

**Pembroke Violin Bookcase,
Designed by William Chambers, illustrated 1760,
Made by Thomas Chippendale, c.1760-2.**

Client, Wilton House Trust. admin@wiltonhouse.com CR@wiltonhouse.com



23rd October - 20th November 2018; Restoration work carried out by;

**Gordon Maxwell, Restorers and Conservators,
Unit 5, Blenheim Studios,
3, Stewart's Place,
Blenheim Gardens,
London, SW2 5AZ,**

**Hugh Wedderburn, Woodcarver,
17, Tabard Street,
London, SE1 4LA**

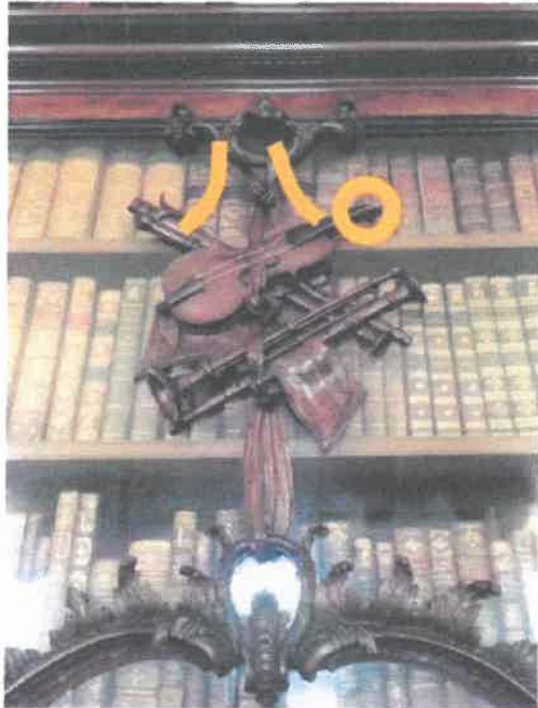
with advice from James Lomax, Chippendale Society Archivist and Curator.

Report written by Hugh Wedderburn, Photographs by Jonathan Knight.

Outline:

We approached the work with joy and excitement, tempered with caution and respect for the history and provenance of the piece, some anxiety caused by the valuation placed on it.

Requested to reinstate the Violin Head, pegbox and accompanying ribbons missing from the musical trophy centred in the chief compartment of the centre door, these elements have been absent for as long as photography has been employed to record the piece. None of the images available show the complete, undamaged ornament.



The mahogany bookcase with exquisite carving and marquetry is in excellent condition. On close inspection there are numerous missing pieces of leaf, testament to the age of the piece, only the missing violin head was considered a major interruption to the design.

Not concerning this restoration, there was debate as to whether or not the door originally held mirrored glass, the need to reflect candle light being a necessity in the 18C. The smaller glazed compartments contain mirror glass with mahogany board covering the backs, the clear glazed areas are carefully puttied in with the putty coloured to match the mahogany.

Approaching the restoration:

From the restorers perspective, the glazed door caused anxiety lest the glass be cracked during the restoration work.

The initial approach was to work on the bookcase from a platform on site, in the Large Smoking Room, with the estate workshop available for preparatory work on the pieces to be jointed on. As the practicalities were thought through, dismantling the door and removing it to the estate workshop became a more favourable option; this agreed, the advantages of transporting the door to Gordon Maxwell's London workshop became obvious, removing the need for commuting with tools and organising overnight accommodation.

On a piece as important and valuable as this the responsibility for insurance cover had to be agreed. Wilton House made enquiries to confirm the House insurance would cover the piece while off the premises and undertook the responsibility for transport from Wilton to Gordon Maxwell and back, Craig Webster driving. A substantial crate was purpose made to protect the door in transport.

Restoration:

Dismounting the door was carried out by Jonathan Knight, assisted by Hugh Wedderburn, supervised and helped by Wilton House staff, Nigel Bailey and Craig Webster.

