

Robert Thompson's[®] Craftsmen Ltd

Remembering John Cartwright 2nd April 1936 – 25th July 2015

Robert Thompson's ethos of creating beautiful furniture using traditional materials and techniques has been kept alive for over 100 years by a direct line of family members working in the business and a tradition of master craftsmen tutoring younger apprentices. Sadly, this year, we said goodbye to an important and much-loved member of the family as John Cartwright, Robert Thompson's Grandson, sadly passed away.

The son of Percy and Elsie Cartwright (Robert Thompson's daughter), John

was born in 1936 in Kilburn and lived in the village all his life. On leaving school at the age of 15, he followed his brother, Robert, into the family business where he worked under the supervision of his Grandfather Robert Thompson.

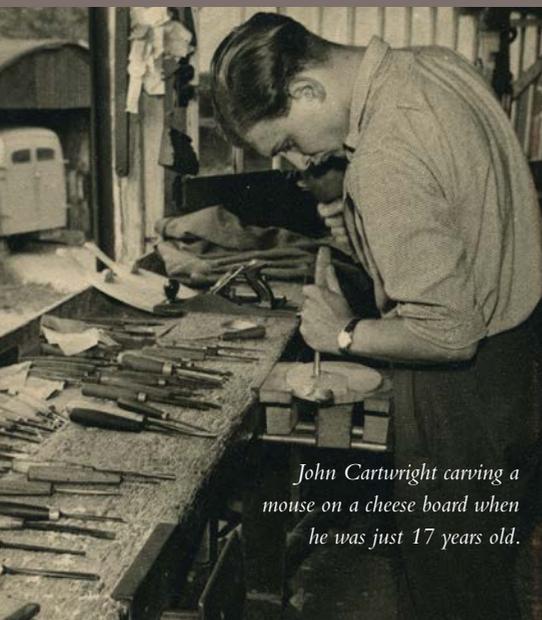
After spending two years on the shop floor learning the trade, he found his niche in the drawing office where his artistic flair was channelled into designing furniture. Many of the designs used today were influenced by John Cartwright.

He had particularly fond memories of the time he spent with Robert Thompson in the years before his Grandfather's death in 1955. John enjoyed exploring the Yorkshire countryside and would often visit and admire his Grandfather's work. Latterly, he spent many hours at our timber yard, tending to the oak butts and looking after the grounds.

The family tradition of course continues with all of John's sons - Peter, Giles and Andrew - working in the business along with myself and my son Simon.

A memorial bench will be placed in the garden of the Mouseman Visitor Centre overlooking the workshop where John spent so many happy years. The lasting legacy of John Cartwright is in the furniture and designs he created, which will continue to give pleasure to people, far and wide, for years to come.

Ian Thompson Cartwright



John Cartwright carving a mouse on a cheese board when he was just 17 years old.

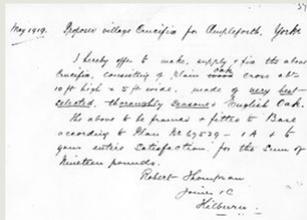
New Life for Ampleforth Memorial

In 1919, Robert Thompson undertook one of his most important commissions when he was asked by Father Nevill of Ampleforth College to create a wooden cross for the Catholic church in Ampleforth village. This work, which commemorates villagers who lost their lives in the Great War, forged a lifelong connection between 'the Mouseman' and Ampleforth College. In 1966, the wooden structure of the memorial was weather-beaten beyond repair and a replacement cross was made by Robert Thompson's Grandsons, Robert and John

Cartwright. Forty-nine years later, that replacement is now also showing the ravages of time and has completely rotted at its base, requiring a new structure to be made by the craftsmen in Kilburn.

It will be erected in Ampleforth's churchyard in early 2016. The life-span of the previous two crosses suggests that the latest version, which sits on the 1919 stone plinth and

carries the original bronze figure of Christ, will be in place for another fifty years to bear witness to the 150th anniversary of the start of the Great War.



The original cross created by Robert Thompson and the new memorial cross under construction in the workshop this year.

A Mouseman Refurbishment in Cleckheaton

The West Yorkshire town of Cleckheaton played a seminal role in Mouseman history as it was there that a young, and possibly homesick, engineering apprentice, Robert Thompson, realised that his passion was for working with wood rather than industrial machinery. He returned to his native Kilburn and subsequently established the furniture making company that continues in the village today.

Earlier this year, Cleckheaton was once again to the fore when Robert Thompson's Craftsmen undertook a refurbishment project at the town's Methodist Church, which involved a combination of traditional wood working skills with an interesting engineering twist.

The project comprised the refurbishment of oak pews and other items of furniture, originally supplied by the company in the

1960s, as well as several newly created pieces designed to allow more flexibility in the use of the space. New communion rails posed a particular challenge as they had to be strong, weight-bearing and robust in their fixing, yet light and easy to remove so that the space could be transformed into a performance area. Simon Thompson Cartwright came up with an ingenious solution in the form of industrial strength magnets, which have been used to lock the base of the communion rails into the floor. The magnetic force



ensures that the rails do not rock or move horizontally but allows for a vertical, sliding motion so that the rails can be lifted easily out

of their floor mounts.

It is the first time that such a locking device has been used by the company. Simon's Great Great Grandfather, Robert Thompson, would, no doubt, have been

intrigued to see this perfect combination of engineering and wood-working ingenuity in Cleckheaton.



The interior of Cleckheaton Methodist Church pictured before (above) and after the refurbishment.

