

# Robert Thompson's<sup>®</sup> Craftsmen Ltd

## WELCOME!

Four years ago, we produced a special newsletter (Number 10, Summer 2014), which focused on war memorials created by Robert Thompson to commemorate those who lost their lives in the Great War 1914-1918. This year, as we commemorate the centenary of the end of that great conflict, we thought it would be fitting to look again at some of Robert Thompson's memorial work as a way of remembering all those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. The memorials we have chosen to feature are



all stonework and can be seen today in the North Yorkshire villages of Coxwold, Brandsby and Husthwaite. Although Robert Thompson's chosen trade was as a wood carver and joiner, at this stage in his career, before his reputation was firmly established, he regularly turned his hand to working in stone.

Behind each of the names inscribed by my great grandfather on these memorials there is, of course, a story of a family's grief, some of which are illuminated in this newsletter. Whether it is the two brothers who died on foreign soil within a matter of months of each other, or the young man, son and heir of an illustrious architect, who was lost at sea, these stone-carved echoes of lives long gone remind us of the layer upon layer of personal tragedy experienced by communities during the 1914-1918 conflict. Today, the memorials in Coxwold, Brandsby and Husthwaite, like so many others in our cities, towns and villages, continue to stand silently, bearing witness to the fallen whilst at the same time enhancing their surroundings with their dignified beauty.

Sending all our Mouseman friends across the world best wishes for 2019.

*Ian Thompson Cartwright*

*After more than 35 years of working together, this memorial to the fallen of the Second World War was the final commission by Leslie Moore to Robert Thompson. His grandson, John Cartwright, is seen gilding one of the shields prior to its installation in 1955.*

## *WW1 Memories Carved in Stone*

In 1919, Robert Thompson's estimates ledger shows a commission received from the architect's firm of Temple Moore and Moore for a 'stone cross, Coxwold', which stands today in the churchyard of St Michael's Church. This was followed by commissions for war memorials at churches in the villages of Brandsby and Husthwaite. These three make up an interesting group not simply for the fact that they are works in stone, rather than the oak more usually associated with Robert Thompson, but also as they form some of his earliest work for the nationally renowned architectural practice of Temple Moore and Moore, with whom Thompson would continue to work for the rest of his life.

The firm of Temple Moore and Moore was established by Temple Lushington Moore (1856-1920) a London-based architect who trained as an assistant to George Gilbert Scott Junior and was later a mentor to Giles Gilbert Scott (with whom Robert Thompson would also work so successfully at Ampleforth). Temple Moore was celebrated for his work in the late Gothic Revival style and was considered to be the leading ecclesiastical architect of his time. His work is particularly well represented in Yorkshire where he was responsible for numerous churches and church restorations. Robert Thompson no doubt came to the architect's attention through his work for the

Ecclesiastical and Church Estates (ECE) Commissioners carrying out general repairs in wood and stone at churches in the area around Kilburn. Robert Thompson's ledgers show that he produced pieces for Temple Lushington Moore as early as 1913 for Brandsby Church.

Between 1914 and 1918 the nation grieved as thousands of young men went off to war never to return. Temple Moore suffered his own loss when, in 1918, his son's ship was torpedoed off the coast of Ireland. Coming shortly after this personal tragedy, the architect's work on the war memorials at Coxwold, Brandsby and Husthwaite must have been particularly heart-rending. Following the death of his son, Temple Moore was joined in the practice by his son-in-law, Leslie Moore, and it was the latter who, after the senior architect's death in 1920, oversaw the completion of the stone crosses in the three North Yorkshire churchyards. In this way, Leslie Moore seamlessly maintained his father-in-law's architectural legacy and went on to complete other projects commenced by Temple Moore including, what is considered





*Left: Following earlier work at Brandsby church at the start of the 20th century, Temple Moore was commissioned in 1920 to design its stone war memorial. Robert Thompson's quotation for the work was for a sum of £120 plus incised lettering at 4/6 per dozen.*

*Below: Husthuwaite war memorial. On inscribing the names of the fallen, Robert Thompson would, no doubt, have been moved to see those of two brothers, Abraham Hebblethwaite (killed October 1915) and Lieut. J.C. Hebblethwaite (killed June 1916). Just a few years earlier, Robert Thompson had been commissioned by their father to produce several items of domestic furniture for the family home in Husthuwaite.*

by many to be Temple Moore's masterpiece, the Grade 1 listed church St Wilfrid's in Harrogate. Robert Thompson too was part of the continuation of Temple Moore's Gothic Revival legacy. The craftsman's ledgers show a steady stream of pieces for Leslie Moore until 1954, the year in which Thompson finally succumbed to the terminal illness that led to his death in 1955. Poignantly, this final collaboration was a magnificent war memorial door for the medieval church of St Mary's in Beverley. Designed by Leslie Moore and completed by Robert Thompson's grandsons in 1955, it records the names of parishioners who died between 1939 and 1945 in the conflict that followed the earlier, tragically misnamed 'war to end all wars'.



