were still at home but eldest son Thomas was away visiting in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire and his occupation, age twenty, is chair maker. Sanders, the third son, married Mary Williams, daughter of William Williams, Joiner, at St George's Church, Hanover Square, London on 14 September 1846. Both he and his father are stated to be chair makers on the register. The suspicion, of which no proof has yet been unearthed, is that during the intervening years between 1820 and 1836 John Trotman may have been working near or for Samuel Prior.

From the *Morning Post* of 29 May 1847:

RUSTIC CHAIR DEPOSITORY.— To Ladies and Gentlemen.— Mr. TROTMAN respectfully invites the attention of those who are about furnishing their pleasure grounds, shrubberies, and gardens, to his Manufactory and Warerooms, 12, Alfred-terrace, Upper Holloway, where he has been preparing a great variety of GARDEN SEATS, of new and elegant patterns, rustic tables for summer-houses, flower stands and vases, of various descriptions, &c. It being so short a distance from town, and a pleasant road, Mr. Trotman flatters himself that he shall have the honour of a visit from those

⁸⁷ Cotton (1990), p. 457: 'Prior, Samuel Ch. M. 1816 Hillingdon Lib[rary] Cricklewood'.

‘Who, when bright Phoebus in his zenith burns,
 Beneath the spreading elm a seat admires
 To catch the zephyrs of the grateful shade.’

Also a large assortment of invalid and children’s airing carriages.

It is possible the verse was Mr Trotman’s own. Yet the gods looked unkindly on Mr Trotman (either father or son) for on 10 September 1851 he had his watch stolen. *The Morning Advertiser* of 12 September 1851:

WORSHIP-STREET.

Yesterday *Michael Fleet*, a stylishly-dressed, powerful young man, well known to the police, was placed before Mr. Hammill charged with having been concerned with two other men, not in custody, in violently assaulting and robbing Mr. John Trotman, an upholsterer, in Alfred-terrace, Upper Holloway. The prosecutor stated that he was passing along the City-road shortly after nine o’clock on the preceding evening, when he observed a crowd of persons collected round a discharged soldier, who was soliciting alms, and while threading his way through the assemblage, he was confronted by the prisoner and two other men, who placed themselves immediately before him, and effectually impeded his progress. On stepping aside to avoid them, they made a corresponding movement in the same direction, which was repeated two or three times, and before he could extricate himself from them the prisoner made a rapid snatch at his watch, which he jerked out of his waistcoat pocket with such force, that the guard was instantly snapped, and the watch remained in his possession. Witness immediately exclaimed, ‘You villain, you have stolen my watch,’ and seized hold of the prisoner, who after a fruitless attempt to disengage himself, struck him two heavy blows on the right temple, which partially stunned him, and caused him to stagger back. The prisoner then started off at full speed, but was pursued by some of the bystanders, one of whom overtook him in adjoining street, and endeavoured to secure him, but was beaten off by the prisoner, who continued his flight until he was intercepted by a policeman, and taken into custody. A determined attempt was then made by the prisoner’s confederates to rescue him from the custody of the officer, who defended himself stoutly with his truncheon, but was almost overpowered, when a private constable named Taylor came to his assistance, and, after a severe struggle, the prisoner was ultimately secured and conveyed by main force to the station-house. Mr. William Moon, a boot manufacturer, who had also been assaulted by the prisoner, gave corroborative evidence; and Police Constable M’Carthy, N 56, stated that the blood was streaming down the prosecutor’s face at the time he preferred the charge against the prisoner, who had contrived to get rid of the stolen watch, and no trace of it had been obtained. The prisoner, on being asked if he wished to say anything, expressed his intention to reserve his defence by the advice of Mr. Robinson, his solicitor, and was committed to Newgate for trial.

Some time before May 1855 the youngest son, William Trotman, felt the need to break free from the family business in Holloway. The preceding few years must have been tumultuous for a man who had already become a Baptist minister. Caroline Martin, daughter of William Martin and Elizabeth Frost, was born 1 November 1818 and was baptised by a Protestant Dissenting Minister in the parish of St Martin, Colchester. She married in the second quarter of 1851 at Edmonton, Middlesex, one William Trotman. One Henry Martin Trotman was born in the second quarter of 1852 in the Ongar Registration District of Essex. Caroline Trotman died in the third quarter of 1852 and was buried at Blackmore, Essex on 1 October 1852, leaving a baby

who was six months old. In the 1851 census, which was taken on 30 March, William Trotman, Baptist Minister, born in Hendon, was lodged in the house of Ann Barrett, whose daughter Mary was to become his second wife, but not until the second quarter of 1854. It seems William may have overlooked mentioning that he was in the process of marrying someone else and having a son.⁸⁸

On 25 May 1855 the *Chelmsford Chronicle* advertised:

BLACKMORE GOTHIC WORKS.

—
WM. TROTMAN,
RUSTIC GARDEN SEAT MANUFACTURER
AND
SUMMER HOUSE BUILDER.
—

WM. TROTMAN begs to inform the Nobility, Gentry, and Public generally, that he has commenced business as a Rustic Garden Seat Manufacturer and Summer House Builder. Ladies or Gentlemen requiring their gardens furnished with Seats, Tables, Flower Boxes, Vases, Gothic Summer Houses, or Ornamental Rustic Work in Oak or Yew Tree, will receive immediate attention. W. T. begs respectfully to solicit attention by his entirely new stock of Fancy Chairs, Tables, Vases, Thatched Summer House, with Yew Tree front, &c. &c. on view at

BLACKMORE GOTHIC WORKS,
NEAR CHELMSFORD.

N.B. Invalids' and Children's Carriages Let on Hire hourly, weekly, or monthly.

The previous month William Trotman's second wife Mary had given birth to the first of their four daughters and one son. William must have had plenty of nervous energy to work off in the wood yard. His eldest brother Thomas, who had no children, was devoting his energies to invention. On 28 August 1855, in the *Morning Advertiser*:

WHERE SHALL WE PUT IT ? — Ask for T. TROTMAN'S NEW PATENT PERAMBULATOR, to double up when not in use. Ask for the Safety Perambulator, with Registered Safety Guards, to prevent falling over backwards. Patent Carriage Works, High-street (Gate), Camden Town. Caution. — Any person infringing the above patent will be prosecuted.

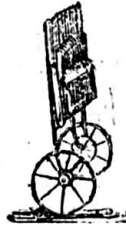
A further warning against infringement appeared in the *Lady's Own Paper* of 29 September 1855 (Figure 26):

⁸⁸ Henry M. Trotman, aged 8, was a visitor in the house of farmer James Hales, of Beadles End, Writtle, Essex in the 1861 census. By 1871 he was boarder and bookkeeper in the home of James Walker in Bishop Wearmouth, Co Durham. He was in and out of workhouses from about 1876 onwards. In 1891, Henry Trotman, born Blackmore, Essex, mercantile clerk, was a patient in the London Hospital. His unhappy life ended in July 1892 and he was buried in Camden..

**T. TROTMAN'S PATENT FOLD-
ING PERAMBULATORS for INFANTS & ADULTS,**
folded in an instant when not required for use.



OPEN FOR USE.



FOLDED.