Screw locations were carefully recorded as they were removed from the hinges by placing them in a block of expanded polystyrene marked to represent the door. This allowed for any discrepancy in the screw sizes to be maintained with the corresponding hole when reassembling.

One of the hinges had broken at the knuckle and the jamb shows signs of damage and previous repair at the lower hinge mounting with the carcass. (*Possibly caused by the weight of the door when mirrored and so explaining the present clear glass arrangement.*) Nonetheless, the door function is unimpeded and so, for the time being, no further intervention or repair is considered necessary.

Dismantling achieved, the door was crated and taken to Gordon Maxwell. Inevitably, the reinstatement of the violin head and accompanying ribbons involves speculation. Examining the door, the grain of the wood runs vertically throughout the trophy allowing a delightful decorative effect on the sound board but causing vulnerable sections elsewhere, the break points are obvious.

Material:

A selection of suitable timber was made from Gordon Maxwell's extensive stock of timber the grain and colour were closely matched.

The Violin Head:

The fingerboard and tailpiece are separate elements, added on in ebony wood; the pegbox had sheered off at the point where the first tuning peg was located one hole remaining, half of the corresponding hole. This indicated that the tuning pegs were also loose items, probably also made of ebony. David Kewn turned the four new tuning pegs and made a replacement bridge, all in ebony wood.

The pegbox ends abruptly where the break occurs on short grain, contrary to the construction of a real violin where the grain would run with the length of the neck. Knowing the date of the bookcase to be 1760-62 research on period violins from Cremona suggested a design for the violin head in keeping with the shape and proportions of the body but this conflicts with Chippendale designs that can be seen in *The Gentleman & Cabinet-Maker's Director*. Research for carved examples resulted with yet other styles as found in *The Norfolk House Music Room at The V&A*.

The first design based on the Cremona examples was rejected by James Lomax, his eye for Chippendale being refined by huge experience and knowledge of the oeuvre. A base relief gilded panel in the Temple Newsam collection shows a violin head similar to Chippendale's designs. The subsequent proposal follows Chippendale's designs and was accepted by James Lomax.

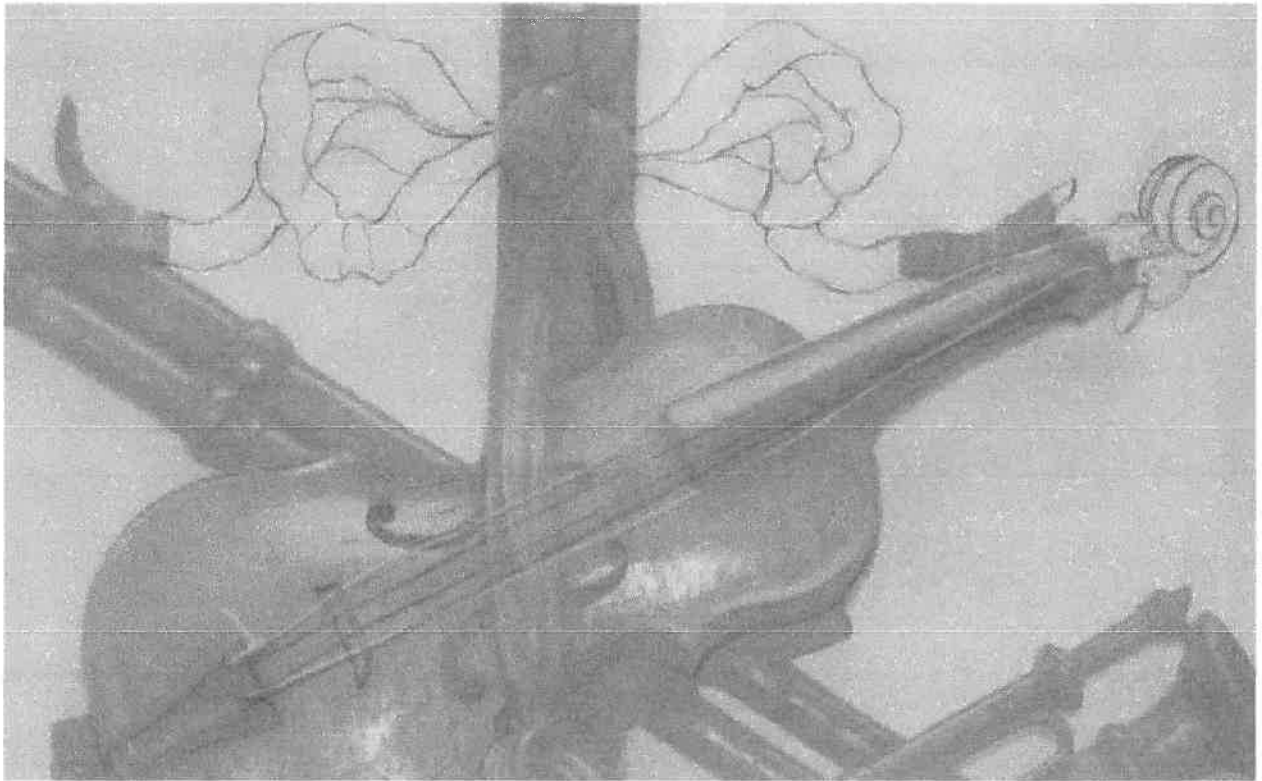
Lately, an arrangement of strings had been made but with no pegbox to connect to the scheme was unconvincing. Another arrangement survives in the archives where the strings were kept. There is no proof that this was the original stringing but it is at least real gut. David Kewn sourced gut strings to restring the restored piece. Two lengths of E string (the thinnest) proved sufficient for the four pegs to be strung. (*Please note that the tailboard has only two holes so the stringing has two strings emerging from each hole.*) Care has to be taken not to wind the strings too tightly and so strain the repair.