*Far Left: Coxwold war memorial, designed by Temple Moore, completed by his son-in-law Leslie Moore and crafted by Robert Thompson in 1920.*

## *Records Tumble at Auction*

In October, one of the largest collections of early Mouseman furniture ever to come to the market attracted intense bidding when it went under the hammer at Sworders Fine Art Auctioneers of Stansted Mountfitchet. There was a palpable sense of excitement in the packed sale room when bidding for the largest piece, a superb oak dresser, flew beyond the upper estimate of £8000 to reach a heady £35,000, a record hammer price for a single Mouseman piece sold at auction in the UK.

The collection of around 45 lots comprised one of the Robert Thompson's largest commissions from the prime period of his career. All pieces were handmade by the Kilburn workshop in the 1930s for offices at the landmark Horlick's factory in Slough. The revolutionary brick building was commissioned by company co-founder, James Horlick, in 1908 to produce the famous malted milk drink for the UK market. The range of pieces offered in the Sworders auction was extensive, from sideboards, partners desks, kneehole desks and typists chairs to coat stands and pairs of 'In' and 'Out' postal trays. A number of Thompson's iconic monk's chairs, bearing the Horlick family coat of arms and the Latin inscription *Labore Et Scientia* (by work and by knowledge), were particularly sought after. Sworders Director John Black, who conducted the sale, described it as a 'once-in-a-lifetime' event. He explained: "A single collection of furniture by Robert Thompson, from the prime of his career and supported by his original notes and drawings, is incredibly rare. A strong provenance such as this is always expected to command interest, however expectations were completely

exceeded with the commission achieving just shy of £300,000, including premium, three times the high estimate."

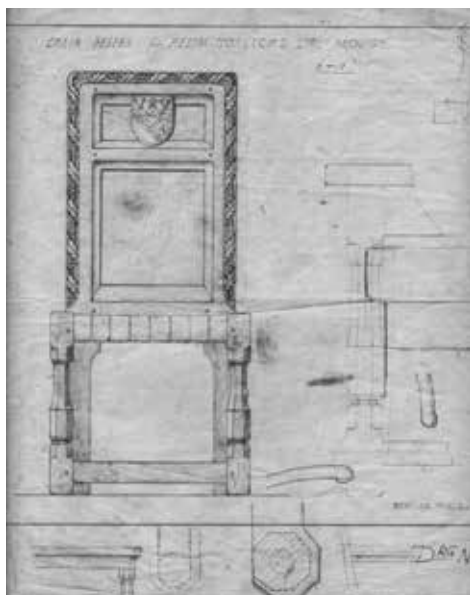
According to Mr Black, there is a rising interest in Robert Thompson's furniture and an appreciation of his place within the Arts and Crafts pantheon alongside others such as Gimson and the Barnsleys.

In preparing the sale, Mr Black met with a wide range of Thompson furniture enthusiasts and was particularly struck by the warm spirit of Mouseman aficionados, noting, "It's a lovely community, buyers are not only knowledgeable and enthusiastic but also open, friendly and very keen to talk about their collections. It seems that Mouseman furniture creates a strong connection with anyone who comes into contact with it."

*Oak dresser carved with a double mouse signature, the letter H and the date 1930. Robert Thompson's ledger of 1930 records: 'Lieut. Col. AJ Horlick c/o Horlicks Ltd., Slough Buckinghamshire Dresser as sketch submitted 6'0 long x 7' high app. £45'. The hammer price of £35,000 is thought to be the second-highest ever for Mouseman after the \$70,000 (£40,460) bid at Sotheby's New York in 2003 for an oak cupboard of 1923 from the collection of fashion designer Wolfgang Joop.*



Sold for £6,400, this very distinctive pair of hall chairs have leaf carved backs and the Horlick arms, over a burr oak panel, with latticed leather seats, each with a mouse signature on the left and right legs. Illustrated (right) in Robert Thompson's Archive – 'Chair Design for Messrs Horlicks Ltd., Slough'.



To view Classic Mouseman pieces, visit [www.robertthompsons.co.uk/classic.php](http://www.robertthompsons.co.uk/classic.php)

### North Shields Dollies

In October this year, the town of North Shields in Northumberland celebrated the anniversary of a much-loved local landmark, the carved wooden Dolly in Northumberland Square, which bears the distinctive trademark mouse of the Kilburn workshop where it was created 60 years ago.

At the time of its installation in 1958, the 'Mouseman' Dolly was the fifth in a series of carved wood female figures

which had been a feature of the fishing port for over 140 years. The first three Dollies, which stood amongst the tenement buildings and rowdy ale houses of Low Street by the quayside, were former ships' figureheads and lasted in turn between 1814-1850, 1850-1864 and 1864-1901. These buxom figures became popular with local seamen who sliced off chunks to take to sea as a good-luck charm. Following the inevitable demise of the third Dolly, a local Alderman's daughter, May Spence, was commissioned to carve a replacement figure.

