

# Thomas Truman — the Earliest Wiltshire Windsor Chairmaker?

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Twenty five years ago RFS Newsletter 27 (1997/1998) contained a note from the then extant British Regional Furniture Study Centre:

... the Centre is now seeking assistance to purchase another Thames Valley chair, name stamped by the maker, Thomas Truman [...]. This chair was brought to our attention by Gill Meddings and Keith Pinn of Leonard's Antiques in Essex. Gill and Keith have kindly held the chair until sufficient funds can be raised. Made from beech with a walnut arm bow, ash arm supports and an elm seat, the turned leg profiles and overall design suggest a date of manufacture of circa 1740–1760, placing it amongst a very small group of other 18th century Windsor chairs from this region for whom makers can be ascribed. The Mormon genealogical index records several Truman families living in the Thames valley area during this period, including the town of Beaconsfield. A search of Parish records is now necessary in order to identify a Thomas Truman who was either a turner, chairmaker, or wheelwright by trade. If any member of the Society is interested in following up this research trail, please contact the centre.<sup>1</sup>

A long public silence met this polite encouragement, possibly because the only potentially relevant Buckinghamshire record between 1740 to 1760 appears to be the baptism of Thomas Truman, son of Thomas and Mary on 25 June 1756 in Beaconsfield.<sup>2</sup> No more information seems to be available about either father or son. The 1798 Buckinghamshire '*Posse Comitatus*' (including six hundred and seventy-eight carpenters, one hundred and sixty-four wheelwrights, eighty-one turners and seventy-six chairmakers) records more than twenty-three thousand men's names: none is called Truman or Trueman.<sup>3</sup> The only Truman chairmaker listed in Dr B. D. Cotton's *English Regional Chair* is George Truman of Digbeth, Birmingham (fl. 1790–91).<sup>4</sup> The British and Irish Furniture Makers Online database lists eight entries apiece under Truman or Trueman, but none is named Thomas.<sup>5</sup> This article discusses a group of five Windsor armchairs, referred to for ease of cross-comparison as TT1 to TT5 respectively.

The chair ('TT1') was acquired (Figure 1). The holdings of the now closed Centre later moved, with the Cotton Collection, to the Museum of the Home, where the catalogue entry of object number 19/2017 reads:

<sup>1</sup> Regional Furniture Society Newsletter 27, Winter 1997/98, p. 4. See <https://regionalfurnituresociety.files.wordpress.com/2022/01/rfs-nl-27-meddings.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Buckinghamshire Archives, Bishop's Transcripts, 1715-1812 D/A/T/16; also *England Births and Christenings, 1538–1975* database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:N5L9-LRP> : 20 September 2020), Thomas Truman, 1756.

<sup>3</sup> Beckett (1985), Table 1, p. xxi, and pp. 1–363.

<sup>4</sup> Cotton (1990), p. 492. No variants of the surname, e.g. Trueman, are listed.

<sup>5</sup> [www.bifmo.history.ac.uk](http://www.bifmo.history.ac.uk)



1 TT1, stamped THOS:  
TRUMAN. © *Dr B. D. Cotton*

Comb-back Windsor armchair, made from beech with a walnut arm bow, ash arm supports and an elm seat [Figure 2]. With the maker's stamp, "THOS TRUMAN" [Figure 3], impressed on the seat edge. Made in the Thames Valley area, 1740–1760. [...] Decoratively turned front legs attached to plain back legs with turned elliptical H-stretchers [Figure 4]. Eight long turned back spindles, two underarm spindles (sc. either side) and crook shaped arm supports for the arm bow. Comb rail with an 'ear' either side supported on the long spindles, a hole through one of the ears [Figure 5]. There is another small hole through the upper side of the arm bow. Dimensions Height: 95 cm Width: 56 cm Depth: 38 cm.<sup>6</sup>

One might add that the comb rail is pegged from the front into the two outer long sticks as, from the front of the arm bow, are the second and seventh long sticks. The arm bow splays slightly beyond the seat edges. The straight-sided seat has pegs driven into its sides to fix the underarm supports, and curves behind those points. It has a

<sup>6</sup> <https://collections.museumofthehome.org.uk/object/14646> For convenience: 95 cm = 37.4 inches, 56 cm = 22 inches and 38 cm = 15 inches.