T. Trotman has the Royal Letters Patent for the above.

CAUTION.—The Promneur Carriage, and Guards to prevent Perambulators falling over backwards, are **T. Trotman's own Property**, secured to him by Registration.

T. TROTMAN'S PATENT CARRIAGE WORKS,
Near the Gate, HIGH-STREET, Camden Town.

 An extensive Stock constantly on view.

26 Thomas Trotman advertisement, *Lady's Own Paper*, 29 September 1855.
Newspaper image
© The British Library Board, all rights reserved

**T. TROTMAN'S PATENT FOLD-
ING PERAMBULATORS for INFANTS & ADULTS,**
folded in an instant when not required for use.

[diagram]

OPEN FOR USE.

FOLDED.

T. Trotman has the Royal Letters Patent for the above.

CAUTION.—The Promneur Carriage, and Guards to prevent Perambulators falling over backwards, are **T. Trotman's own Property**, secured to him by Registration.

T. TROTMAN'S PATENT CARRIAGE WORKS,
Near the Gate, HIGH-STREET, Camden Town.

 An extensive Stock constantly on view.

The catalogue of the Society of Arts' Eighth Exhibition of Inventions of 1856 explains what he was so keen to protect. Submitted by T. Trotman, High Street, Camden Town, exhibits 220, 221 and 222 were, respectively, a 'Registered Metallic Scroll Guard ... to be attached to the axletree, spring, or back of hand carriages or perambulators, to obviate the possibility of the carriage throwing over backwards', a 'Registered Promeneur Carriage ... adapted for the reception of children sitting back to back, thereby securing an easy and safe balance, also allowing the youngest child to see its attendant' and a 'Patent Folding Perambulator' This last was

constructed upon the same principle as the folding chair, but with additional strength. It economises space, as it will stand in the hall, or may hang upon a nail, out of the way. [...]



27 (above) Thomas Trotman's badge. Reproduced from *Prams in the Garden* (2014). © Jan and Geoff Swift



28 (right) 1850s child's folding carriage by Thomas Trotman. *Prams in the Garden* (2014). © Jan and Geoff Swift

It is folded in a moment. [...] but, if close packing is desired, by removing the thumb screw, the handle folds close to the back of the carriage, and on unbuckling the strap, the front wheel folds closely down. By this arrangement the perambulator takes but little room, though it is not taken to pieces. The patent also extends to various other carriages.⁸⁹

A fine example of a T. Trotman child's folding carriage from the 1850s has on its crowned crested badge: 'DO YOU DOUBLE UP YOUR PERAMBULATOR / MAKER BY ROYAL LETTERS PATENT / TROTMAN'S PATENT, 1854 / COBDEN HOUSE CAMDEN NW' (Figures 27 and 28).

The author has consulted Jan Swift, the leading authority on, and collector of, early carriages and perambulators:

The manufacture of the first ready-made carriages specifically intended to carry children coincided with the start of the Victorian era. In the early 1840s firms including Allen, Babin and Monk, working independently, all started to produce a similar carriage with three wheels to carry a sitting infant. Some of the companies were already involved in the making of invalid carriages for adults and this clearly influenced the choice of design.⁹⁰

Charles Burton of Hampstead, in 1852 may have been the first to adopt the word 'perambulator' for his version of a child's carriage. It was an emerging field and by 1856 directories listed twenty perambulator makers or retailers in London.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce (1856), p. 50.

⁹⁰ Swift and Swift (2014), p. 14; and personal communication

⁹¹ Sewell (1923), p. 718.

At Upper Holloway, John Trotman offered not only his 'portable Summer houses, Garden-seats, Swiss-vases, Wheelbarrows all sizes, [and] Garden-flower-sticks' but also the hire of his son's perambulators and bath-chairs.⁹² Over at Blackmore, seven miles west-southwest of Chelmsford, William notified his customers that he could have 'Turnover Chairs and Wheel Chairs sent to any distance and made to order'.⁹³ By 1861, the family's advertisements were appearing next to one another:

WILLIAM TROTMAN, Blackmore, Essex, Rustic Garden Seat Manufacturer and Summer House Builder. Estimates given.

TROTMAN'S RUSTIC WORK, a great variety always on view. Thatched Summer House, Pagoda Roof Zinc Ditto, Yew, Oak, and Swiss Tables, Oak Benches, Yew Seats and Stools, Flower Vases, and Baskets, Perambulators, Bath Chairs, &c., ready for delivery, always on view, at TROTMAN's Manufactory, 12, Alfred-terrace, Upper Holloway.⁹⁴

Similar notices appeared until at least September 1862. In the 1861 census William was billed as 'Baptist Minister of Blackmore Baptist Chapel' and John Trotman junior gave his occupation to the census enumerator in Holloway as 'Local preacher'. In May 1863 the Holloway business was expanding:

J Trotman, Jun., Rustic and Per-
AMBULATOR WORKS [sic], 6a Francis-place,
(opposite Liverpool-road), Lower Holloway. J.
Trotman, Jun., Designer and Executor of all kinds of
Rustic Work, Maker and Repairer of Perambulators,
and Bath Chairs, having for many years superintended
the business in connection with his Father at Upper
Holloway, has, by mutual arrangement, opened the
above premises for the convenience of the Inhabitants
of Highbury and its vicinity. Extensive Show-rooms
for Rustic Work, Perambulators, and Invalid Carriages.
Designs furnished on application.⁹⁵

By 1866 William Trotman was thanking his patrons for their support over twelve years in the *Essex Herald*. By the *Chelmsford Chronicle* of 7 May 1869 he was crowing:

RUSTIC WORKS, BLACKMORE.
W. TROTMAN

HAVING FURNISHED to the Nobility and Gentry of Essex and neighboring counties (including King's College, Cambridge ; Countess Waldegrave ; Bramston Staines, Esq., F. Wells, Esq., W. Perry, Esq., and others) upwards of

40 SUMMER HOUSES,

Begs to inform the public that he will send designs and estimates if required, and confidently hopes to give satisfaction to those who shall employ him.

Garden seats, rustic vases, stools, &c., on view and for sale.

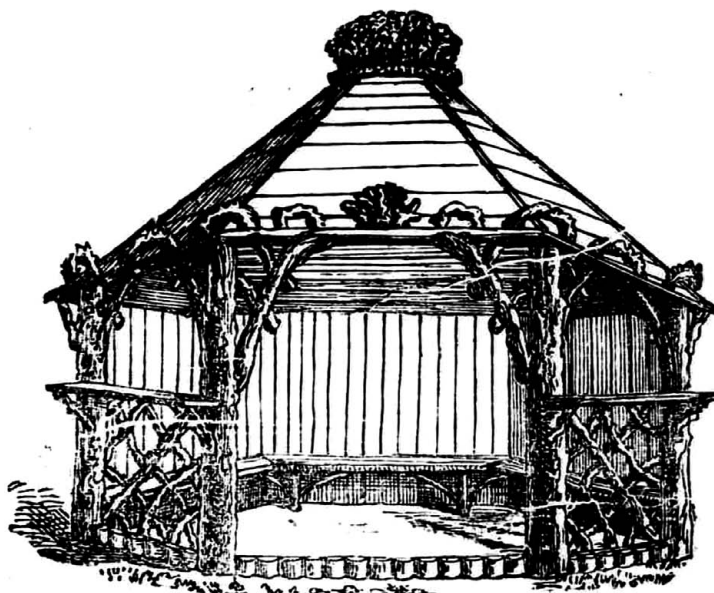
⁹² *Islington Gazette*, 13 June 1857.

