

SHORTER NOTICE

A DATED WELSH BACKSTOOL

When Charles II returned in 1660 from exile in Holland the social history of England changed dramatically. The courtiers who had lived abroad with the king had become accustomed to a different way of life and they brought back to England a taste for luxurious furnishings, dress, and continental standards of comfort. The new style of cabinet making relegated the joiner, trained to work in oak, into the 'second league' as demand grew for fashionable, light, and elegant walnut furniture. Many joiners were incapable of adapting the modern designs and moved from large cities to small towns, and country districts. This exodus helped lay the foundations for the vernacular furniture tradition which flourished on the joiners' level. Their skills and traditions were handed on from father to son, so keeping alive local styles, design types, and the use of oak throughout the eighteenth century. This chair, or backstool as it would have been known at the time, provides an excellent example of the changes described above. It is instructive to discover an item which would, on stylistic evidence, normally be ascribed to the second half of the seventeenth century were it not dated.

The backstool was purchased near Porthmadog and came from a private owner who claimed it had descended in his family for over 100 years. The frame is entirely of oak, the members being united by mortice and tenon joints with oak pins. The shaped top rail bears the inscription 'WG 1717' inlaid in bog oak. The front legs display well executed column or

'gun barrel' turning, perhaps slightly less robust than one might expect on a seventeenth-century English chair, which gives it a rather sophisticated appearance. It was almost certainly made in Wales, possibly in the southern part, because of the rounded treatment of the backposts. This type of upright is illustrated in L. Twiston-Davies and H. J. Lloyd Jones, *Welsh Furniture*, 1950. It is also worth noting that a chest of drawers very much in a seventeenth-century idiom, reproduced as plate 60 in the same book, is also dated 1717 and comes from Cowbridge, South Glamorgan.

TOM CRISPIN



Welsh chair or backstool, oak, dated 1717