2 Seat of TT<sub>I</sub>, stamped THOS: TRUMAN. © J. H. J. Parker

3 Detail of stamp, THOS: TRUMAN, on side of seat of TT<sub>I</sub>. © Dr B. D. Cotton

4 TT<sub>I</sub>, front view. © J. H. J. Parker

5 TT<sub>I</sub>, detail of ear of crest rail. © J. H. J. Parker

6 TT<sub>I</sub>, front leg. © J. H. J. Parker

marked saddle in the middle at the front, scooped out either side and rising to the front corners (Figure 4). The stamp on the proper left side of the seat is very worn in parts and hard to read. The mark between THO and TRUMAN does not easily form an 'S'; it may be ':'. The lettering is small and of a type later familiar from workers' tool stamps (Figure 3). The 'decoratively turned front legs', through-mortised and wedged, are of a distinctive design not common in Windsor chairs thought to date from the middle to second half of the eighteenth century: the top of the legs are cylindrical, finishing with a subtle three-ring turning above a middle vase-shaped section, which sit above a further distinctive elongated cylinder or reel, with a shallow scribe line at the top, another similar in the middle and a deeper one at the bottom above a concave turning atop circular hoof-shaped feet (Figure 6). The tops of the legs are cut on a slant to match the rise of the seat to the corners. The rear legs are plain, apart from a scribe line above a concave turning similar, but not identical to, those on the front legs atop hoof-shaped feet, much worn (Figure 4). The H-form stretchers, of simple central swelling with a scribe line, are set low, blind-mortised into the middle of the elongated



7 (above) TT1, paint traces on underside of seat. © J. H. J. Parker  
8 (right) TT1, drill holes showing at rear of seat. © J. H. J. Parker



cylinder or reel at the height of the middle shallow scribe line on the front legs and the further scribe line on the rear legs. There are no obvious signs of paint, except underneath the seat, where the first visible paint layer may be cream-coloured, the next layer a dull sage green and the most recent layer black (Figure 7). The seat, seen from the rear and underneath, was originally fashioned with a segment of the outer layers towards the bark attached. Over time that segment has been lost revealing three drill holes for the long sticks, one of which has been fixed with a screw (Figure 8). There is a superficial, if only vestigial, resemblance to some ‘colt’s foot’ chairs (including Oliver Goldsmith’s chair at the Victoria & Albert Museum), but the relative proportions between the sections of the leg turning are wholly different.<sup>7</sup>

The next crumb in the trail appeared in RFS Newsletter 43 (2005) in an account of a chair surgery held at Chalfont St Giles.<sup>8</sup> One chair illustrated (‘TT2’, Figure 9) was captioned as follows:

English mid-18th-century hoop-back chair with walnut arm rails. Essentially a hoop-back version of the Truman Thames Valley chair [TT1] with typical Philadelphia vase and cylinder front legs. Note the original green paint.

William Sergeant drew the author’s attention to two more photographs, of two chairs in a private collection, published with the owner’s permission, which have this prominent seat saddle and distinctive front leg turnings and arm bow splayed slightly beyond the seat edges: one is the identical comb back model to that in the Cotton

<sup>7</sup> V&A, 538-1872. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O372245/oliver-goldsmiths-chair-windsor-armchair-unknown/>

<sup>8</sup> Regional Furniture Society Newsletter 43, Autumn 2005, p. 4. See <https://regionalfurnituresociety.files.wordpress.com/2022/04/rfs-nl-43-passant.pdf>



- 9 (top left) Bow back chair, TT2.  
 10 (top right) Comb back chair, TT3.  
*Private collection*  
 11 (left) Bow back chair, TT2. *Private Collection*  
 12 (right) TT2, seat. *Private collection*

Collection ('TT3'), except that its rear legs and cross stretcher are plain (Figure 10); the other is very similar indeed from the arm bow downwards, but a bow back version (Figure 11).<sup>9</sup> Both these chairs were acquired from the same Dorset antique dealer. Both these chairs are painted, one mostly black, the other mostly green. The owner has kindly provided photographs of these chairs which are set out in Figures 12 to 17.