⁹³ *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 8 April 1859.

⁹⁴ *London City Press*, 31 August 1861.

⁹⁵ *North London News*, 9 May 1863.

RUSTIC WORKS, BLACKMORE.



Hexagonal Summer-House Yew Tree Front.

RUSTIC CHAIRS, VASES, &c.,
ON VIEW AND FOR SALE AT THE
RUSTIC WORKS, BLACKMORE.

29 William Trotman advertisement, *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 21 April 1871. Newspaper image © The British Library Board, all rights reserved

The *Chelmsford Chronicle* of 21 April 1871, and again on 28 February 1873, showed the magnificence of what was on offer (Figure 29).

In the 1871 census, William Trotman's occupation is given as both 'Baptist Minister and Rustic Chair Manufacturer' yet ultimately the call prevailed. Sometime after February 1873, he moved from Essex to Devon to spend the rest of his life — he died in 1906 — in the Baptist ministry in which he had already been engaged whilst in Essex. His son the Reverend Herbert Trotman (1857–1944) became a Baptist Minister in London, Leeds, and Wales.

John Trotman junior moved between premises in Holloway. On 9 May 1868 he announced via the *North London News*:

SELLING OFF, in consequence of Expiration of Lease. A liberal discount allowed on
SUMMER HOUSES, GARDEN SEATS, VASES, &c.

J. Trotman, Junr. gratefully acknowledges the patronage he has received since commencing business in the above place, and respectfully invites inspection of the large assortment of

FANCY ORNAMENTAL RUSTIC WORK,
 which he has been preparing in summer houses,
 garden seats, tables, swiss baskets, vases, flower stands, fern
 stands, hall seats, &c. Designs furnished for every descrip-
 tion of fern stands, flower stands, &c., for conservatories,
 or drawing rooms. Having had 30 years' practical expe-
 rience in the above works of art, Mr. T. hopes still to meet
 the wishes to [sic] his patrons.
 Good Perambulators warranted and imperfect ones
 thoroughly repaired; hoods, aprons, &c., made to fit.
 J. TROTMAN, JUNR.,
 RUSTIC HOUSE 160, HOLLOWAY ROAD.

He may have succeeded in extending the lease as he was still advertising from 160 Holloway Road (the alternative number for 6a Francis Place) in the *Islington Gazette* in September 1870. But by 29 March 1873 an advertisement in the *North London News* shows 'Holloway Rustic Works Trotman J. Jun., Rustic Works 196 Holloway Road.' Ordnance Survey maps of the period show none of these premises to have been especially extensive.⁹⁶

From a first appearance in the *Daily Telegraph & Courier (London)* on 25 July 1870 to its last in the *Morning Advertiser* on 28 December 1872 an advertisement for Thomas Trotman read:

DO YOU DOUBLE UP YOUR PERAMBULATORS? —THOS. TROTMAN, Inventor of Folding Perambulators, for the health, comfort, and safety of Infants and Invalids. See all kinds on view. Manufactory and Show-Rooms, Cobden House, next to No. 2, High-street, Camden Town, N.W. New Patent Doubling Up, 1868. Caution—sold only at Cobden House.

Samuel Prior had been dead nearly ten years when John Trotman senior died on 12 February 1873, leaving effects of under £1,000. It was more than fifty-six years since his marriage in Cowley near Uxbridge and subsequent move to the Willesden and Hendon area. Thomas Trotman lived until 1895. It is not quite clear what happened to the separate business. After 1872 the perambulators may have been sold via his brother John's business but no documents detailing any such arrangement have been located. In Thomas's will he left bequests to his three brothers, John, Sanders and William, all still living, and to his nephews, Thomas, Charles and Herbert. Thomas's House at 24 Leighton Road he gave to his brother John. His nephew Charles Harding Trotman (1858–1922) was one of John Trotman junior's sons. He carried on both the rustic furniture and the perambulator businesses.

Over time the goods available at 196 Holloway Road diversified. On 29 July 1881 Trotman's specialities at 196 Holloway Road in the *Islington Gazette* remained portable rustic summerhouses. The same paper on 14 December 1888 advertised the same items 'and all kinds of rustic work [...] See Diplomas and Medal from South Kensington Exhibition'. By the *Islington Gazette* of 30 March 1892, Trotman's had

⁹⁶ Ordnance Survey London 1:1,056, Sheet III.73 (1895). Alfred Terrace occupied what became 632–648 Holloway Road in 1886 and Francis Place numbers 140–170. Williats (1986), unpaginated.



30 Trotman mail cart, Edwardian period. *Prams in the Garden* (2014).
© Jan and Geoff Swift

diversified into dog kennels: 'KENNELS ! Kennels ! See Trotman's Stock of Rustic and Plain.' The *Islington Gazette* of 4 November 1897 continued:

BROCK'S BEST FIREWORKS, AT WHOLESALE PRICES.

SEND AT ONCE FOR CUT PRICE LIST.

TROTMAN, 196, HOLLOWAY ROAD,

Close to Holloway Station G.N.R.

WASHING DAY A PLEASURE BY USING

TROTMAN'S RUBBER WRINGERS.

Vulcanised on Shaft, BEST Rubber.

UNEQUALLED VALUE.

The *Islington Gazette* on 25 October 1900 proclaimed 'Trotman's Famous Baby Carriages and Carts Far and away the best value in the trade' and more fireworks at 33% to 50% discount.

The *Hampstead and Highgate Express* for 12 July 1902 seems to be the last advertisement for 'PORTABLE RUSTIC HOUSES Garden Arches, Seats, Vases, Tables Dog Kennels &c., substantially and artistically made' alongside Trotman's baby carriages, mail carts and baby chairs. A mailcart was a variety of baby carriage; some were elaborately decorated (Figure 30). In the *Islington Gazette* of 22 October 1903 the advertisement for Trotman's 'OLD ESTABLISHED CASH FIRM FOR MANGLES & WRINGERS, RUBBER WRINGERS, BABY CARRIAGES AND MAIL CARTS, NEW FOLDERS [folding push-chairs], STRONG TOYS &c', with the seasonal firework selections, makes no mention of rustic work.

The faintly desperate tone and the ever-widening range in the *East London Observer* of 19 December 1908 is a long way from a coppice in Buckinghamshire.

Established 1821.
 **MONEY SAVED** **XMAS**
 AT
TROTMAN & Co.'s **BAZAAR**
 196, HOLLOWAY ROAD, N.

TROTMAN & Co.'s STRONG ENGLISH TOYS.
 Rocking Horses, Tricycles, Bicycle Horses,
 Horses and Carts, Vans, Pole Horses,
 Engines, Dolls' Houses etc., lowest price in
 the trade.

TROTMAN & Co.'s FOREIGN TOYS
 in great variety, remarkable value.

