

## **The Furnishing of an Eighteenth Century Bed**

**By Bertram Chapman MBE**, Chairman Albert E. Chapman Ltd

An elegant Flying Tester bed (Angel Bed) Circa 1730 from Raynham Hall in Norfolk came to us to be upholstered after careful restoration of the all the wood elements by Christopher Howe.

It was our task, under the auspices of English Heritage, to bring the bed back to its former glory, before its removal to the Georgian Wing of Hampton Court Palace.

Research into provenance for the bed was involved and not entirely conclusive as the following shows:

### **Raynham Hall Angel's Bed**

The history of his bed is obscure but by scouring the Raynham Hall household accounts and searching for stylistic and archaeological evidence it has been possible to map out the following provenance.

Examination of the extensive and detailed household accounts and documents revealed no evidence beyond supposition that could be used, although there is much evidence related to beds between 1708 and 1777, but none actually mentioning the bed in question.

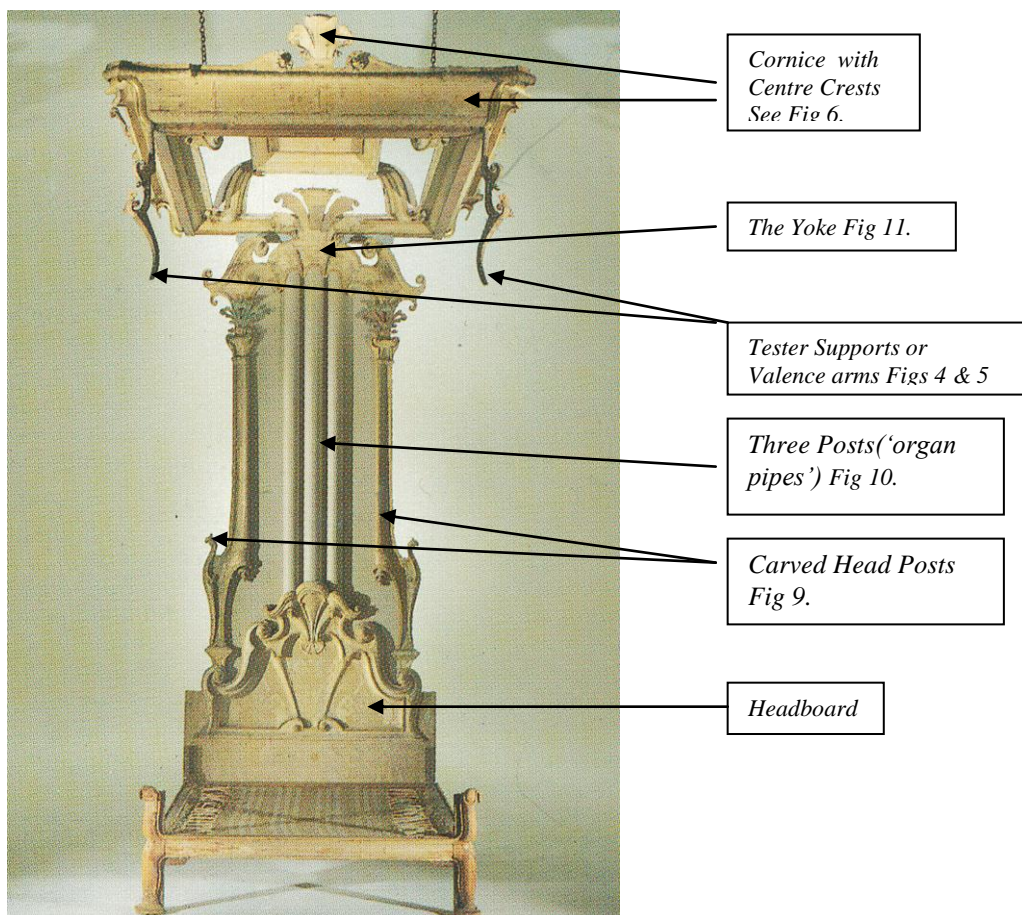
However, stylistic evidence played an important part in the research and through detailed searches it has been possible to piece together a credible history of the bed with strong pointers as to its origin. Although there are many state beds from the periods 1700-1720 and 1750-1800, there are few datable examples from the 1730s and 1740s, and the Raynham bed shares few features with the earlier beds. The closest, stylistically, is one at Leeds Castle, Kent which has the same cabriole finials at its feet, similar valance arms and the headboard must have originally had very similar 'organ pipes' (the central three headposts). Unfortunately there is no documentary evidence dating the Leeds bed exactly, but dates prior to 1720 have been suggested which run contrary to a Heals trade card for upholsterer William Tomkins which put the date after 1740.

Next, archaeological evidence was considered. Extensive investigation of the Raynham bed showed that timber elements were once covered with a painted

cotton fabric which, for convenience has been termed 'chintz' and chintz was in vogue in England, particularly in the period 1700-1730.

Therefore the bed at Raynham Hall was covered in chintz and this is supported by reference to chintz having been used on a bed when two drapers were paid £3. 4s for calico and chintz for Lord Townshend's bed in 1740. This suggests that the work was 'repair' to an existing bed in the 'chintz bedchamber' originating before 1730 and this is the provenance that has been ascribed to the Angel Bed, which when brought for conservation and restoration by Bert Chapman bore a replacement cover of damask of no proven date. The decision was taken to cover the bed in new damask, but to retain some of the best of the old.

The following illustrates some of the procedures employed to bring the project to a successful conclusion.