13 TT2, rear. *Private collection*

14 TT2, front leg.  
© J H J Parker

The bow back has nine long ash sticks and three short ash sticks either side below the arm bow before the crook underarm supports. It is the same chair which appeared in RFS Newsletter 43, i.e. TT2. Its third and seventh long sticks are pegged into the arm bow from the front (Figure 11). Each first short stick either side, immediately after the crook underarm support, is also pegged into the arm bow. The sticks show the facets made by a draw knife. The arm bow, as was noted in the Newsletter, is of walnut, as is the back bow, which is tenoned and pegged into the arm bow. The straight-sided elm seat has pegs driven into its sides to fix the underarm supports, and curves behind those points. The top of the seat shows at least three layers of paint: white, green and reddish-brown (Figure 12). The legs are through-mortised and wedged and their tops are cut on a slant to match the rise of the seat to the corners. From the rear (Figure 13) white is visible under the green. The longer terminals of the rear legs below the deep scribe line and concave turning give a good indication that the rear legs of TT1 have been worn down by about one and a half inches (four centimetres). The detail of the front leg (Figure 14) shows that the leg decoration is identical to TT1. The height is 99.5 cm, the maximum seat width 50.2 cm, and the maximum seat depth 39 cm.<sup>10</sup>

The ash comb rail of the comb back, as with TT1, is pegged from the front into the two outer long sticks as, from the front of the arm bow, are the second and seventh long sticks. The ash sticks were made with a draw knife: the facets made by the tool are more pronounced in the lower tier of sticks. The arm bow splays slightly beyond the seat edges (Figure 10). The straight-sided seat has pegs driven into its sides to fix the underarm supports, and curves behind those points.

<sup>9</sup> Respectively: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/72050267@No5/49114171993/> and <https://www.flickr.com/photos/72050267@No5/49110758411/>

<sup>10</sup> For convenience: 99.5 cm = 39.2 inches, 50.2 cm = 19.8 inches and 39 cm = 15.4 inches.



15 (top left) TT3, seat and front legs. *Private collection*

16 (right) TT3, rear. *Private collection*

17 (left) TT3, front leg. *Private collection*

The arm bow is of walnut. The elm seat has the same marked saddle in the middle at the front, scooped out either side and rising to the front corners. The seat top again has at least three paint layers: probably an initial layer of white lead, followed by green and then black (Figure 15). The middle layer is now an eye-catching pale light green: it is not known whether this is the shade of the original colour or caused by chemical change over time. The underside of the seat appears not have been completely painted (Figure 16). The legs are again through-mortised and wedged and their tops are cut on a slant to match the rise of the seat to the corners (Figure 17). The rear legs and the cross stretcher show the marks of a draw knife. The same three paint layers have been applied to all legs and the cross stretcher. Integration of all legs into the seat looks similar, undisturbed and original. The painted surface of the cross stretcher is scuffed and worn. The height is 91 cm, the width of the comb 46 cm, the maximum seat width 50 cm, and the maximum depth of the seat 38.8 cm.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For convenience: 91 cm = 35.8 inches, 46 cm = 18.1 inches, 50 cm = 19.7 inches and 38.8 cm = 15.3 inches.



18 TT4, with vasiform splat, three-quarter view. © Robert Young Antiques



19 TT4, with vasiform splat, front view. Private collection

A fourth chair in this group, 'TT4', formerly in a private collection, was originally acquired from an antique dealer in Petworth, West Sussex and sold at Christie's in 2010 (Figures 18 and 19). The lot description was:

A George III painted Windsor armchair, late 18th. century, Thames Valley with eared top rail and solid splat, walnut armbow and figured elm seat on turned legs. 38 in. (97 cm.) high; seat 17 in. (43 cm.) high.

The similarity to TT1 and TT3 is obvious. Two of the eight long turned back spindles are substituted by a long vase-shaped splat, which is rebated into the arm bow in the manner that is common amongst Thames Valley makers; the two underarm spindles either side and the crook-shaped arm supports for the arm bow are the same. The eared comb rail, as with TT1, is pegged from the front into the two outer long sticks as, twice from the front of the arm bow, is the splat. The seat saddle has suffered some losses. The seat shape is the same. The top paint layer where it remains is black; there are signs of a red layer underneath. The cross stretcher is different: it has a central bobbin with elongated darts either side rather than a central swelling with scribe line. The front leg turnings differ only in that the lower ring is not placed above a concave



20 (left) TT5. © Dr B. D. Cotton

turning: this difference is reflected in the rear legs which similarly have just a lower ring.

In searching for comparable or related chairs, Figure TV 16 in *The English Regional Chair* caught the author's eye (Figure 20), therein described:

Comb back Windsor chair. Ash with elm seat, with traces of original green paint. Attributed to Thames Valley, c. 1720–40. Comb back Windsors with turned legs probably developed before those with cabriole legs. The paint may well reflect its use as an item of garden furniture, which was an early 18th century function for Windsor seating.<sup>12</sup>

This chair, 'TT5', also now forms part of the Cotton Collection at the Museum of the Home where the catalogue entry of object number 541/2005 reads:<sup>13</sup>

[...] Comb back Windsor arm chair, back has flattened outer supports, four long back spindles & a central vasiform splat. [...]

