

Untitled

Here is a summary of the origins of William Legg (1740-1798), tallow chandler, upholder and draper, mostly culled from research by Thomas Woodcock, the current Garter King of Arms.

William Legg was born in London in 1740, the youngest son of Robert and Elizabeth Legg, who were originally from Reading. William, christened at St Clement Danes in 1740, is first recorded as working in the tallow trade in the Parish of Mounthall close to the Tallow Chandlers Hall.

In 1756, at the age of 16, William Legg married Elizabeth, the widowed daughter of Samuel Walker, a draper and upholder residing at 51 Snow's Hill, Holborn. At this time William was recorded as helping a young nephew, Samuel Legg, to become an apprentice to his father-in-law. (Long afterward, in 1813, Samuel Legg was elected Master of the Upholders' Livery Company).

Elizabeth's father died in 1769, making her sole heiress to his upholding business. William Legg combined this with his business as a tallow chandler, moving with his wife from Snow's Hill to another establishment in Tottenham Court Road, Holborn, in 1784 (see Land Tax Records and Bailey's Directory).

The couple were childless.

It is noteworthy, in the context of the Rice Portrait, that during the 1780's the new Legg shop on Tottenham Court Road was located within walking distance of Ozias Humphry's studio at 25 Newman Street (Land Tax Records).

During these years William Legg was a tallow chandler supplying oil and soap at his Tottenham Court Road location. This business clearly complemented his wife's already existing upholding concern. Prior to the patenting of bleaching chlorine powder by Charles Tennant in 1799, which changed the industry forever, bleaching involved the use of soaps and bleaching fields. Among other uses, hard soap was needed for bleaching canvases - and the painters of the new Royal Academy, many of whom lived and worked in the Holborn area, needed canvases. The Legg establishment provided them.