TROTMAN & Co.'s TOY CARRIAGES AND
 MAIL CARTS. Hundreds to choose from, 1/-
 to 42/-, our own make, guaranteed saving
 of 25 per cent.

TROTMAN & Co.'s BABY CHAIRS. An unique
 present, splendid value, great variety.
Lists Free.

TROTMAN & Co.'s BABY CARRIAGES AND
 MAIL CARTS. Exceptional value, our own
 make, 200 to choose from. Cash only.
Lists post free.

TROTMAN & Co.'s WOOL, FUR AND
 CARRIAGE CLOTH RUGS from 2/6.
 Wonderful value. *Lists free.*

TROTMAN & Co.'s PRAMETTES, CARETTES,
 PUSH CARTS AND FOLDERS. Large variety to
 choose from. *Lists post free.*

TROTMAN & CO.'S XMAS BAZAAR
 196, HOLLOWAY ROAD, N.,
 Close to and same side as NORTHERN POLYTECHNIC

It was not enough. In 1910 the *Barnet Press* reported Charles Harding Trotman's bankruptcy. The report noted that his father had retired in 1901 and that Trotman's 'sales reached "the highest point" in 1904, when they amounted to about £2,321. Since that year, owing to bad seasons and keen competition, they had declined until for the year 1909 they amounted to only £1,837.'⁹⁷ Charles Harding Trotman did not give up. The following year, Trotman & Co. were back advertising 'Summer Sale of Baby

⁹⁷ *Barnet Press*, 10 September 1910..

Carriages, Mail Carts, Toy Prams, &c. Genuine Bargains' and continued thereafter with a strict focus on prams and toys.⁹⁸

A year later on 28 June 1912, in the *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald*:

YOUR DARLING CHILD should ride in a

Trotman's Baby Carriage

THE REASONS WHY—

None better, None Cheaper. Cash only at Lowest Prices. All Goods Guaranteed and Delivered Free. They are Comfortable, Easy and Light. The Best and Biggest Variety in North London. Doctors and Nurses recommend them. For Quality and Finish unequalled.

TROTMAN & Co., Makers, Estd. 1821.

Offer you Best Value. in Baby Carriages. Mail Carts, Pramettes, Carettes, Push Carts, Folders and Toy Prams Come and see them, you are not pressed to purchase.

Sun Canopies from 2/6.

210 (late 196), Holloway Road. N. (Price List Post Free. Close to and same side as N. Polytechnic.)

The very last whimper came just before the Great War. The pre-pays column of the *Daily Herald* on 9 May 1914: 'POST FREE.— Cash Catalogue of High Grade Baby Carriages, etc. Buy direct from makers and save all intermediate profits. Carriage paid. Address, Trotman and Co., Baby Carriage Makers, 'Department H.', Holloway, London.'

Charles Harding Trotman, last of the line, died in 1922, and the firm finally ceased trading.⁹⁹ Did he ever hear of his three-times great grandfather, John Prior, who made chairs (and very possibly children's carriages, as John junior and Robert did in the 1820s), in Uxbridge one hundred and sixty years before?

STAMPED PRIOR CHAIRS

The last significant publication of stamped Prior Windsor chair types was in Dr B. D. Cotton's *The English Regional Chair*. Eleven chairs and their stamps are shown there at Plates 3 to 7 inclusive and Figures TV 148, TV 149 and TV 151 to 159 inclusive.¹⁰⁰ A further chair was published by Thomas Crispin in *The English Windsor Chair*.¹⁰¹ Four stamps were known. These were the single 'PRIOR' mentioned but not shown in relation to Plate 7 in *The English Regional Chair*, which Cotton attributed to Samuel Prior, and three others, two of which are small, like tool stamps, and one is larger and set over two lines:

I·PRIOR UXBRIDGE

ROBERT·PRIOR
MAKER·UXBRIDGE

R·PRIOR

⁹⁸ *Islington Gazette*, 16 June 1911

⁹⁹ Sewell (1923), p. 720.

¹⁰⁰ Cotton (1990), pp. 36–7 and 77–9.

¹⁰¹ Crispin (1992), p. 146. In Crispin (1978), plate 52C, this chair's workshop is mislocated at Cambridge. The chair in Crispin (1992), p. 147 is the same as Cotton TV 156.

The author has combed the literature and the auction catalogues to collate and analyse all detectable sales of stamped Prior chairs since 1992. There may, of course, be others of which no public searchable record can be found. A further twenty four stamped chairs have been offered for sale, two of which have been excluded because the author does not believe that the stamps are genuine.

On 28 June 2000 Christie's sold a set of two armchairs and six side chairs, all bow backs with Gothic tracery.¹⁰² They were not stamped, but were sold accompanied with a lot essay by Dr B. D. Cotton which updated in some important ways what he had written in 1990:

Typically, the name-stamped chairs by members of this family which are found most commonly are those by Robert Prior (1780–1853), and more rarely, those by his elder brother, John jnr. (1761–1846), who continued the business of their father John snr, (died 1816). [...] From time to time, chairs which seem to have the characteristics of these two brothers' work appear, but without maker identification. Recent research indicates that there may be a number of possible explanations for this, including that these chairs may have been made by other chair-making members of the Prior family who apparently did not name-stamp their work. These family members for whom no name-stamped work has yet been recorded include John snr. (1731–1816) who worked as a Windsor chairmaker and turner in Uxbridge and who, in addition to John Jnr. and Robert, had two other chair-making sons; William (1763–1788) and Samuel (1785–1863) who moved to work in Cricklewood.

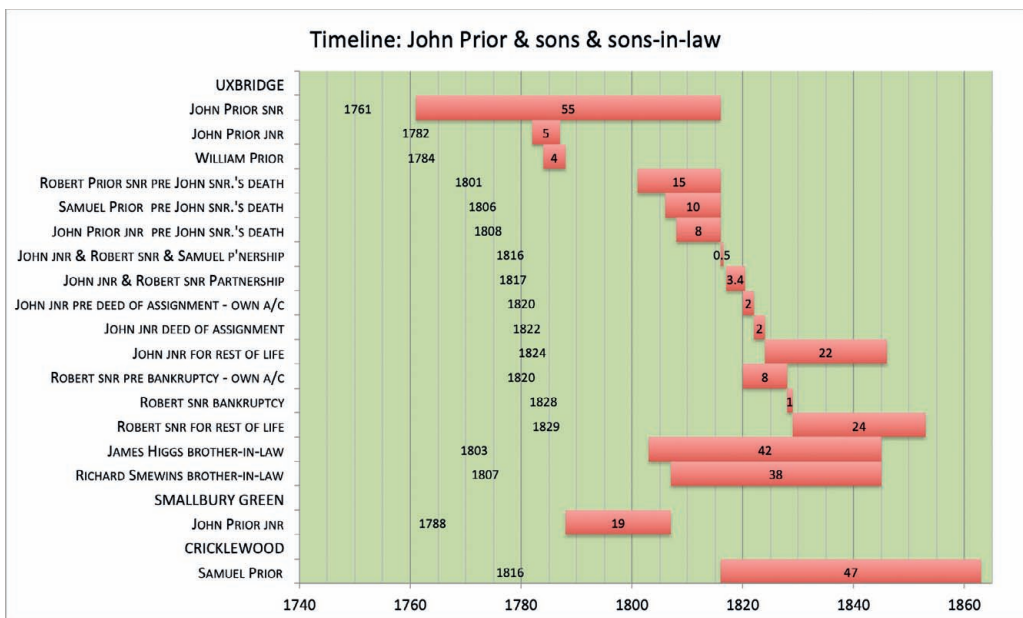
Two chairs have come to the author's attention which have been sold in recent years. One is stamped J PRIOR UXBRIDGE, with considerable spacing between the words. The other is stamped J PRIOR UXBRIDGE. In neither case is the lettering straight: the stamping has been made using individual letter punches. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century makers used whole word stamps. Nor has the stamper of these chairs appreciated that all known examples of a Prior stamp use the conventional 'I' and not 'J'.