Chair back: high comb back; decorative comb or crest rail with scroll ends supported by central unpierced splat, 4 long parallel spindles & 2 outer plain flattened back supports; [...] Back legs: plain turned legs with lower ring & concave turning; Feet: straight turned feet continuous with leg; Stretcher detail: H-form elliptical turned stretchers, [...] Arm: bent arm bow; underarm spindles mortice (sic) through the arm bow; Underarm supports: 1 shaped flattened underarm support & 4 short parallel spindles each side; Seat: D-shaped seat with legs morticed through seat; seat warped. [...]

<sup>12</sup> Cotton (1990), fig. TV16, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> <https://collections.museumofthehome.org.uk/object16358>

21 TT5. © *The Museum of the Home*22 TT5, view from rear. © *The Museum of the Home*

As may be seen from Figures 21 to 25, whilst clearly part of this group of chairs and from the same workshop, TT5 has a number of significant divergent features. The crest rail of the comb, whilst having the usual ears, has two additional central peaks and the stiles are laths not sticks. The rebated vase-shaped splat is very similar in overall form but longer than TT4. The stiles are pegged from the front of the crest rail and also from the front of the arm bow, as is the splat, twice, from the arm bow. The front underarm supports are of a concave-cut blade-shaped lath type that is familiar from mid- to late-eighteenth century Windsor armchairs, particularly those attributed to John Pitt or Richard Hewitt of Upton-cum-Chalvey near Slough.<sup>14</sup> The underarm sticks are not evenly mortised into the arm bow: three show on the proper left side but only two on the proper right side (Figure 22 and Figure 23). Viewed from the rear (Figure 22) the severe tilt caused by the extensive seat warping may be seen. The proper left rear leg is 10 cm (4 inches) longer than the proper right leg. The height is 104 cm,

<sup>14</sup> Parrott and Harding-Hill (2005), pp. 20–32 for John Pitt, V&A, W.9-1988: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O141954/windsor-armchair-hewett-richard/> for Richard Hewitt.

<sup>15</sup> For convenience: 104 cm = 41 inches, 42 cm = 16.5 inches, 60 cm = 23.6 inches and 43 cm = 16.9 inches.



23 TT5, arm bow.  
© *The Museum of the Home*



24 TT5, seat. © *The Museum of the Home*



25 TT5, mortise and drill holes showing underneath the seat.  
© *The Museum of the Home*

the height of the seat at the front in the middle is 42 cm, the maximum seat width 60 cm, and the maximum depth of the seat 43 cm.<sup>15</sup>

The top of the seat shows at least two layers of paint: a dark green that is almost black, over a layer of cream/white (Figure 24). The legs are through-mortised and wedged and their tops are cut on a slant to match the rise of the seat to the corners. In a similar way to TT1, the seat, seen from the rear and underneath, was originally fashioned with a segment of the outer layers towards the bark attached. Over time that segment has been lost revealing a wide mortise for tenon of the splat, and small holes where the bottom end of sticks may be seen (Figure 25).

The uniformity of workshop practice in this group of five chairs is shown by the use of walnut for all the arm bows, elm for all the seats and ash for the rest of the parts where the woods can be determined. The similarity of the front legs and the seats is



26 Proper right front legs of all five chairs, left to right: TT<sub>1</sub>, TT<sub>2</sub>, TT<sub>3</sub>, TT<sub>5</sub>, TT<sub>4</sub>. © J H J Parker



27 The seats of all five chairs, clockwise from top left: TT<sub>1</sub>, TT<sub>2</sub>, TT<sub>4</sub>, TT<sub>5</sub>, TT<sub>3</sub>. © J H J Parker



28 All four comb backs, left to right: TT<sub>1</sub>, TT<sub>4</sub>, TT<sub>3</sub> and TT<sub>5</sub>. © J H J Parker

clear from Figures 26 and 27; ditto the comb backs when they are compared to each other from the same perspective (Figure 28). The pinning of the combs and the splats from the front into the crest rails and the arm bows is another significant marker. These all came from the same workshop. So who made them and where?

