Forrest chairs, the first portable garden seats, and the probable origin of the Windsor chair

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Pleasingly formed from native woods, hardwearing, light in weight and relatively inexpensive, the Windsor chair is probably one of the most popular and successful forms of seating ever to have been produced. There is also documentary proof that the term 'Windsor' has been used to refer to this distinctively English design of chair for nigh on 300 years.[1] It is logical, therefore, to assume that chairs of this type may have a connection with either the castle, town or forest of Windsor. In spite of this, no convincing evidence has ever been provided to support such an assumption and, in consequence, the origin of the 'Windsor' design is an intractable problem that has long been the subject of speculation. Nevertheless, there does seem to be a general consensus amongst furniture historians that English Windsor chairs were most likely to have originally been made for garden use and that this probably occurred in the Thames Valley region sometime in the early eighteenth century.[2] Consistent with this view, the recent findings described here, together with a re-examination of some issues arising from the earlier literature, shed new light on the emergence of the Windsor chair.

The earliest accepted reference which, at a stretch of the imagination, might refer to a Windsor of a type recognisable today is that of Lord Perceval describing a chair in which his wife was 'carry'd' (i.e. probably transported in a wheeled chair 'like those at Versailles') at Hall Barn, Beaconsfield (near Windsor) in 1724.[3] Recently however, Lucy Wood has fortuitously discovered an unambiguous reference for a more conventional style of Windsor that predates this by a year.[4] This information comes from a probate inventory made in March 1723 of the contents of Chevening House, Kent, following the death of the widowed Lady Lucy Stanhope in 1722. One of the sections of this inventory is concerned with the garden; it begins, 'Thirty four large Garden Seats, 60 Windsor Chairs painted Green …', followed by a list of garden items and tools.[5] This very large number of garden chairs must surely have been required for outdoor entertainments, perhaps of a dramatic or musical nature. The large seats would have been awkward to move whereas the Windsor chairs, being lightweight and portable could have been easily arranged to suit the occasion. Furthermore, the green paint not only provided protection from the elements but would also be appropriate for seats set out on the grass. In this connection, a 1719 print of Chevening, the seat of James, Earl Stanhope, shows that there was a large raised area consisting of four grass 'plats'

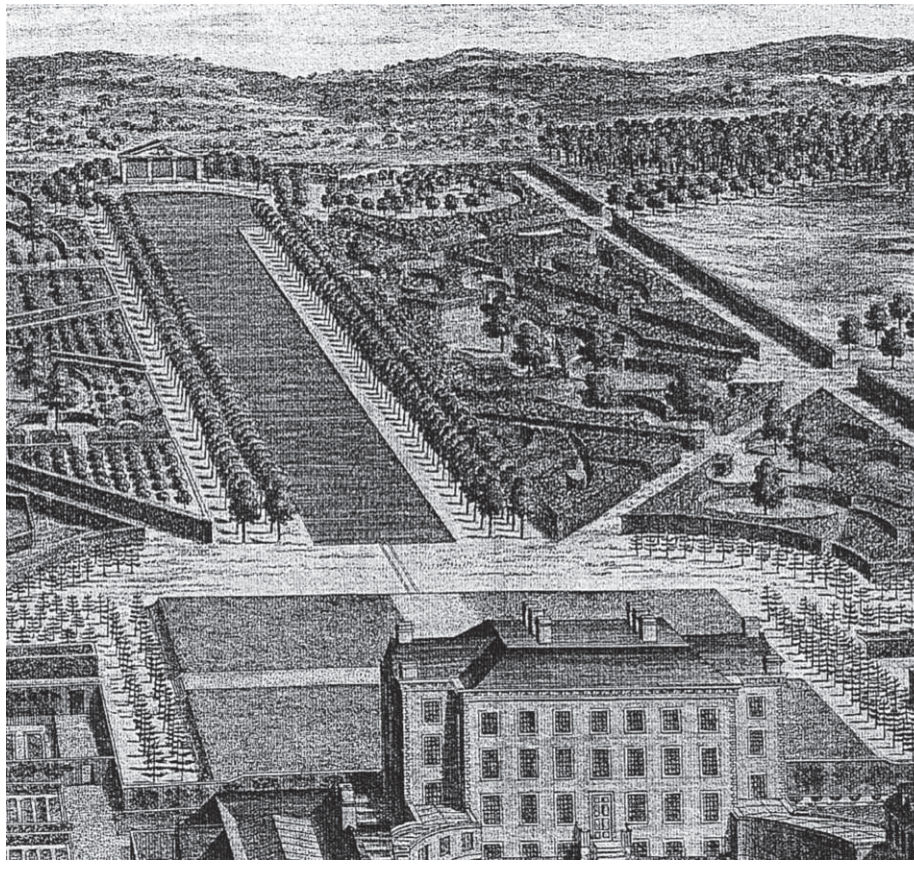
[1] Evans (1979); Parrott (2005).