After 45 years, a master craftsman leaves the table

Earlier this year, one of the company's longest-serving craftsmen, David Bowman, retired after 45 years. On leaving Thirsk Grammar School, where he excelled at woodwork, he went straight to work at Robert Thompson's, starting on the 8th of June 1970, just before his 16th birthday. After an initial 18 months apprenticed to Mike Varley, he served the rest of his time with Peter Medhurst who was in charge of tables. David particularly enjoyed this area of work and subsequently took charge of table production in 1978, remaining in that role until his retirement.

Like all Thompson craftsmen, David perfected the skill of working with an adze to create the distinctive Mouseman table top surface. His particular style was honeycomb adzing and, in the same way that each mouse is the unique signature of a Thompson craftsman, David can recognise the hand of individual colleagues through the adzing on a piece of furniture – he is confident that he can spot his own work at twenty paces.

David's first large commission in the early 1980s was a six-feet wide octagonal table, with burr inlays, which was created for the Electrical Trade Union college at Esher

4 feet wide, with 2 ¼ inch table tops. David recalls travelling to London to deliver them to the company's office in Liverpool Street, where a crane was waiting to hoist each table into an upstairs window. A few years later, one of the tables made a return journey back out through the window and up to Kilburn, where it was shortened in length by two feet for the company's York office.

David's largest creation was an enormous dining table, 23 feet in length, which was commissioned in the late 1990s by British Steel for its conference centre in Chepstow. David and Peter Cartwright travelled with this mammoth piece to the Chepstow centre where they were met by eight burly steel workers who helped to off-load the table top, which was in one piece, and man-handle it into the dining room. It was then constructed in situ. Unfortunately, several years later, the table top was badly scorched by Christmas decorations which caught fire following some festive revellery. A burr inlay was fashioned to cover the scorch mark along with two matching inlays to complete the design.

As David now looks forward to spending his retirement on his allotment and on the golf course, he takes pleasure in the thought that the hundreds of tables he has helped to create over the past 45 years have found homes far and wide across the globe. And if any readers should visit our T Café in Kilburn village, we hope you will raise a cup to David Bowman, he made the table you are sitting at.



From Kilburn to the Cotswolds

The beautiful refractory table pictured here is one of the finest pieces of early Mouseman work and provides a fascinating link between Robert Thompson and the Arts & Crafts movement in the Cotswolds.

The company's original records at Kilburn show that the table was made by Robert Thompson in 1934 for Captain Alan Richardson of Southrop Manor in Lechlade, Gloucestershire. Brought up at Potto Hall in Northallerton, around 20 miles from Kilburn, Captain Richardson would have been familiar with Thompson's work as several items of 'Mouse' furniture are recorded as having been supplied to Mrs Richardson of Potto Hall in the early 1930s.

In 1932, Captain Richardson acquired Southrop Manor, an historic estate which is mentioned in the Domesday Book and which remained in the ownership of the church until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 16th century. In 1612, the estate was acquired by Dorothy Wadham and passed to The University of Oxford as part of the endowment of Wadham College. Southrop Manor remained part of the University until 1926 when it was sold and subsequently acquired by Captain Richardson.



In the late 1920s and throughout the '30s, Southrop Manor was subject to substantial alterations, including remodelling of the dining room. The alterations were carried out by architect-craftsman, Norman Jewson (1884-1975) who was a leading member of the Cotswold movement of Arts & Crafts

practitioners and who had a hand in the repair and refurbishment of a number of distinguished Cotswold manors and farm houses. The table made by Robert Thompson for the remodelled dining room at Southrop was very much within the ethos espoused by Jewson who said of his own building projects, "I wanted to have the basic qualities of the best old houses of their

locality, built in the local traditional way in the local materials."

The Southrop table is in fact a tour de force within the Arts & Crafts tradition of furniture making. Its sinuous shape reflects



the outline of the tree and explicitly rejects any suggestion of machine-tools and modern design. At one end, where the head of the table would be seated, a distinct, inwardly curved section traces the shape of the tree's original rootball. The adzed finish of the table top presents an undulating, highly tactile surface, which, with the trademark mouse, is the unmistakable signature of Robert Thompson.

The table is now owned by a direct descendent of Captain Richardson who kindly allowed us to take the photograph reproduced here. We are grateful for the time and correspondence provided by the owner and his late mother, which have helped us to piece together the history of this important Mouseman piece and its link to the Cotswold Arts & Crafts movement.

The Southrop table will be featured in a forthcoming book which will examine important pieces produced by Robert Thompson in the first half of the 20th Century. We will be delighted to hear from owners of similar items of furniture from this period, which will help us in tracing the development of Robert Thompson's style and his ideas.





*Classic Mouseman –
Restored Items for Sale*

Robert Thompson's regularly purchases items of pre-owned Mouseman furniture for refurbishment and resale. These items are professionally restored, using traditional methods and materials, by the company's craftsmen in Kilburn.

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Items of Classic Mouseman furniture, similar to the pieces pictured, are regularly updated on the company's website www.robertthompsons.co.uk/classic.php



*T Café and Visitor Centre
Opening Hours*

The Mouseman Visitor Centre and T Café will close on Sunday 6th December, 2015 and will reopen again on Good Friday 25th March, 2016.

The office and showroom will close for the annual Christmas holiday on Friday 18th December, 2015 and will reopen open on Monday 4th January, 2016.

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Newsletter No 13 will cover Spring/Summer 2016.
Edited by GNB Communications.
Design, production and principal photography by ion river design.