One of the chairs so stamped has features which indicate that it may possibly have been made in a Prior workshop; the other has some odd characteristics never seen on a stamped Prior chair. The author suspects that the person who stamped these chairs may have been an avid reader of lot essays twenty years ago, and the possibilities revealed by them, but not particularly knowledgeable about Windsor chairs. A buyer or dealer without specialist knowledge would have no reason to suspect anything amiss. Let the buyer beware.

WORKSHOP STAMPS AND THEIR DATES OF USE

Scrutiny of all published stamped Prior chairs shows that the known stamps remain those that were known in 1992. The timeline of the various known business arrangements are set out in Figure 31. No clear pattern relates that timeline to the stamps. The two Robert Prior stamps probably principally relate to the years from 1820 onwards, but may have been in use earlier. I-PRIOR UXBRIDGE could have been

¹⁰² Christie's South Kensington, 28 June 2000, lot 362, £32,900.



31 Timeline: John Prior and sons and sons-in-law. © J. H. J. Parker



32 Windsor chair from John Prior 1797 billhead. © J. H. J. Parker



33 Late eighteenth-century Windsor armchair. Private Collection. © J. H. J. Parker



34 (left) Low armchair. Yew, elm seat, scribe line, legs through-morticed and wedged, stamped ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE. Narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel, three arranged in symmetrical curved alignment, two under arms. Four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet. Crinoline stretcher with two spurs. © Sotheby's



35 (right) Low Armchair. Yew, elm seat, scribe line, legs through-morticed and wedged, stamped PRIOR UXBRIDGE (only example). Narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel, three arranged in symmetrical curved alignment, two under arms. Four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet. Crinoline stretcher with two spurs. © Bonhams

used equally by father and son: the discovery of a chair with cabriole legs that bears this stamp, and is discussed below (Figure 38), increases the likelihood of this. John Prior senior showed a cabriole leg chair on his billhead, which was in use from at least 1768 onwards. A detail of that engraving can be compared with a chair from the author's collection, of similar style and date, not claimed to be a Prior, but photographed at the same angle (Figures 32 and 33).

A schedule which sets out the basic features of each known stamped Prior chair is set out in the appendix. Those chairs which are previously unrecorded types, or variants of previously known types, are examined here. A pair of low back armchairs exhibiting the familiar three narrow fretted splats with turned roundel, sold at Christie's in 1998, are the first examples recorded which also combine the I·PRIOR UXBRIDGE stamp and a crinoline stretcher.¹⁰³ A chair sold at Christies in 1999, whilst again of a familiar general type (Cotton Figure TV 156), is the first recorded with the combination of the I·PRIOR UXBRIDGE stamp and a simple H stretcher.¹⁰⁴

A group of eight chairs sold at Sotheby's in 2004, two of them stamped ROBERT·PRIOR / MAKER·UXBRIDGE, are the first recorded to combine that stamp with a crinoline stretcher (Figure 34).¹⁰⁵ A group of ten, sold at Bonham's in 2010, are of the same type but one was catalogued as being stamped simply 'PRIOR UXBRIDGE' (Figure 35).¹⁰⁶ If the cataloguing was accurate, this is the only chair of this type known to bear this stamp.

¹⁰³ Christie's South Kensington, 25 February 1998, lots 742 and 743.

¹⁰⁴ Christie's South Kensington, 24 February 1999, lot 690.

¹⁰⁵ Sotheby's Olympia, 27 April 2004, lot 141.

¹⁰⁶ Bonhams Chester, 13 May 2010, lot 696.



36 (left) High Armchair. Yew, ash, elm seat, scribe line, legs through-morticed and wedged, stamped ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE. Six-piercing accentuated wheel with turned roundel rebated into armbow. Four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet. Crinoline stretcher with two spurs. © *Dreweatts 1759*

37 (right) High Armchairs. Yew, elm seat, scribe line, legs through-morticed and wedged, stamped ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE. Six-piercing accentuated wheel with turned roundel rebated into armbow. Four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, H stretcher with central swelling to both sides and darts on the cross stretcher. © *Woolley and Wallis*

Given the popularity and frequency within the Thames Valley tradition of high back bow back armchairs with wheelback splats, it is perhaps surprising that a chair such as the one sold at Dreweatts in 2013 appears not to have been published before (Figure 36).¹⁰⁷ Of yew with an elm seat, it is stamped by Robert Prior. The wheel is accentuated and has a turned roundel in its centre; the splat is rebated into the front of the arm bow. The legs are the familiar single ring and concave turning with a single lower ring and the legs are connected by a two-spurred crinoline stretcher. A group of six chairs, all stamped by Robert Prior, were sold at Woolley and Wallis in 2019 (Figure 37).¹⁰⁸ They are similar to the Dreweatts chair yet feature an H stretcher with a central swelling to each side stretcher, and darts at either end of the cross stretcher. All six are stamped on the front of the seat saddle, a location previously unrecorded.

A chair sold at Batemans in 2017, of yew, elm and beech is unique (Figures 38, 39 and 40).¹⁰⁹ The author, alas, did not manage to inspect the chair before it was sold. It is the only stamped Prior chair that appears to have survived which has cabriole legs and pad feet at the front, in the manner of John Prior senior's billheads from 1768 and

¹⁰⁷ Dreweatts 1759, 23 April 2013, lot 369.

¹⁰⁸ Woolley & Wallis, 3 July 2019, lot 18.

¹⁰⁹ Batemans, 6 May 2017, lot 911.



38 (top left) High Armchair. Yew, beech, elm seat, scribe line, legs through-morticed and wedged, stamped I PRIOR UXBRIDGE. Prince of Wales feathers, each with three turned roundels rebated into armbow. Cabriole legs with pad feet at front, single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet at rear. Stretchers missing. © Batemans

39 (top right) Same chair — side view. © Batemans



40 (bottom left) Same chair — stamp detail. © Batemans



41 (left) Low Armchair.
Fruitwood with elm seat,
stamped ROBERT·PRIOR
MAKER·UXBRIDGE.
Sawn uprights with curved
stay rail longer than the
two cross rails with scribe
lines. Four single ring &
concave leg turnings, with
lower ring and straight feet,
H stretcher with central
swelling to both sides and
darts on the cross stretcher.
© David Swanson Antiques

42 (right) Same
chair — side view.
© David Swanson Antiques



43 (bottom) Same
chair — stamp detail.
© David Swanson Antiques



44 (left) High Armchair.
Fruitwood with elm seat,
stamped ROBERT·PRIOR
MAKER·UXBRIDGE.
Sawn uprights with curved
stay rail and three cross
rails with scribe lines. Four
single ring & concave leg
turnings, with lower ring
and straight feet, H
stretcher with central
swelling to both sides and
darts on the cross stretcher.
© J. H. J. Parker

45 (right) Same
chair — side view.
© J. H. J. Parker



46 (bottom) Same
chair — stamp detail.
© J. H. J. Parker

1797. The chair bears the I-PRIOR UXBRIDGE stamp, has a magnificent crack in the seat, has lost its stretchers (though marks show where a crinoline stretcher once was) and the back legs have the single ring and concave turning with a single lower ring.