[2] Jervis (1979); Cotton (1990) p. 43; Crispin (1992) pp. 5–7. In 1728, one Spencer (most probably Henry), of Lamb's Conduit, Holborn, supplied the Holkham estate, Norfolk, with 13 Windsor chairs costing £3 9*s*. 9*d*. (listed in the garden expenses) [Beard and Gilbert (1986), p. 843].

[3] Quoted in Evans (1979).

[4] Personal communication.

[5] Centre for Kentish Studies, U1590 E12/1.



1 Chevening (detail), showing grass plats behind the house and pavilion at the end of the lake, engraving. Reproduced from Harris, *The History of Kent* (1719)

(lawns) immediately behind the house and a long and wide tree-lined almost rectangular lake extending from the back of the house to a temple-style pavilion (Figure 1).[6] This large neo-Classical building, open at the front, with a triangular pediment supported by four columns, may have been constructed as part of the remodelling of the garden carried out between 1717 and 1719 following the Stanhopes' acquisition of the estate. It is possible to envisage that concerts or plays might have been put on for an audience accommodated on Windsor chairs placed on the plats or, perhaps more likely, within or in front of the pavilion. In this context, it is worth noting that eighteenth-century probate inventories which also deal with garden matters are particularly scarce and estate accounts that refer to garden purchases seldom seem to mention any outdoor furniture. Moreover, if as is generally believed, the Windsor was originally conceived as a garden chair then this lack of documentary evidence may be one of the reasons why its origins have remained so obscure.

[6] Harris (1719), p. 74.

James, Earl Stanhope, Lady Lucy's husband, had died suddenly of a stroke aged forty-seven two years earlier (1720). As a result, another inventory of the contents of Chevening had been drawn up between 29 May and 2 June 1721.[7] This is similarly arranged to the one in 1723 and under the heading 'without doors' also contains a section concerned with garden furniture and tools. It too starts off with 'Thirty-four large Seats' but the second item is 'Forty eight Forrest Chairs'; this is followed by garden equipment such as rollers, tools and wheelbarrows, several of which are also listed in the 1723 inventory. Since there is only two years between these inventories, it seems highly likely that the 48 'Forrest' chairs were added to with a dozen more, forming the group referred to as 60 'Windsor' chairs in 1723. Presumably therefore, the type of seat originally described as a 'Forrest' chair sometimes went under the alternative name of a 'Windsor' chair.[8] This, then, may be another reason why the early history of the Windsor has been so difficult to ascertain.

After the death of the Earl Stanhope in 1720 there were many outstanding debts which the Countess settled. These are listed under the heading 'Paid to Sundry Builders and Workmen relating to Houses & Gardens at Chevening'.[9] Amongst these is the following entry: 'Paid Mr Kingsmill Eyres for Forrest Chairs for the Garden at Chevening as p. Rec.^{t} 26 Apr.^{l} 1721 — £8–19'. This gives a cost of approximately 3*s*. 9*d*. per chair, although the bill probably would have included a charge for carriage from wherever they were made. As the engraving (Figure 1) indicates that Stanhope's alterations to Chevening house and garden were completed by 1719, it seems likely that the chairs were supplied around this time. It cannot have been much earlier because although the Stanhopes married on 24 February 1713, the Earl did not purchase the Chevening estate, formerly owned by the Earl of Sussex, until 1717.[10]

Kingsmill Eyre (1682–1743) was the third son of Sir Samuel Eyre of New House, Wilts, and a resident of Chelsea. He was secretary, and later treasurer, to the commissioners of Chelsea College (Hospital) and was also involved in taking out a patent concerned with iron founding, in other words, an unlikely chair maker.[11] However, he seems to have been on particularly good terms with the then Paymaster to the Forces and Treasurer of Chelsea Hospital, Robert Walpole, who was soon to become England's first Prime Minister. In fact, Eyre's post at the College was probably due to Walpole's patronage. Walpole used his position to buy land from the College and convert the stable block into a residence known as Orford House and it was Eyre who not only provided trees for the garden but who also seems to have acted as Walpole's wine merchant.[12] There is also a letter written in 1720 concerned with forest and fruit trees that Eyre was going to supply to Walpole's seat at Houghton (Norfolk) where Eyre was involved in laying out the garden; this actually took place before building work started on the house in 1722.[13] Eyre, therefore, seems to have provided garden

[7] Centre for Kentish Studies, U1590 E206/1.
[8] Evans (1996), p. 61, note 15.
[9] Centre for Kentish Studies, U1590 E206/1.
[10] www.the peerage.com.; Centre for Kentish Studies, U1450.
[11] Eburne (2003); www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline.
[12] Eburne (2003).
[13] Eburne (2003); Horace Walpole remarked: 'One of the finest gardens in this simple though still formal style was my father's at Houghton. It was laid out by Mr Eyre, an imitator of Bridgman' [Walpole (1782), p. 43].