The Ribbons:

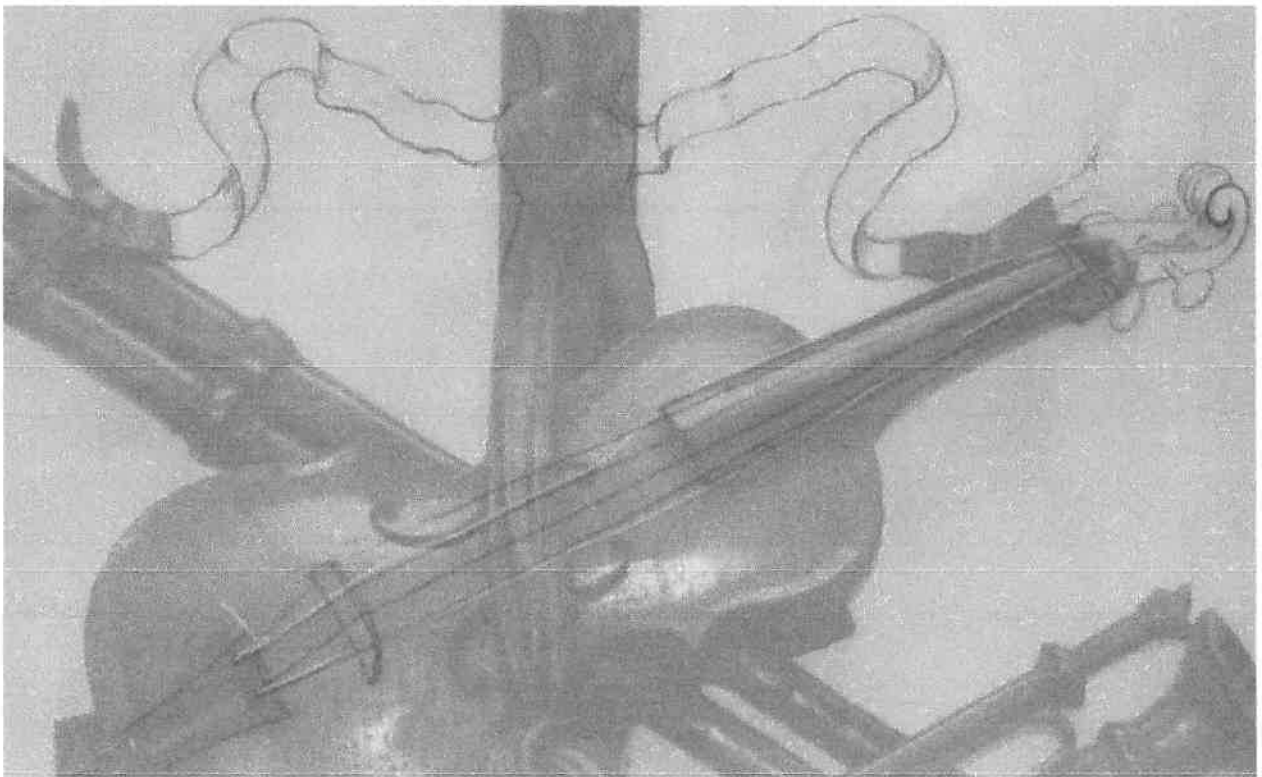
The ribbons, exiting from each side of the central knot and terminating left and right where the remains are found. The replacements had to balance the asymmetric design keeping within the flow of Chippendale's style, the lines and forms combining with the remaining original pieces. The initial design relied on the bows to fill and balance the space. James Lomax considered this excessive and so a more moderate design was proposed and accepted.