A chair sold by David Swanson Antiques prior to 2019, of fruitwood and elm, has similarities to Cotton's TV 158 (Figures 41, 42 and 43). It has no splat. Instead its members are made of sawn uprights with a curved stay rail longer than the two cross rails. The uprights and rails all bear scribe lines. The longer top stay rail differentiates it. It is stamped by Robert Prior. And finally, a chair from a private collection, acquired in December 2019, and also stamped by Robert Prior, also has similarities to Cotton's TV 158, but is the high back version (Figures 44, 45 and 46). Of fruitwood and elm, it has three cross rails, all bearing scribe lines. The extra cross rail differentiates it. The chair has a small notch on the front underside of the arm.

MANY ARE ATTRIBUTED BUT FEW ARE STAMPED

Attribution between generations is complicated by the fact that between them father and sons were making Windsor chairs for the best part of one hundred and ten years between about 1750 and 1860. During that period styles and construction techniques developed in the wider world. Great technological advances were made. At the beginning of the period water power, if there was a handy stream, was sometimes possible. Otherwise all working effort was by human exertion. By the end of that time steam-powered sawmills existed. There is, however, little or no evidence that the Priors were particularly given to updating the techniques that John Prior senior had learned. Robert and John junior do not seem, for instance, to have abandoned the old technique of fixing the legs to the seat by a wedged through-mortice. No blind tenons on a Prior chair seat. Attribution even of stamped chairs to John Prior senior as opposed to junior is complicated by the fact that for very long periods the I-PRIOR UXBRIDGE stamp works equally well for either of them and, one begins to suspect, may have been used by both.

Many chairs are attributed to the Prior family, doubtless in the hope that it will enhance the value at auction or in private sale. The family's justly high reputation for making chairs of good design and quality is well-known. The stamped three-splat low armchairs, with two interposed sticks under the back bow (sometimes, but not always, with a further two short splats beneath the arms) are well-attested. The two stamped types either feature 'Prince of Wales' feathers with a roundel on each feather and a diamond piercing below, or central roundels with double almond-shaped fretting above and below (Figure 47).

All these chairs also have three different splat templates for the splats under the back bow. The left and right mirror each other and are shorter than the middle. The left and right are higher on the inside shoulder of the pattern than the outside and the 'Prince of Wales' feathers or roundels are level with each other but lower than that on the middle splat. The result is a harmonious crescent arrangement that creates an elegant balance under the back bow.

The analysis required to produce the appendix revealed one result, which struck the author as remarkable but appears to hold true, though he is, as always, happy to be corrected if he is wrong. Countless side chairs with three splats with roundels are

47 (left) Prince of
Wales feathers.
© Lyon & Turnbull.

(right) roundel.
© J. H. J. Parker



frequently, almost automatically, attributed to the Prior family. No one has published a bow back side chair featuring the use of the three different splat lengths to make the elegant crescent of roundels that is stamped. The only ones that bear any Prior stamp are the armchairs.

There is a chair from the author's collection that is not stamped but has features which make it attributable to the Prior workshops (Figure 48). Dr B. D. Cotton's essay for Christie's in June 2000 also noted that

Typically these features include finely turned legs which were morticed and wedged through the seat. This form of leg turning, included as Type B in the Windsor chair leg typology for the Thames valley [...] is a style which was largely abandoned in the region by 1820 in favour of blind socket joints. John and Robert Prior, who would have been taught this method by their father, continued to use this practice until they ceased working around 1850. Secondly the seats which have been recorded on Prior chairs are distinctive, too, but not unique to the Priors, in being elegantly thin and bell-shaped, and usually with pronounced concave tool marks on the underneath of the seat. A further feature which, although not unique to a Prior chair, does, in combination with other features, form part of a vocabulary of design or constructional elements common to their trade, is the use of two large square pegs driven in on the sides of the seat to secure the back bow, as evidenced in this set of chairs. Thirdly the low single bow armchairs made by the Priors typically have a feature which may be unique to them, which is the use of short splats connecting the arms to the seat ...

Almost all these features are present in the low armchair, of yew and elm with some fruitwood, except that its back bow pegs into the seat are round, as are those which secure the shaped arms to the seat. (In this context it is worth noting that the stamped Robert Prior 'Prince of Wales' feathers low armchair at Figure TV 153 in *The English Regional Chair* has 'back hoop fixed with turned dowel through side of seat'.) The chair has the small notch on the front underside of the arms, similar to that of the high back version (Figure 44). The 'pronounced concave tool marks' were made by a scrub



48 Low Armchair. Yew, elm seat, scribe line, legs through-morticed and wedged, unstamped, attributed to Prior family. Narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel, three arranged in symmetrical curved alignment, two under arms. Four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet. Crinoline stretcher with two spurs. © J. H. J. Parker

49 Same chair — scrub plane marks.
© J. H. J. Parker





50 Low Armchair. Ash, fruitwood, yew, elm seat, scribe line, legs through-morticed and wedged, unstamped, attributed to Prior family. Narrow fretted splats with near-diamond-pierced urn motif, three arranged in symmetrical curved alignment, two under arms. Four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet. Crinoline stretcher with two spurs. © J. H. J. Parker



51 Same chair — front view.
© J. H. J. Parker

plane, used to remove a large amount of wood fast from the underside of the seat (Figure 49). Since the underside is not on show, expending further time, effort and wages on using a smoothing plane doubtless seemed pointless.¹¹⁰

There is a further chair from the author's collection that is not stamped but has features which make it attributable to the Prior workshops (Figures 50 and 51). Again a low armchair, of yew and elm with some fruitwood, it has nearly all the features mentioned by Dr Cotton, with the same exception that its back bow pegs into the seat are round, as are those which secure the shaped arms to the seat. The chair has the small notch on the front underside of the arms.

¹¹⁰ Tim Garland, personal communication.



52 Low armchair, tapered back bow. Yew and elm. Eight pierced splats with roundels, three upper and five lower, morticed into the arm bow. Crook arm stands, wedged through the bell-shaped chamfered seat. Four shallow ring and concave leg turnings with a single lower ring. Crinoline stretcher with two spurs.

