Armchair

Place of origin: England (made)
Date: 1750-1775 (made)
Artist/Maker: Unknown
Materials and Techniques: carved mahogany with embroidered upholstery
Credit Line: Bequeathed by Lady W. S. Theobald
Museum number: W.12-1938
Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description
This armchair is in the gothic style that became fashionable in the middle of the 18th century. Together with a companion chair (W.12-1938), it was originally part of a larger set, which was probably made for a drawing room. The needlework cover is original, but it appears to have been made about thirty years earlier than the chair. Similar needlework survives on two of the other chairs from this set and a matching sofa. These covers were presumably made for a different set of furniture, but not actually used until a generation later. The suite may have belonged to a family named Bishop, ancestors of Lady Theobald, who left this chair and its pair to the Museum in 1938.

Descriptive line
Armchair, carved mahogany with embroidered upholstery (RF: 79/849)

Physical description
Carved mahogany. Wavy top-rail with rococo foliage at the ends. Openwork splat of four upper bars, forming in the centre a gothic arch below rococo compartments, and of three lower bars above rococo scrollwork. S-shaped arms, terminating in reverted elbow rests carved with foliage, and resting on recurved supports. Outside of seat frame front and sides decorated with fret border in countersunk relief. Pillar front-legs with foliated capitals above countersunk carving of cusped arches, connected by tangent U-shape stretchers with plain pillar back-legs. Inset seat upholstered in needlework colours with a formal surround enclosing an irregular panel showing a growing rose bush.

Upholstery Note:(departmental records)
The upholstery was removed by Carole Thomerson in 1979. Evidence showed that the chair had been upholstered only once. The webbing, tacks and base cloth were considered original.

Dimensions
Height: 132.7 cm, Depth: 68.6 cm, Width: 76.8 cm

Museum number
W.12-1938

Object history note
W.12–13-1938 (see also W.14–19-1938) were bequeathed by Lady W.S. Theobald of 57 Bedford Gardens, W8 in 1938.

The use of needlework covers which were evidently worked for chairs of an earlier date; and as on those chairs this appears to be an 18th-century marriage – i.e. these seem to be the first and only covers to have been placed on the frames, and indeed they appear not to have been used previously on any other frames. See following extract from LMW’s catalogue of Lady Lever upholstered furniture (entry on two chairs en suite with W.12–13-1938):

The V&A chairs were bequeathed to the Museum by Lady (Winifred Sarah) Theobald, the daughter of Thomas William Jackson,(1) and the second wife and widow of Sir Henry Studdy Theobald, K.C. (1847–1934),(2) Her will mentions a number of other pieces of furniture and pictures, at least some of which were evidently inherited, but does not reveal which of these came from her family and which from her husband’s.(3) Among the items that would appear to concern her own family are ‘my framed Bishop pedigree’, bequeathed to Mrs Zara Frith, and ‘my oil painting of the Bishop ancestor by Cornelius Jansen and the Chippendale easel on which it stands’, left to Miss Doris Wheler. Doris Wheler and her brothers Trevor and Francis Glynne Wheler were – with Zara Frith and one Robert de C. Tronson – Lady Theobald’s principal legatees. The Bishop connection came through the Whelers’ paternal grandmother, one Elizabeth Bishop (1820–1900) of ‘Grey’s Wood’ (i.e. Grayswood, near Haslemere) in Surrey.(4) Their earlier ancestry remains to be disentangled,(5) but – to judge by the portrait and its easel – it would appear that the Bishops at least were fairly prosperous in the 17th and 18th centuries, and might quite plausibly have commissioned this suite. However, it is equally possible that the two V&A chairs were recent purchases by the Theobalds themselves.

(1) He is listed in the Post Office London Directory from at least 1876 to 1900 as Thomas Wm. Jackson, stationer, POST OFFICE Receiving Ho. Money Order and Savings Bank, 24 & 25 Albion Street, Hyde Park. Mrs. Elizabeth Jackson (his widow?) is listed at the same address in 1902, and was still there in 1911. His will has not been traced.
His will, proved 12 July 1934, makes no specific bequests except financial legacies, his wife being his residuary legatee. His estate was valued at £185,062 10s. 6d. gross, £174,122 17s. 4d. net.

Her will was proved on 9 April 1938; estate valued at £137,571 6s. 7d. gross, £122,833 11s. 3d. net.

For the relationships between the Whelers, see LDS, Ancestral File: Doris Laura (b. 1886), Trevor (b. 1888), and Francis Glynne (b. 1891) were the children of Francis Henry Wheler (b. 1848) and Sarah Jane, née Highett (b. 1854). Francis Henry's father was another Francis Wheler, and his mother was Elizabeth Bishop 'of Grey's Wood', who is said to have been born on 2 February 1820, but her parents are not named; she died 16 March 1900, at Southport, Lancashire, and was buried at Leamington, Hastings, 21 March 1900. Robert de C. Tronson was evidently a relative of Sir Henry Jackson's, whose will (see note 7) identifies one Hillam Tronson (Lady Theobald's godson) as his nephew.

There is apparently no close connection with the Wheler family of Otterden Place, Kent; still less with the Bishoppes of Parham Park, Sussex.

A pair of chairs from the same set are in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool.

Displayed with W.13-1938 in the Lee Priory Room before being lent to Newstead Abbey.

This chair was on long loan to Newstead Abbey from 1979 until its return in June 2016.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O100671/armchair-unknown/