Illustrations:

Initial Design, rejected;



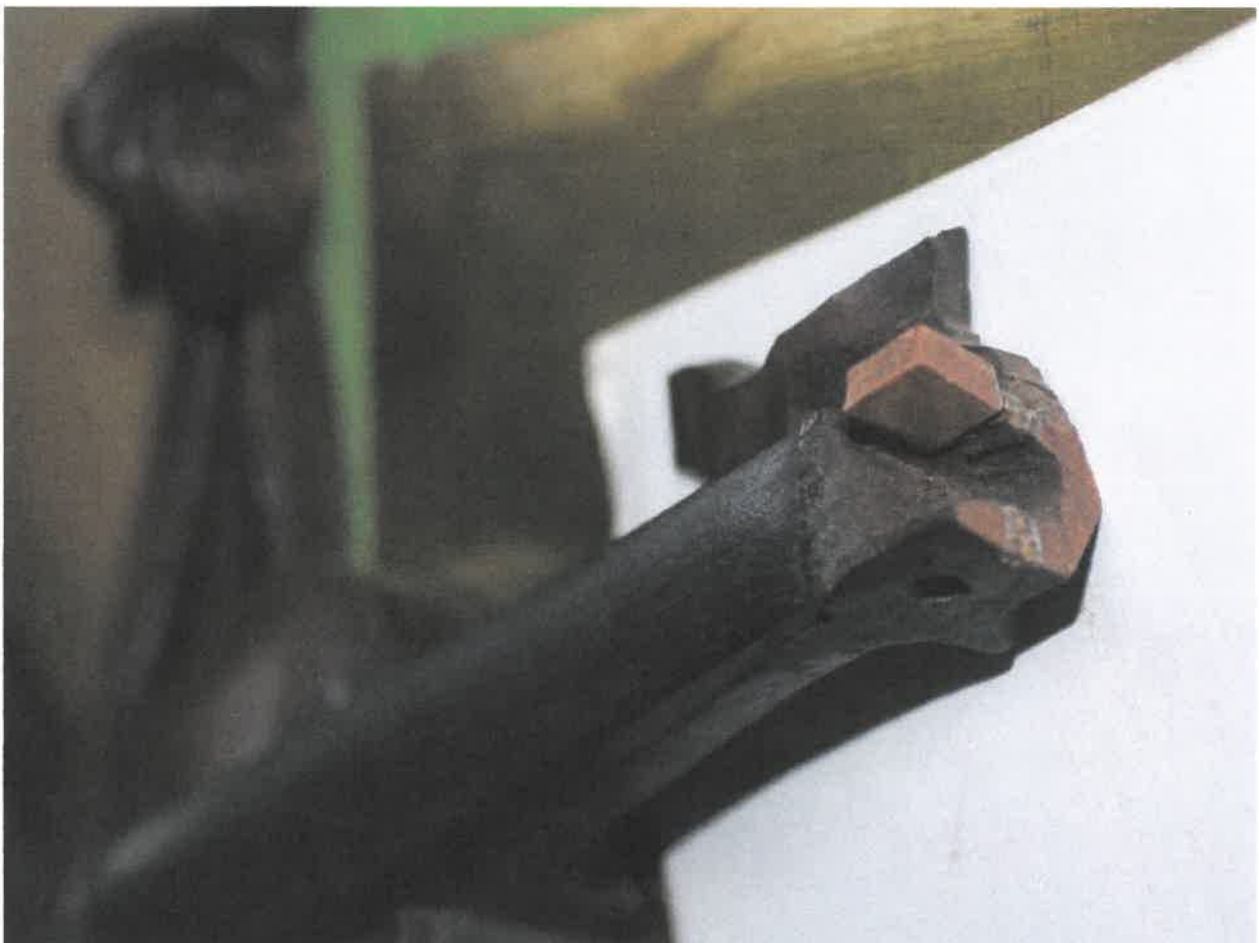
Refined design, accepted;