© J. H. J. Parker



53 Same chair — side view. © J. H. J. Parker

The chair has four tapered long sticks alternated with three fretted splats with two rows of near-diamond-pierced urn motif under the back bow and two similarly ornamented short splats, with a single pierced urn, connecting the arms to the seat. Again three different splat templates for the splats under the back bow are used. The left and right mirror each other and are shorter than the middle. The left and right are higher on the inside shoulder of the pattern than the outside and the two sets of near-diamond urn piercings are level with each other but lower than that on the middle splat. The result is the harmonious crescent. In Figure TV 115 in *The English Regional Chair*, Cotton shows a high back armchair and a side chair with this decoration, though the high armchair is of the crook arm type with eight underarm sticks. The author

attributes this chair to the Priors on account of the features set out. A chair of this exact type has not been recorded hitherto; it may be only a coincidence that it was acquired at an auction just over three miles from Hillingdon End.

A final unstamped chair from a private collection will demonstrate that roundels must not arouse a temptation to attribute to the Prior workshop, especially when other features are contradictory. There is an exception to every rule which a furniture history student feels themselves to have just mastered. This chair is perhaps the archetypal example of such a chair (Figures 52 and 53).

It is a low back, bow back armchair, of yew and elm. It has at first glance three different splat templates for the splats under the back bow. The left and right mirror each other and are shorter than the middle. The left and right are higher on the inside shoulder of the pattern than the outside and the roundels are level with each other but lower than that on the middle splat. The harmonious crescent is there. Two similarly ornamented short splats connect the arms to the seat.

At second glance, this chair is an extraordinary rarity. There are no fewer than eight splats (and thus eight roundels) incorporated into this chair, three upper and five lower, each tenon morticed into letterbox mortices in the arm bow. There are four templates: top left, centre and right, and bottom five. Uniquely amongst these short underarm splat chairs, the maker used crook arm stands, wedged through the seat. The arm bow is secured to the crook arm stands by screws; one cannot tell whether this is a repair.



54 Front leg turnings.
(left) stamped Amos Grantham.
(right) chair in Figure 51.

© J. H. J. Parker

The ends of the back bow are tapered in the way a Lincolnshire maker would fashion them. Two long sticks separate the three back splat pairs; two short sticks separate the outer back splats from the underarm short splats. The two long sticks and the two short splats are pinned to the arm bow with round pegs. The bell-shaped elm seat is chamfered all round underneath and with a scribe line all round the top. All four legs have a shallow ring and concave turning with a single lower ring. The spurs of the crinoline stretcher swell slightly towards the front. Every construction technique on this chair mirrors those used by East Midlands makers, not those from the Thames Valley. The author placed this chair next to a chair thought to date from c. 1810 stamped 'AMOS GRANTHAM' (Figure 54). The leg turnings are extraordinarily similar. Wherever this chair was made, it was not in Uxbridge and the author would be keen to hear from anyone who has found anything similar.

A CODA FROM DORNEY

It seems right to end in Dorney, where this story began, with a tale of Jeremiah Dell from 5 October 1850 in the *Windsor and Eton Express, Berks, Bucks, and Middlesex Journal, and West Surrey Gazette*:

Burnham Fair.— Mr. Jeremiah Dell, a highly respectable inhabitant of Dorney, and who has obtained the patriarchal age of 90 years, started off on foot, in company with a grandson 9 years of age, last Tuesday morning for Burnham fair, which he has attended regularly for the last 80 years. The 'old boy' and the 'young boy' strolled about the fair, enjoying the amusements, and not forgetting to taste the good cheer. The day was spent very pleasantly, and as the sun began to sink towards the west, the usual series of fights commenced. Old Mr. Dell felt like Richard in Bloomfield's beautiful rural tale—

'I'm surely growing young again ;
I feel myself so kedge¹¹¹ and plump,
From head to foot I've not one pain,
Nay, hang me, if I couldn't jump.'

With these feelings uppermost, the 'old boy' espied a fight, and nothing could restrain him from taking a part in the pugilistic encounter. 'Let I go in ; stand a one side ; let I have a knock at 'em.' cried he, and was soon foremost in the throng. After the fight was over, Mr. Dell felt exhausted and thirsty, and adjourned to a neighbouring inn, 'to whet his whistle;' but when he essayed to pay the waiter, he found, alas ! that his purse had vanished. Luckily, it contained only a small amount of silver; but its loss should warn elderly gentlemen to steer clear of fights—particularly at Burnham fair.

On 9 April 1859 the *Windsor and Eton Express* marked the end of an era: 'On the 6th inst., at Dorney, Bucks, Mr Jeremiah Dell, at the advanced age of 99. Deceased was the well-known Windsor chair maker, and was churchwarden of Dorney for 50 years'.

John Webb's will in 1794 declared

¹¹¹ Brisk, active, lively. (Wright, 1902), p. 405.



55 Dell's Cottage, Dorney. © Susan McArdle

I devise my Messuage with the appurtenances in or near Like and in the said county of Bucks now in the occupation of John Dell to his wife Sarah Dell my daughter her Heirs and Assigns for ever and I devise all the two Messuages or Tenements adjoining together with the Buildings thereunto belonging now in the occupation of the said Jeremiah Dell and William Green situate at Dorney aforesaid and the close of Meadow Land adjoining now in my own possession unto the said Jeremiah Dell his Heirs and Assigns forever.¹¹²

Jeremiah Dell's cottage, and his son John's, on Dorney Common, with the meadow behind leading four hundred yards to the Jubilee river, are now a single building, listed at Grade II in 1955 as 'Dell's Cottage' (Figure 55).¹¹³

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¹¹² The National Archives, PROB 11/1246/72.

¹¹³ The river was dug between 1995 and 2006 to alleviate flooding and flows roughly parallel to the Thames.

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(Appendix, pages 134-35 to 140-41)

APPENDIX

Schedule of all known stamped Prior chairs. © J. H. J. Parker

No.	Source	Page / Reference	Date recorded or sold	Type (armchair unless stated)	Wood and seat features	Stamp
1	Dr B. D. Cotton, <i>The English Regional Chair</i>	36, Plate 3	1990	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
2	Dr B. D. Cotton, <i>The English Regional Chair</i>	37, Plate 4	1990	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	I·PRIOR UXBRIDGE
3	Dr B. D. Cotton, <i>The English Regional Chair</i>	37, Plate 5 and 79, TV 155	1990	High	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
4	Dr B. D. Cotton, <i>The English Regional Chair</i>	37, Plate 6	1990	Side chair	ash and beech, with elm seat, with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged, with fantail and two angled sticks fixed into the back bow	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
5	Dr B. D. Cotton, <i>The English Regional Chair</i>	37, Plate 7	1990	Low	ash and fruitwood, with elm seat, with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	PRIOR (only example)
6	Dr B. D. Cotton, <i>The English Regional Chair</i>	77, TV 148, stamp TV 149	1990	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	I·PRIOR UXBRIDGE
7	Dr B. D. Cotton, <i>The English Regional Chair</i>	78, TV 151, stamp TV 152	1990	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	I·PRIOR UXBRIDGE (twice)

