

Robert Thompson's[®] Craftsmen Ltd

WELCOME!

There is nothing quite like the smell of a joiner's shop: oak shavings, saw dust and wood wax all combine to create a scent like no other. Every time I step into the workshop here in Kilburn, that heady aroma transports me back to my youth, evoking memories of my father and uncle and so many other craftsmen who have passed before. Above all, I remember the strong camaraderie amongst the workmen. One hundred years ago when Robert Thompson's business first started to grow, he instilled a strong work ethic in the early band of craftsmen who toiled beside him. That ethos continued through every generation as older craftsmen passed on their knowledge to younger apprentices, building strong bonds of comradeship. And it remains in place today as our current young apprentices in

Kilburn learn the ropes from the older hands, many of whom have worked with us for decades. I recognised that same supportive network amongst co-workers – as well as the Proustian scent of the joiner's shop - when I visited the wood working centre at Claro Enterprise, a charity based in Harrogate that helps those suffering from mental illness to find purpose, motivation and ultimately, wellbeing, through regular meaningful work. You will read more about Claro in the following pages. As a family business, we are so pleased to be able to support this particular charity, as mental health issues today have an impact on many families in our community.

It is interesting to note the parallels between the image below of my great grandfather in his workshop in 1925 and the picture of the Claro workshop later in this newsletter. Many things change but some things, such as the benefits of meaningful work and friendship, remain the same.

Wishing all our Mouseman friends across the world good health and happiness for 2020.

Ian Thompson Cartwright

Robert Thompson in the Kilburn workshop, 1925.



An Altar for Eton

On 4th February 2018, a special service was held within the historic splendour of Eton College Chapel to commemorate the installation of a new altar table. The altar, designed by architect Oliver Stirling, was completed in the Mouseman workshop at Kilburn under the supervision of Simon Thompson Cartwright, great-great-grandson of Robert Thompson.

Mr Stirling, Managing Director of Stirling and Co, London, explained that the commission from Eton College was for a 'plain, simple but strong' contemporary piece which would 'push the boundaries of craftsmanship, complementing rather than competing with the richness of the chapel'. Within the decorative abundance of the interior, which includes 15th century Flemish-style wall paintings and mid-20th century stained-glass, the new altar commands the space through the purity and simplicity of its design.

From the initial brief, Stirling developed his concept for an altar table combining both tradition and modernity through the materials of hand-crafted English oak framed in steel. Family connections with Ampleforth village meant that he was well acquainted with the work of Robert Thompson's craftsmen and immediately envisaged the subtle rippled effect of the adzed surface as part of the design. Initial thinking was that the wood would come from trees within Eton College grounds, however, discussions with Ian Thompson Cartwright led to the conclusion that the Eton oaks would not be of the required size. Fortunately, timber of sufficient scale and quality was available from Thompson's supply of naturally seasoned

English oak, large stacks of which are a familiar site around Kilburn village.

For the steel work, which forms the central cube of the altar pedestal, Robert Thompson's was pleased to work with another Yorkshire craftsman, James Morris, whose company Sculpsteel is based in Terrington in the Howardian Hills, just 13 miles from Kilburn. James Morris and Simon Thompson Cartwright have worked together on several bespoke projects, giving added confidence that this element, so integral to the design of the altar, would be completed to the highest quality.

While the central steel cube has a powerful solidity, its plinth is recessed so that the pedestal appears to hover above the floor. In the same fashion, the rippled oak surface of the altar table 'floats' above the pedestal, bringing a sense of lightness to the design.

To maintain the purity and simplicity of the piece, the only decorative element of the altar is the Latin inscription of the Founder's Prayer of King Henry VI, carved into the front panel:

Domine, Jesu Christe, qui me creasti, redemisti, et preordinasti ad hoc quod sum; tu scis quæ de me facere vis; fac de me secundum voluntatem tuam cum misericordia. Amen.

(O Lord Jesus Christ, who hast created and redeemed me and hast foreordained me unto that which now I am; thou knowest what thou wouldst do with me; do with me according to thy will, in thy mercy. Amen)

Right: The new altar at Eton College Chapel.



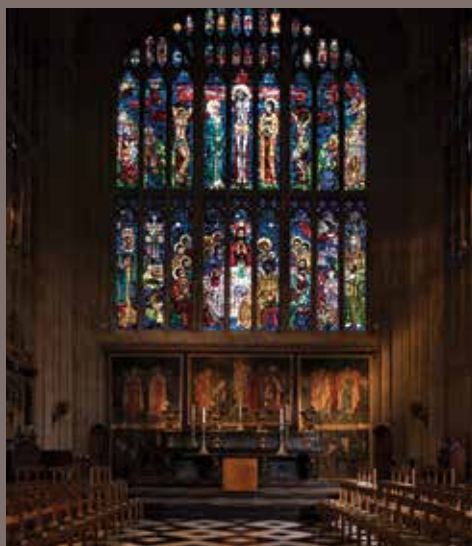
Eton Chapel Treasures

The College Chapel at Eton was constructed in the years between the school's foundation by King Henry VI in 1440 and his deposition by Edward IV in 1461. The chapel interior includes a striking set of wall paintings, which were completed by four master painters between 1479 and 1487. The paintings were ordered to be white-washed over in 1560 by the Protestant church authorities and were not fully revealed again until their restoration in 1923.