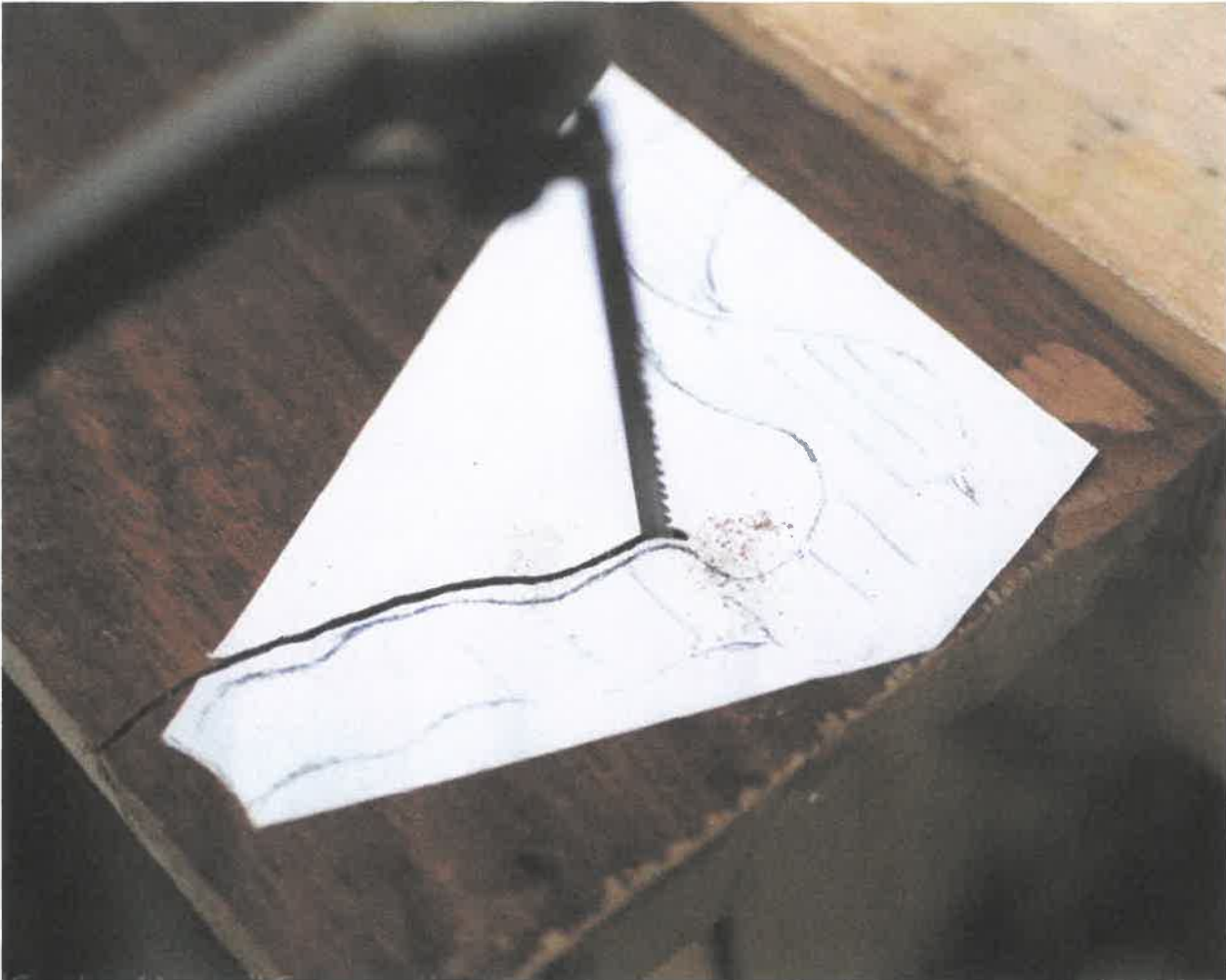
Ebony finger board loose on arrival;