#### THOMAS TRUMAN OF LYDIARD MILLICENT

William Sergeant suggested that there might be an association with Wiltshire and knew of a marriage in Lydiard Millicent<sup>16</sup>, which is a small village in North Wiltshire, two

<sup>16</sup> Most likely by putting ‘Thomas Truman chairmaker’ into Google, which at the time of searching results in <https://ukga.org/browse.php?action=ViewRec&DB=8&bookID=68&pagecount=21> (the Hankerton Parish Register) as the fifth result. ‘Thomas Truman chair maker’ does not return that result, which shows the necessity of a flexible approach to the spelling of search terms.

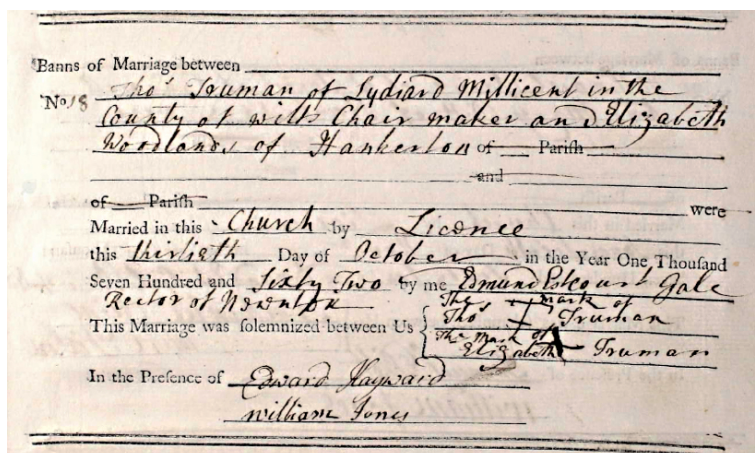
Lacock

Lydiard Millicent



29 North Wiltshire from An Improved map of Wiltshire: divided into its hundreds, Emanuel Bowen, London, 1755. Triangles denote substantial country houses. © J. H. J. Parker

30 Marriage by  
banns of Thomas  
Truman and  
Elizabeth  
Woodlands. Image  
courtesy of the  
Wiltshire and  
Swindon History  
Centre accessed on  
Ancestry.co.uk



miles west of Swindon. It sits above the Lydiard Brook which joins the River Ray which flows north to meet the Thames east of Cricklade (Figure 29)<sup>17</sup>. The seventeenth and eighteenth century main road from Bristol to Oxford ran just north of Lydiard Millicent, and just south of Purton.<sup>18</sup>

On 30 October 1762 Thomas Truman of Lydiard Millicent, chair maker, married Elizabeth Woodlands of Hankerton (five miles west north west of Lydiard Millicent). Thomas's mark is a 'T' with descending serifs either side of the top bar and a bar across the middle of the letter, about halfway down (Figure 30).<sup>19</sup>

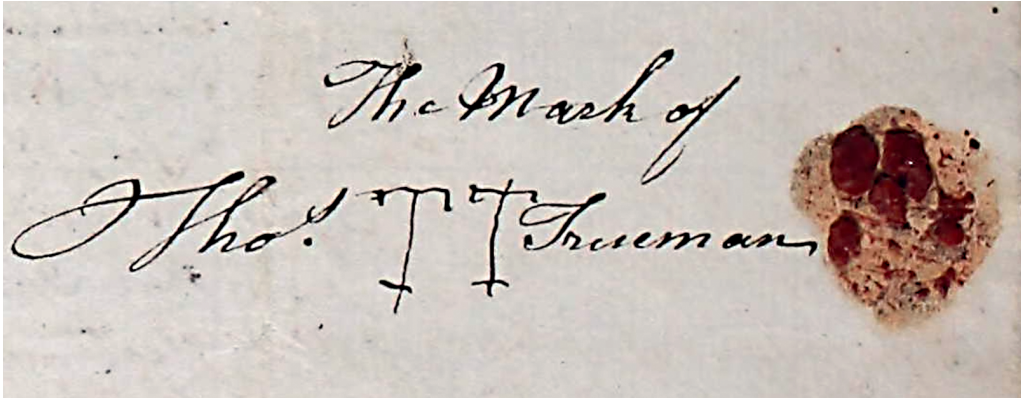
Further research revealed a will dated 19 March 1773 of Thomas Trueman, chair maker; Thomas's mark is a pair of 'T's with descending serifs either side of the top bar and a bar across the middle of the letter, towards the bottom (Figure 31):