Back bow or stay rail with scribe line	Arm bow	Splat or sawn uprights	Splats under arm	Long back sticks	Short sticks under arm	Shaped arms, morticed to the back bow, and shaped arm stands morticed to the seat	Leg turnings, with stretcher type
Yes	—	Prince of Wales feathers, each with three turned roundels arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	—	a six piercing wheel with turned roundel	—	6	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	Yes	Prince of Wales feathers, with three turned roundels rebated into the armbow	—	10	10	Crook arm stands	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	—	a six piercing wheel with turned roundel	—	6	—	—	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with H stretcher with central swelling to both sides and cross stretchers
Yes	—	with Gothic tracery featuring two elements dividing into four at the bow	—	—	—	Yes	three ring leg turnings, with vase feet at front & with lower ring and straight feet at back, with H stretcher with central swelling to both sides and darts on the cross stretcher
Yes	—	a six piercing wheel with turned roundel	—	6	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	—	narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with H stretcher with central swelling to both sides and darts on the cross stretcher

Schedule of all known stamped Prior chairs (*continued*)

No.	Source	Page / Reference	Date recorded or sold	Type (armchair unless stated)	Wood and seat features	Stamp
8	Dr B. D. Cotton, <i>The English Regional Chair</i>	78, TV 153, stamp TV 154	1990	Low	ash back bow, fruitwood elsewhere, with elm seat, with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
9	Dr B. D. Cotton, <i>The English Regional Chair</i>	79, TV 156, stamp TV 157	1990	Low	ash back bow, fruitwood elsewhere, with elm seat, with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
10	Dr B. D. Cotton, <i>The English Regional Chair</i>	79, TV 158, stamp TV 159	1990	Low	fruitwood with elm seat	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
11	Thomas Crispin, <i>The English Windsor Chair</i>	146, Plate 4:22 both chair and stamp	1992	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE (and) R·PRIOR
12	Christie's, South Kensington	Lot 742, type previously unrecorded with I Prior stamp & crinoline stretcher	25 February 1998	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	I·PRIOR UXBRIDGE
13	Christies, South Kensington	Lot 743, type previously unrecorded with I Prior stamp & crinoline stretcher	25 February 1998	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	I·PRIOR UXBRIDGE

Back bow or stay rail with scribe line	Arm bow	Splat or sawn uprights	Splats under arm	Long back sticks	Short sticks under arm	Shaped arms, morticed to the back bow, and shaped arm stands morticed to the seat	Leg turnings, with stretcher type
Yes – fixed by dowel into seat	—	Prince of Wales feathers, each with three turned roundels arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	—	a six piercing wheel with turned roundel	—	6	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with H stretcher with central swelling to both sides and darts on the cross stretcher
Yes	—	sawn uprights with curved stay rail and two cross rails, all with scribe lines	—	—	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with H stretcher with central swelling to both sides and darts on the cross stretcher
Yes	—	narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	—	narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	—	narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs

Schedule of all known stamped Prior chairs (*continued*)

No.	Source	Page / Reference	Date recorded or sold	Type (armchair unless stated)	Wood and seat features	Stamp
14	Christies, South Kensington	Lot 690 type previously unrecorded with I Prior stamp & H stretcher	24 February 1999	Low	ash, fruitwood, with elm seat	I·PRIOR UXBRIDGE
15	Christies, South Kensington	Lot 275 1 of 2 not pictured but said to be same type as TV 156 in note	17 March 2004	Low	yew, fruitwood, replacement arm in walnut, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
16	Sotheby's, Olympia, Figure 34	Lot 141, x 2 type previously unrecorded with Robert Prior stamp & crinoline stretcher	27 March 2004	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
17	Bonhams Chester	Lot 244 1 of 5, type unclear, not pictured in catalogue	04 May 2006	Unknown	saddle seat with rear wedge support	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
18	Christie's, South Kensington	Lot 9, 1 of 6 stamped same type as No. 11	06 November 2007	Low	Not specified but likely to be yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
19	Lyon & Turnbull	Lot 638, same type as Cotton plate 3	10 July 2008	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
20	Bonhams on site in Broadway	Lot 72, same type as No. 11	25 October 2008	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE (and) R·PRIOR (twice)

Back bow or stay rail with scribe line	Arm bow	Splat or sawn uprights	Splats under arm	Long back sticks	Short sticks under arm	Shaped arms, morticed to the back bow, and shaped arm stands morticed to the seat	Leg turnings, with stretcher type
Yes	Yes	a six piercing wheel with turned roundel	—	6	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with H stretcher with central swelling to both sides and cross stretchers
Yes	—	a six piercing wheel with turned roundel	—	6	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with H stretcher with central swelling to both sides and darts on the cross stretcher
Yes	—	narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
?	?	a wheel pierced central splat	?	?	?	?	unknown with H stretcher
Yes	—	narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	—	Prince of Wales feathers, each with three turned roundels arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	—	narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs

Schedule of all known stamped Prior chairs (*continued*)

No.	Source	Page / Reference	Date recorded or sold	Type (armchair unless stated)	Wood and seat features	Stamp
21	Bonhams Chester, Figure 35	Lot 696 1 of 2 armchairs in set of 10	13 May 2010	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	PRIOR UXBRIDGE (only example if description accurate)
22	Dreweatts 1759, Figure 36	Lot 369, type previously unrecorded	23 April 2013	High	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
23	Batemans, Figures 38, 39 and 40	Lot 911, type previously unrecorded	06 May 2017	High	yew and beech, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	I PRIOR UXBRIDGE
24	Woolley & Wallis, Figure 37	Lot 18, x 6 type previously unrecorded	03 July 2019	High	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
25	David Swanson, Figures 41, 42, and 43	Type previously unrecorded	01 November 2019	Low	fruitwood with elm seat	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE
26	S & S Timms	1 of 2 stamped same type as No. 12	01 November 2019	Low	yew, with elm seat with scribe line, and legs through-morticed and wedged	I·PRIOR UXBRIDGE
27	Private sale, Figures 44, 45 and 46	Type previously unrecorded	01 December 2019	High	fruitwood with elm seat	ROBERT·PRIOR MAKER·UXBRIDGE

Back bow or stay rail with scribe line	Arm bow	Splat or sawn uprights	Splats under arm	Long back sticks	Short sticks under arm	Shaped arms, morticed to the back bow, and shaped arm stands morticed to the seat	Leg turnings, with stretcher type
Yes	—	narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	Yes	a six piercing accentuated wheel with turned roundel rebated into armbow	—	8	8	Crook arm stands	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	Yes	Prince of Wales feathers, each with three turned roundels rebated into armbow	—	8	8	Crook arm stands	cabriole legs with pad feet at front, single ring & concave, with lower ring and straight feet, with no stretchers
Yes	Yes	a six piercing accentuated wheel with turned roundel rebated into armbow	—	8	8	Crook arm stands	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with H stretcher with central swelling to both sides and darts on the cross stretcher
Yes	—	sawn uprights with curved stay rail longer than the two cross rails with scribe lines	—	—	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with H stretcher with central swelling to both sides and darts on the cross stretcher
Yes	—	narrow fretted splats with turned central roundel arranged in symmetrical curved alignment	2	2	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with crinoline stretcher with two spurs
Yes	—	sawn uprights with curved stay rail and three cross rails with scribe lines	—	—	—	Yes	four single ring & concave leg turnings, with lower ring and straight feet, with H stretcher with central swelling to both sides and darts on the cross stretcher