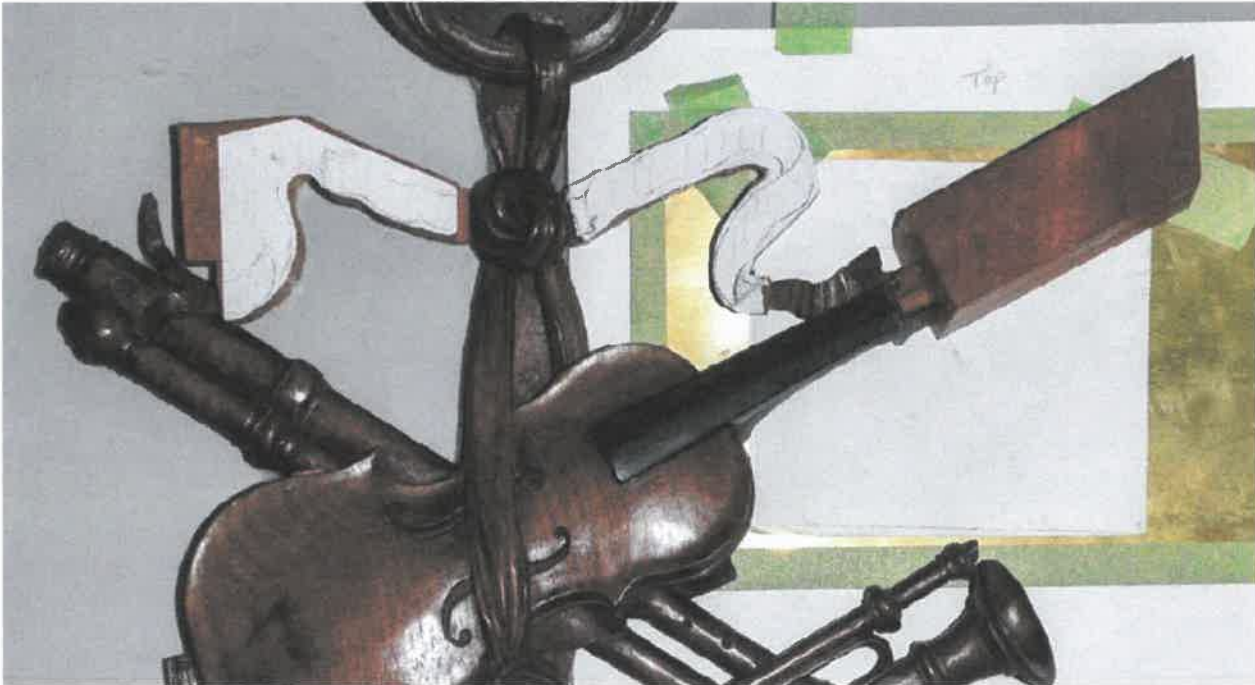
Pegbox joint prepared;