This fourth iteration of the Dolly caused some consternation locally as the figure broke the tradition of using traditional ships' figureheads and instead was a lifelike representation of a local fishwife, wearing a traditional shawl and leaning forwards under the weight of the basket on her back. The unveiling of May Spence's Dolly in June 1902 was a spectacular event with marching bands and speeches from local dignitaries: Dolly was no longer simply part of the folklore of local working people but instead had been adopted as a source of municipal pride. Despite this elevation in status, May Spence's wooden sculpture succumbed to the traditional practice of souvenirs being sliced from her body and she was removed in a sorry state in 1957.

At this stage, the workshop of Robert Thompson's entered the story when it was asked to create the town's fifth Dolly. This was commissioned by the civic authorities as a tribute to May Spence. The remains of her Dolly were taken to Kilburn where craftsmen carved a new Dolly in mahogany using what remained of May Spence's figure as a template for the design. Records show that it took 389 hours and cost a total of £145/17/6. On 22 October 1958, the fifth Dolly was unveiled. The date was chosen to commemorate the 100th anniversary

of May Spence's birth. The site for the new figure broke with tradition as this Dolly was located away from the narrow, quayside alleyways around Low Street to a leafy square in the town centre where it was considered it would be safe from penknife-wielding souvenir hunters. Restoration work took place in 1986, at which stage the wood was coated in a thick layer of brown paint. Whilst not the most aesthetically pleasing approach to restoration, it has ensured that the Mouseman Dolly remains today in Northumberland Square, where visitors enjoy seeking out the two mice, one hidden in her sleeve another in the carved folds of her clothing.

In 1958-9 several requests were made to Robert Thompson's Craftsmen Ltd for carved miniature Dollies. Around six of these were carved, each 16 inches tall, costing £12. One of these beautiful carvings recently returned to the company in Kilburn on the death of its owner, Fiona Jean Clement of Fife. This miniature Dolly now lives in the Mouseman Visitor Centre, a link to her 'sister' in Northumberland Square and the lineage of North Shields Dollies stretching back over 200 years.



*The Mouseman Dolly pictured at Kilburn before its journey to North Shields.*

## *Revived Mouse Goes Back to School*

Earlier this year, Robert Thompson's was delighted to welcome back to Kilburn a lectern which originally left the workshop more than 55 years ago for its new home at High Storrs School in Sheffield. The lectern was bought by the school in 1962 in memory of a female pupil who had died. Over the years, it was a much-appreciated feature of High Storrs, presiding over assemblies, musical recitals and other gatherings. Unfortunately, those years of constant use took their toll. Realising how much this piece of furniture meant to current and former pupils, the school undertook a fundraising project and asked Robert Thompson's whether it could undertake the challenge of bringing it back into tip-top condition whilst retaining the integrity and patina of



the piece. The 'before' and 'after' images here speak for themselves. The lectern is now back at High Storrs where it will once again stand proud as a focal point for future generations of pupils for many decades to come.

The restoration of the High Storrs lectern demonstrates the skills of the craftsmen at Robert Thompson's where skills and experience are passed from one generation of craftsmen to the next in a line extending back seamlessly to the Mouseman himself. This lineage of craftsmen means that all restorations undertaken by the company are sensitive to the origins of a piece and will enhance rather than detract from its history.

*The High Storrs lectern before restoration and returned to its former glory.*

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## *Bringing Tired Furniture Back to Life*

The craftsmen at Robert Thompson's were asked to bring this classic 1950s smoking chair back to life whilst maintaining its mature beauty which is very much the charm of old Mouseman furniture. The work, all of which took place in the Kilburn workshop, included careful repolishing to restore the patina of the oak, renewal of the leather lattice work and replacement of its worn leather cushion. Contact the company for information on its restoration services.



## *Mouseman Pop-up at Liberty*



In May this year, Robert Thompson's joined with Liberty London as part of the iconic department store's celebration of London Craft Week.

A special pop-

up display of classic Mouseman furniture was created for the event, enhanced by demonstrations of wood carving by Simon Thompson Cartwright, great-great-grandson of the first Mouseman. The history of the Liberty store makes it a particularly fitting location to showcase fine heritage craftwork. Established in 1875, the current store on Great Marlborough Street opened in 1924 with a mission to purvey beautiful Arts and Crafts products. Designed in the Tudor Revival style, the materials used in the construction of the store reflect this homage to the past and include 24,000 cubic feet of seasoned oak timbers taken from two ancient decommissioned battle ships, the

*Top: Robert Thompson furniture on display in Liberty's London store (courtesy of Liberty London).*

*Below: Simon Cartwright, Robert Thompson's great-great grandson demonstrating hand carving. May 2018.*



HMS Impregnable and the HMS Hindustan. Today, many visitors to the Grade II\* listed building will not be aware that they are literally following in the rolling footsteps of bygone sea-farers, the store's flooring being made from the decks of the two battle ships.



### *T Café and Visitor Centre Opening Hours*

The Mouseman Museum, Gift Shop and T Café will close on Sunday 2nd December 2018 and reopen on Saturday 13th April 2019.

### *Office and Showroom*

The Office, main Showroom and Workshop will close for the annual Christmas holiday on Friday 21st December 2018 and will reopen on Monday 7th January 2019.

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