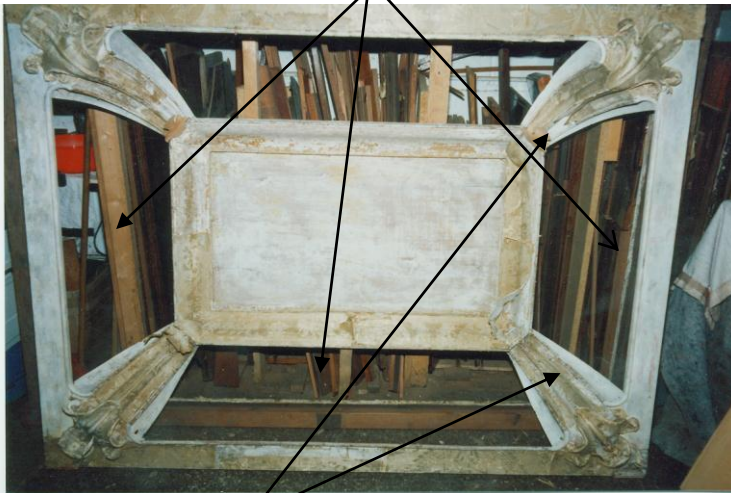
*Fig 1. The Angel Bed at Raynham Hall , Norfolk*

The bed illustrated in Fig 1. consists of 36 separate elements, either slotted, tenoned, screwed or bolted together, each one of which is now covered with gold damask and mostly trimmed with braid.

The adhesive used to apply the damask was the first conundrum we had to solve. The use of rabbit skin size was abandoned because of doubts as to its effectiveness and its compatibility with the various fabric materials involved. We finally settled on a mixture of 90% of rye paste, Sandersons wallpaper paste which contained an anti fungicide and 10% of the water based Clam 2. This proved very effective provided it was spread lightly and evenly. The trick was to leave the applied damask to dry thoroughly before attempting any trimming of the edges, which was finally achieved using a scalpel - a very delicate and precise operation for one slip or false move could result in slashed fabric or at worst cut fingers and blood everywhere!

### **The Tester**

*Each of these areas are covered with damask both inside and out.*



*Tester supports*

*Fig 2.*

**Fig 3. Piece of the Damask furnishing the bed** when brought to our attention



We retained this piece for the centre section of the tester and used new damask for the rest of the bed.

### **The Tester Support Brackets - Valance Arms**

*Figs 4 and 5* illustrate the two elements of each of the two support brackets. These essentially unsupported hanging brackets are most unusual. They ‘hang’ from the cornice frame and give form to the multi-layered fabric lower section valance which is some three times the height of the solid cornice above. The substantial construction of the ‘valance’ maintains its almost ‘flying’ form and contributes hugely to the elegant almost ethereal quality of the bed.



*Fig 4. Top Section*

*Fig 5. The bottom scroll*

## Leaf Crests

The photograph below shows the simple method of fixing the crests to the centre of each of the three sided cornice. Here three crests are pictured, the centre lying on its back.



The crests have wood spigots which are mounted in slots or mortices in the cornice frame.

*Fig 6.*

This picture at Fig 7. shows the use of one piece of fabric to cover the small elements, such as crests, to avoid joins. The fullness on internal corners cut away.



These leaf crests are not seen from the reverse side therefore we were able glue down a 20mm turning on the back.

*Fig 7.*

## Pierced leaf fans *Fig 8.*



The pierced leaf fans are covered and braided. When the bed is assembled each fan sits on top of a bed head post.

It is essential that the appropriate width of braid is used to wrap the edges of the part. On beds of this type three widths of braid are generally required 15mm, 20mm and 25mm for the wide flat edge at the top of the cornice.

## Shaped and carved head posts

*Fig 9.*



The pierced fans at Fig 8 stand on top of each head post while the feet fit into cups in the headboard.



*Fig 10.*

**The three heavy central vertical wooden head posts** (Fig 10.) were changed, on advice from Peter Thornton curator of the Department of Woodwork at the V&A, to ones of laminated hessian.

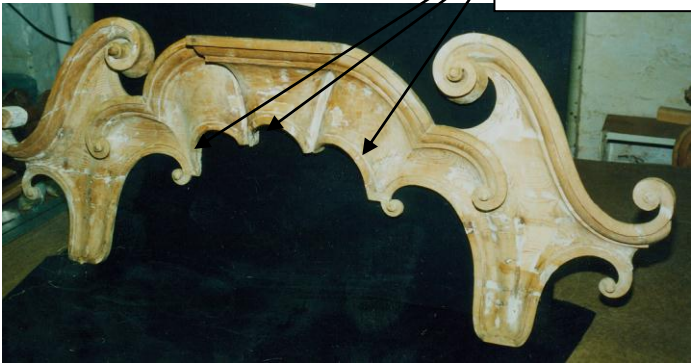
These were much lighter in weight yet very rigid,

To make them we used, as a mould, one of the original semicircular wooden posts. Firstly a wrapping of thin plastic was placed around the post to prevent the successive layers of hessian sticking to the mould. Each layer of hessian was then coated with a layer of thick scotch glue which when dry was sanded down to a smooth finish before the next layer of hessian applied. The four layers of hessian had a final cover of calico before the damask was applied.

The three posts slot neatly into the recesses provided for them in the yoke at the top and the headboard below.

**The Yoke** (Fig 11.)

*The three vertical head posts fit in recesses here*



Below are shots of the bed, temporarily erected in the workshop. This enabled us to decide on the correct proportions of the bed valances and the base valances coverlet and bolster.



**Close up of Headboard**



**The completed bed in situ at Hampton Court Palace.**