Selected wood cut to design;



Selected wood jointed to fit;



Following through lines;



Carving ribbons and violin head;



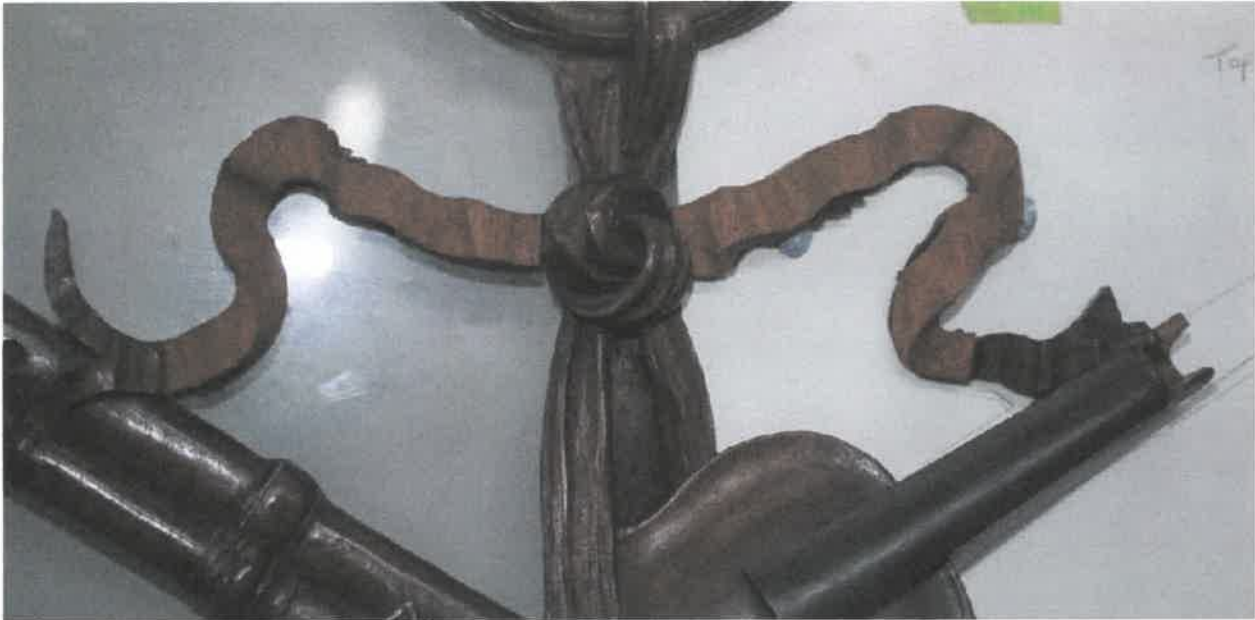
Violin head with ebony tuning peg;