In contrast to the 15th century wall paintings, the chapel also contains striking examples of mid-20th century stained-glass. Following a bomb-blast in 1940, which shattered all the Chapel glass, Irish artist Evie Hone, an early pioneer of Cubism, was commissioned to create a new east window behind the altar. The window, which combines a depiction of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion, is considered by many to be one of the finest examples of modern stained-glass art. Flanking this window, and taking inspiration from it, are a further eight stained-glass masterpieces, designed by John Piper and executed by Patrick Reyntjens.

The hand-painted altar cloth, also by John Piper, dictated the size of the table which had to fit precisely when in use.

A seasonal programme of guided tours is offered of the historic heart of Eton College, featuring many of the Foundation buildings, including the College Chapel, and objects from the College Collections. For more details, visit www.etoncollege.com



Yorkshire Elephants Make an Impact in Somerset



In the July sale at Lawrences Auctioneers in Crewkerne, Somerset, an extremely rare set of Mouseman bookends, carved in oak to represent a pair of elephants, charged ahead of expectations, eventually reaching a hammer price of £10,000 (before buyer's premium and VAT). The bookends achieved one of the two highest prices of the day's sale of fine arts and antiques.

The bookends are thought to have been commissioned in the 1930s by John Weston Adamson who lived at Oldstead Hall, close to Kilburn village, where he came to know Robert Thompson and his work. The choice of elephants for the bookends is particularly unusual and reflects Adamson's keen interest in African wildlife. The pair are thought to have been carved by one of Robert Thompson's senior craftsmen. The carved elephants had been passed down through the family to the present descendants who consigned them to the sale. The strength of the provenance coupled with the unusual nature of the carving and the strong interest

in early Mouseman furniture all contributed to the interest in the piece and its eventual sale price.

Auctioneer Simon Jones commented, "They attracted a huge amount of pre-sale interest and nine telephone lines were booked on the day. We have sold some wonderful pieces of Mouseman furniture over the years, but these were almost certainly the rarest items we have ever handled. This maker continues to attract a huge amount of interest in auction, with a large number of specialist dealers and collectors battling to secure the pieces."

Whilst the elephants have departed Oldstead for pastures new, there is still a Mouseman presence in the village: Robert Thompson's archives record a consignment of furniture in 1930 for the Black Swan Inn at Oldstead. Visitors today will find a carved mouse discreetly nestled on the bar.

Picture courtesy of Lawrences Fine Art Auctioneers, Crewkerne.

Opening a Drawer to a Rich History

Robert Thompson was a perfectionist who hand-picked only the best materials for the production of his furniture. This attention to detail was applied not only to the selection of the best piece of oak for each item of furniture but also to the choice of materials used in their finishing and upholstery. That legacy continues today. Robert Thompson's Craftsmen Ltd continues to

work with a small number of specialist manufacturers of high-quality materials, even for those elements which are not generally on view. One such supplier is AW Hainsworth and Sons Limited in Pudsey, near Leeds, which, for many decades, has produced the green baize used to line cutlery drawers in our sideboards. The company has a fascinating history and, like Robert Thompson's, remains a hands-on, family-run business to this day.

Hainsworth traces its roots back to 1783 and today is one of the few remaining vertical textile mills in the UK: everything in the creation of a piece of cloth, from the sheep's fleece through to the finished material, is produced within the company. Specialist versions of the Hainsworth baize used within Robert Thompson cutlery drawers are also found on snooker and pool tables across the world as well as inside every Steinway piano. Perhaps the most fascinating element of Hainsworth's heritage is its links to Britain's military history. The company's uniform cloths served at Trafalgar, the Battle of Waterloo, the Crimea, the Boer War and in the two World Wars. The phrase 'The Thin Red Line' as depicted by Robert Gibb in his 1881 painting of the same name, and as also described by Rudyard Kipling in his poem *Tommy*, refers to the British soldiers' scarlet uniforms, made from Hainsworth cloth.



Today, the same distinctive red cloth is worn by the Queen's Guards at Buckingham Palace. Hainsworth fabric has also played a role in Royal Weddings. In 1981 Charles, Prince of Wales wore Hainsworth cloth on his wedding to Lady Diana Spencer, as did the Guards in their scarlet tunics lining the Mall. In 2011 Princes William wore Hainsworth cloth for his wedding to Catherine Middleton. In fact, that occasion was a double connection for Hainsworth as, back in 1958, the company had acquired another Leeds textile company, William Lupton and Co, the owners of which were the great-grandparents of Kate Middleton. More recently, in 2018, at his wedding to Meghan Markle, Prince Harry, was resplendent in his uniform made from dark blue Hainsworth cloth, as was his best man, Prince William.