... I give and devise to my beloved Grand Son William Kibblewhite, after the decease of my daughter Frances Kibblewhite (his mother) The West end of my Dwelling House or Tenement wherein William Sheldon and his family now lives Situate lying and being in Liddiard Millicent aforesaid Also I Give and Bequeath unto my said Grand Son William Kibblewhite (after the decease of my said daughter Frances) My Colt Waggon Carts, Harness and all Things thereto belonging and if the same shall be worn out or impaired at the Decease of my said Daughter then my Will is that the same shall be made good to my said Grand Son to the full Value thereof by my said Executor herein after named. Also my Will is that my said Grand Son William Kibblewhite shall have five Shillings a week and the keeping of

<sup>17</sup> Windsor chairs in the early to mid-eighteenth century were mostly for garden use and mostly painted to protect them from the elements: Cotton (1990), p. 46, Parrott (2005), pp. 16–17, and Parrott (2010), passim. They were beyond the reach of all but the well off. In Figure 29 twelve substantial eighteenth-century country homes of North Wiltshire are marked on the map by yellow triangles edged in red. These houses are all within about twenty miles of both Lydiard Millicent and Lacock and represent the closest likely customers of a Windsor chair maker based in North Wiltshire.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, *The Road from OXFORD to BRISTOL* by JOHN OGILBY Esq<sup>r</sup>. *His Mathematices Cosmograph<sup>r</sup>*, 1675 or later. See Dominic Winter Auctioneers, 27 May 2020, lot 74, for an image.

<sup>19</sup> Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham, Wiltshire, Wiltshire Church of England Parish Registers, Marriages and Banns, 1754–1916, 2050/4.



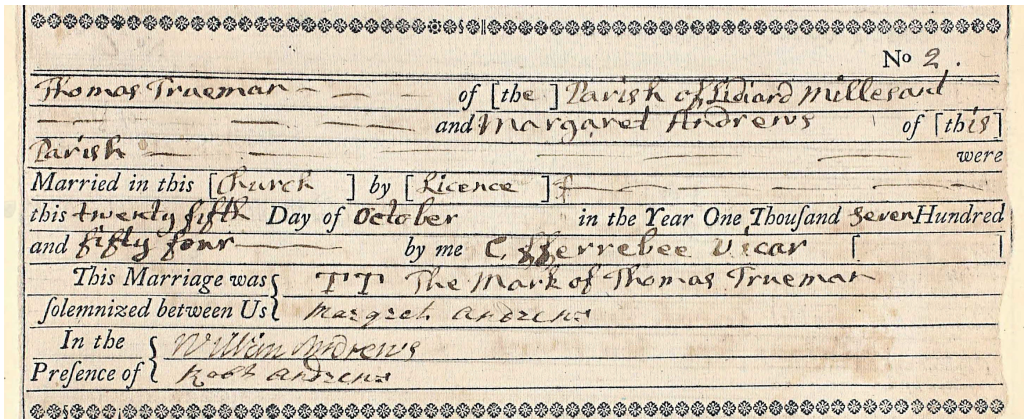
31 Mark of Thomas Truman on his will. Image courtesy of the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre accessed on Ancestry.co.uk

his Colt to be paid him by his Father my Executor herein after named while he continues to Work for his said Father Also I especially leave my Dearly Beloved wife Elizabeth Trueman to the care of my said daughter Frances Kibblewhite desiring her to look carefully after her and to provide for her all necessaries particularly a good Bed and if my said Wife should not chuse to live in my Kitchen my will is that she shall have the Sole use of the Room over the Cellar in the House wherein I now dwell and if my said Beloved Wife shall happen to outlive my said Daughter and not live wth. my Executor then my Will is that she shall have two Shillings a Week to be paid her by my Executor out of my Stock and all other Necessaries. Also I give and Devise to my Son-in-Law his Heirs and Assigns forever All the Rest and Residue of my Real and Personal Estate All my Stock of Cattle of all sorts Corn, Grain and Hay, Household Goods, Implements of Trade Ready Money Securities for Monies and all of my Good (sic) Chattels and Effects whatsoever (not hereby otherwise disposed of) Charged with my Funeral Expences just Debts and Legacies, as aforesaid. And I do hereby appoint my said Son-in-Law Edward Kibblewhite full and Sole Executor of this my last Will and Testament requiring him to see this my last Will duly Executed. ...<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Truman's first appearance in the Lydiard Millicent parish register is the baptism of his daughter Sarah on 28 January 1724. Four more children were baptised by 19 December 1731, including Frances on 25 May 1726. The burial of one infant daughter reveals that his first wife's name was Ann. Her burial is recorded on 28 October 1753. No marriage of Thomas and Ann has been traced before the first 1724 baptism.<sup>21</sup> A reasonable possibility is that marriage would have been *c.* 1723 and that both would have been twenty one (the youngest age at which marriage without parents' consent could take place), so both Thomas and his wife Ann are likely to have been born *c.* 1702. On 25 October 1754: Thomas Trueman married Margaret Andrews,

<sup>20</sup> Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Wills and Probate, 1530–1858, P3/T/649.