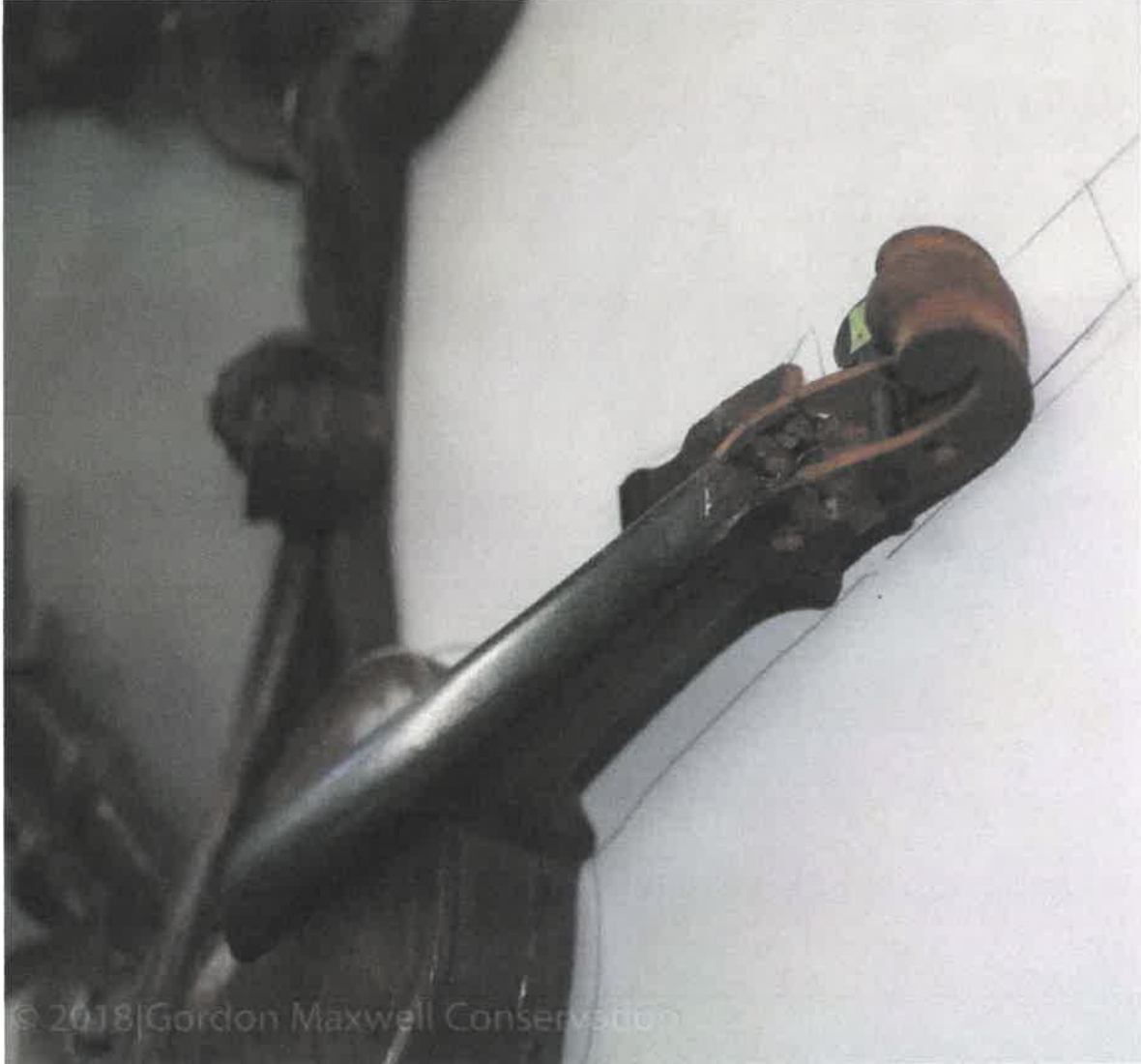
Violin head and tuning pegs offered up;



Offering up ribbons;



Violin head fixed;



Violin head and ribbons fixed;



Violin Head and ribbons fixed and carved in;



Violin head and ribbons polished, tailpiece fitted and restrung;



Patination and Polishing:

The wood having been carefully chosen, there was no need to add colour for the patina to match the original, polish and a final waxing sufficed.

Return and remounting:

As with the delivery, Craig Webster from Wilton House transported the door back where Jonathan Knight, aided by Hugh Wedderburn with Nigel Bailey and Craig Webster, was able to retrieve the screws in their correct order and rehang the door, the broken hinge placed back, as before. Two broken screws were replaced with antique screws of the same size and thread. The door operated unimpeded, opening and closing smoothly as it had before dismantling.

Completed on Tuesday 20th November 2018.