It is fascinating to think that sliding open the drawer of a Thompson-made sideboard reveals a glimpse of humble baize fabric, which is directly linked to such a fascinating, rich history of great British craftsmanship.



Left: The 'Thin Red Line' re-enacted in Hainsworth cloth.

Above: Wool blending today. Images courtesy of AW Hainsworth & Sons Ltd.

All Things Mice at Ilkley Parish Church

In God's Own County, 1 August is deemed Yorkshire Day, an occasion to celebrate the people and things that are synonymous with this part of the world. The town of Ilkley always participates with gusto as it is, of course, the home of the Yorkshire anthem, *On Ilkla Moor Baht 'at*. This year, the Parish Church of All Saints in Ilkley chose as its theme for Yorkshire Day, 'All Things Mice' to celebrate the church's links with Robert Thompson. A range of mouse-themed activities took place within the church including a 'hunt the mouse' trail in which participants were challenged to find Thompson's carved mice within the church. These are situated on the church's two organ cases. They are not particularly easy to find as, rather than carved in relief, they are recessed - a practice that Thompson started to introduce in the 1950s to deter souvenir hunters from hacking off the mice from his



furniture in public places. The organ cases at Ilkley were produced as a collaborative effort between Robert Thompson and his friend of many years, the York architect J S Syme. All Saints Heritage Manager, Carry Lynott said: "We wanted to encourage children and holiday visitors to see, among other things, one of the church's heritage assets – the 1953 organ case, one of the last pieces the Mouseman worked on."

*Above: Children enjoying mouse-themed activities.
Below left: Robert Thompson and J S Syme outside All Saints Church, Ilkley, in 1953.*



Supporting Claro

Robert Thompson's is delighted to have established a relationship with Claro Enterprises, a charity based in Harrogate, North Yorkshire, which helps those with long-term mental health conditions to function in a voluntary real work environment. Through this new arrangement, Robert Thompson's supplies offcuts of the company's oak and leather which Claro's clients use to make items that are then sold to help fund the ongoing work of the charity.

Claro was established 30 years ago by North Yorkshire farmer, Chris Brown MBE, and today provides regular, meaningful work for around 40 clients. The charity is based on the ethos of work therapy: through training and personal development, clients can improve their quality of life, confidence, independence, self-esteem and gain skills, which will enable them to look for, and hopefully achieve, meaningful employment. Having regular times of work and responsibilities helps Claro's clients to maintain structure in their lives. Clients may attend work daily or on set days and it is important that they commit to participating. Working alongside other people with a range of experiences creates friendships and support networks. In many ways, Claro provides an environment similar to most workplaces, without pressure. And most clients are familiar with this type of setting, having previously held down jobs across a wide variety of roles - accountants, chefs, roofers, the armed forces and so on - for various reasons they have suffered a crisis and found themselves under the care of mental health services.

Claro works individually with each client, identifying their interests and skills and then finding a way to utilise these. Woodwork is a key area of the charity's output and Helen Wilkinson, Workshop Manager explained that one of the benefits of the offcuts from Thompson's is that clients can practise their skills without the pressure of thinking that if a piece goes wrong they have wasted the charity's money. The Thompson oak will also be used

The Claro workshop.

by members of Claro's Men's Shed, a recent initiative in which men over the age of 50 can drop into the centre to do woodwork; cutting, sawing and, most importantly, enjoying the companionship of other people. Helen added:

"We are immensely grateful to Robert Thompson's for their support. The donation of these pieces of oak stretches incredibly far and reaches a wide circle of people. It provides our clients with a steady supply of materials to learn new skills and helps us to raise funds through the sale of finished pieces. Above all, each item of woodwork gives its maker an immense sense of pride knowing that its sale will make a direct contribution to our ongoing work."

More information on the work of Claro is available at www.claropartners.co.uk

A range of products, made by Claro's clients from Robert Thompson's offcuts, will be available for purchase from the gift shop in the Mouseman visitor centre from Easter 2020.





Classic Mouseman In-store and Mobile

The recently opened Mouseman Classic Showroom in Kilburn presents an ever-changing display of Mouseman furniture pieces from the 1930s onwards, all of which have been fully restored in the company's workshop. Items for sale in the showroom are also displayed on the company's website which is currently being updated to improve the viewer experience on mobile devices.



To view Classic Mouseman pieces, visit www.robertthompsons.co.uk/classic.php



T Café and Visitor Centre Opening Hours

The Mouseman Museum, Gift Shop and T Café will close on Sunday 1st December 2019 and reopen on Saturday 11th April 2020.

Office and Showroom

The Office, main Showroom and Workshop will close for the annual Christmas holiday on Friday 20th December 2019 and will reopen on Monday 6th January 2020.

Robert Thompson's Craftsmen Ltd,
Kilburn, York, YO61 4AH
t. +44 (0)1347 869100
f. +44 (0)1347 869103
info@robertthompsons.co.uk
www.robertthompsons.co.uk

Newsletter No 17 will cover Winter 2020
Edited by Patricia Lennon.
Design, production and principal photography by Mark Pickthall