<sup>21</sup> Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Wiltshire Church of England Parish Registers, 921/2.



32 Marriage by licence of Thomas Truman and Margaret Andrews. Image courtesy of the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre accessed on Ancestry.co.uk

his second wife.<sup>22</sup> Thomas's mark is a pair of 'T's with descending serifs either side of the top bar (Figure 32). Margaret was buried on 16 February 1762.<sup>23</sup>

Thomas Truman was buried on 5 April 1774, though his will was not proved until 30 May 1781, which post-dated the death of his daughter Frances who was buried in 30 January 1780.<sup>24</sup> Although the first record of his being a chairmaker is his third marriage in October 1762, followed by his will drafted in March 1773, he may have been making chairs since the mid 1720s, given his first paternal appearance in the parish register is 1724. He may not have been literate but his mark was a 'T' or a pair of 'T's with a few flourishes. The contents of his will (without, alas, a fuller description than 'Implements of Trade', which might have told us what kind of chairs he made) suggest that he was not well-off by the time he died, but certainly not impoverished. His great-grandson rose to be a Member of Parliament!<sup>25</sup>

#### THOMAS TRUMAN OF LACOCK

Thomas Truman of Lydiard Millicent is, however, not the only Thomas Truman (or Trueman) who was a Wiltshire chair maker in this period. Lacock is in West Wiltshire, three miles south of Chippenham, on the west bank of the River Avon, about fifteen miles south west of Lydiard Millicent as the crow flies (Figure 29). There are five or six Thomases Tru(e)man recorded in the Lacock parish registers between 1677 and

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> William Kibblewhite married Eleanor Barrett on 16 April 1770. Their first son James Kibblewhite rose from these lowly beginnings to be a solicitor and the Member of Parliament for Wootton Bassett and one of the first Directors of Clerical and Medical. <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/kibblewhite-james-1770-1845>. Carne (1973), p. 39, notes that 'The Rev. W. H. E. McKnight in his *Lydiard Manor*, (1892), p. 24, states the local tradition that James's father was a basket maker — but this may reflect the villagers' propensity to damn with faint praise those of their number who have got on in the world.'

1783, the most relevant of whom, who were probably grandfather, father and grandson, are designated here I to III.<sup>26</sup>

On 9 June 1731 Thomas Trueman II and Amie Weebb (sic) both of Laycock were married by banns at Whaddon (just under five miles south west of Lacock). Amie Webb had been baptised on 22 February 1710. There is no entry in the Lacock parish register recording the baptism of Thomas Trueman II.<sup>27</sup> 6 April 1732 saw the ‘christning’ of ‘Thos. Truman [III] son of Thos. [II] and Emy.’ Between then and 1757 as many as eight more children were born to Thomas [II] and Amy or Emy or Emma.

On 4 September 1758 Thomas Truman III (n.b. a bachelor not a widower) married Jane Nowell. They had three children baptised in 1759, 1761 and 1763. 2 August 1762 records the burial of ‘Thomas Truman senior’[I]. 20 February 1776 records the burial of Thomas Trueman II, and 24 February 1776 the burial of Jane Trueman, wife of Thomas Trueman III.

On 18 June 1776 Tho. Truman [III] of Lacock, Wilts, Chairmaker, took as his apprentice, Wm. Acourt Ely: it was an indenture of two parts, the duty paid on 29 May 1776, for a term of seven years from 13 May last, at a premium of £10 10s, with duty paid of 5s 3d.<sup>28</sup> On 1 January 1778 Tho. Truman [III] of Lacock, Wilts, Turner, took as his apprentice Jno. Amer, again an indenture of two parts, the duty paid 29 November 1777, for a term of 7 years from 19 November last, at a premium of £14 0s, with duty paid of 7s 0d.<sup>29</sup>

On 3 July 1777 Thomas Truman III married Ann Shewering or Show[e]ring. 16 January 1783 shows the burial of Thomas Truman III. No more Thomas Trumans were buried in Lacock after this. The probable dates of Thomas Truman III, chair maker and turner, are therefore 1732–1783. He married first Jane and then Ann. The earliest and only reference to chairmaking is in 1776 and he also appears as ‘turner’ in 1778. His probable working life would have been from 1753, when he became twenty one, normally the age at which apprenticeship was completed, until 1783, when he died.

#### CONCLUSIONS

So the maker of the chairs analysed in this article is likely to be either Thomas Truman of Lydiard Millicent (c. 1702–1774 and fl. c. 1725–1770) or Thomas Truman III of Lacock (fl. c. 1753–1783).

If the author were a gambler, his bet would be placed on Thomas Truman of Lydiard Millicent for two reasons. The first is the earlier beginning of his working life

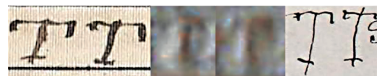
<sup>26</sup> Thomas Truman I’s probable dates are 1677–1762. Thomas Truman II’s probable dates are c. 1710–1776 (no baptism can be found but the estimated year of birth assumes that he was about 21 years old at the time of his marriage). Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Wiltshire Church of England Parish Registers, 1654/2 to 1654/4 (Lacock) and 669/1 (Whaddon).

<sup>27</sup> On 8 February 1677 Thomas Trueman I, son of Richard and Elizabeth was baptised. No marriage can be found for him nor any children. Thomas Trueman I baptised in 1677 could, however, be the father of Thomas Trueman II born sometime between 1700 and 1710 who married Amie Webb in 1731, though this link is plainly speculative. In summary, the dates of Thomases Tru(e)man I, II and III set out above are plausible but there is never any indication of the occupation of either I or II.

<sup>28</sup> National Archives, IR 1/60 f 12 line 44.

<sup>29</sup> National Archives, IR 1/60 f 149 line 62.

33 TT from second marriage register, seat stamp of TT<sub>1</sub>, and from his will.



which fits better with the early style of the chairs, when they are compared to other mid-eighteenth-century chairs. The second, perhaps slightly fanciful, is the resemblance between the typography of the ‘T’s in the chair stamp and the ‘T’ with descending serifs either side of the top bar which feature in his marks both in the marriage registers for his second and third marriages, and in his will (Figure 33).

In a previous *Regional Furniture* article, Robert Parrott and Michael Harding-Hill set out the evidence that the working life of John Pitt, wheelwright and chairmaker of Upton-cum-Chalvey near Slough (1714–1759) was between *c.* 1730 and 1759, and also that

According to R. Symonds, the earliest Windsor chairs had turned legs but at some time around 1730 the cabriole leg was introduced, i.e. about thirty years after its appearance on fine furniture.<sup>30</sup>

The labelled Pitt four-cabriole-legged chair, discussed in that article, is thought to be the earliest Windsor armchair attributable to a known maker. Parrott later set out the evidence that Richard Hewett, also of Upton-cum-Chalvey and a wheelwright and chairmaker, *c.* 1722–1777, may well have worked with, and indeed have been trained to make chairs by, John Pitt.<sup>31</sup> The labelled Hewett chair, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, is thought to be the second earliest Windsor armchair attributable to a known maker.<sup>32</sup>

The possibility must be acknowledged, therefore, that if the author is right — that chairs TT<sub>1</sub> to TT<sub>5</sub>, from their construction method and stylistic similarities, are the products of the workshop of Thomas Truman of Lydiard Millicent — it then follows that any of these chairs, perhaps most obviously TT<sub>5</sub>, is a candidate to equal or perhaps to supersede the Pitt chair as the earliest Windsor armchair attributable to a known named maker.

Furniture history’s uncertainties sometimes make it difficult to pick one’s path through the available material, both the furniture and the extant documents, with confidence. It is often unclear which wisps of evidence relate to one another, which are coincidence and which wholly irrelevant. This tale is one such occasion but the author hopes that, if the various strands now apparent are laid out, as best can now be shown, it may help some future researcher (if ever one recognises further parts of this story) to make better sense of any new chairs and documents which come to light.

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<sup>30</sup> Parrott and Harding Hill (2005), p. 22, referencing Symonds (1935). Present consensus suggests that the genteel ‘cabriole’ developed rapidly in London workshops from around 1715.

<sup>31</sup> Parrott (2008).

<sup>32</sup> V&A W.9-1988.

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