2 M. Haughton, 'Author reading from a manuscript to four ladies', watercolour, 1787. Reproduced from Randall Davies, *English Society of the Eighteenth Century in Contemporary Art* (1907).

and other services to the gentry and, by moving in these circles, most likely became acquainted with Earl Stanhope (First Lord of the Treasury and Secretary of State 1717/8). He probably also had trade connections which allowed him to source 'Forrest' chairs for Chevening and maybe for other properties, although none seem to have been supplied to Houghton. These chairs might have been made locally in London or possibly sent by river to Chelsea from a maker in the Thames Valley.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that 'forest' (old French) is derived from the medieval Latin '*forest-em* (*silvam*)', the 'outside' wood, which in turn comes from '*foris*' meaning 'out of doors'. An 'outside' wood was an area of unenclosed woodland surrounding a park which was often used for hunting, the most famous example being Windsor Forest extending outwards from the Royal Great Park. Hence, 'forrest' or 'forest' might initially have referred to a chair for use outdoors and maybe, at the time, also implied a connection with Windsor. However, it seems that the term 'forest' fairly soon came to refer specifically to painted Windsor-type chairs made for garden use. This is probably what was inferred in the 1754 advertisement by William Partridge which offered 'Garden Seats, Windsor and Forrest chairs and Stools in the modern Gothic and Chinese taste'.[14] Also, the barely decipherable trade label beneath Richard Hewett's sole surviving Windsor chair indicates that he made and sold ' . . . Forest chairs and all sorts . . .'.[15] The description 'Forest chair' is only infrequently encountered in archive sources but, as the following quote from the novel *Benedicta* indicates, it was still in use in the 1790s; '. . . Miss Clarkson accidentally met the young gentleman in the garden; he was reclining on a forest chair, with a book in his hand . . .' (Figure 2).[16]

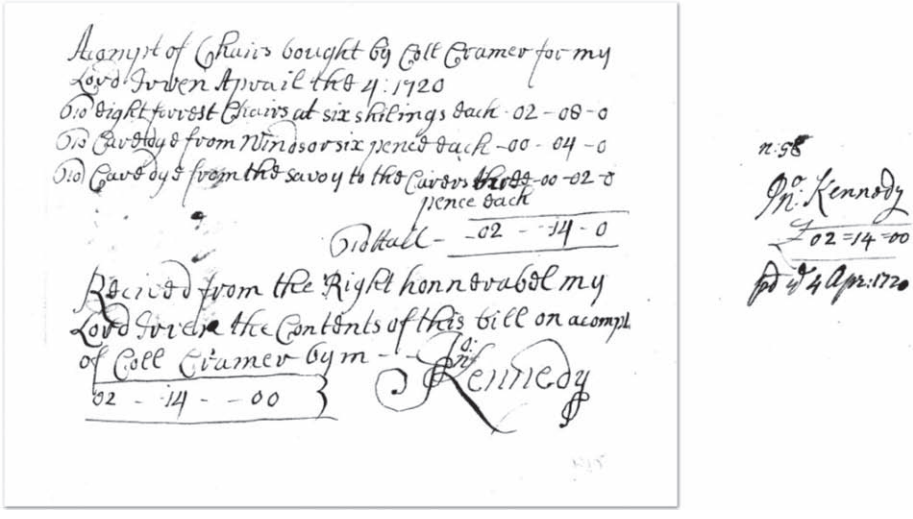
[14] *Oxford Journal*, 13 July 1754.
[15] Stabler (1977).
[16] Anon (1791), p. 93; Gilbert White wrote in his journal for May 15th 1761, 'Finish'd a forest-chair on the bastion; & a plain seat under the great oak' [Greenoak, 1986–89]. Had he been painting them?

3 'Forest' side chair or stool (materials unrecorded), probably last quarter of the eighteenth century.
Gill Pinn

4 'Forest' comb-back chair (materials unrecorded), probably last quarter of the eighteenth century.
Peter Haylett

Another issue concerns precisely what was meant by the description 'Forest' stool. There are records of some other eighteenth century Windsor chair makers supplying these. For example, Henry Webb of Hammersmith supplied '24 forest stools painted white' at £5 8*s*. to Sir John Griffin Griffin at Audley End, Essex in 1767.[17] Moreover, at a cost of 4*s*. 6*d*. each, perhaps including a delivery charge, these were more expensive than the 'Forrest/Windsor' chairs supplied to Lord Stanhope, rather a high price for a simple painted stool. Sir John Griffin Griffin also purchased a further six forest stools for £1 4*s*. (4*s*. each) in 1775, and some more in 1783 from Thomas Aycliffe Jnr of Covent Garden.[18] However, this matter seems to be resolved by details of items supplied to the Duke of Bedford at Woburn Abbey by his estate joiner, upholsterer and cabinetmaker Thomas Shaw in 1766. These included, '8 Windsor stool chairs for the Temple in the garden, 4*s* 6*d* a chair'.[19] Hence, it looks as if what would today be referred to as 'side chairs' were at the time described as 'stools' or 'stool chairs' whereas what is now called an 'armchair' was then simply known as a 'chair' (Figures 3 and 4). The term 'stool chair' is probably derived from the earlier description of a side chair

[17] Beard and Gilbert (1986), p. 953.
[18] Ibid., p. 27.
[19] Ibid., p. 805.

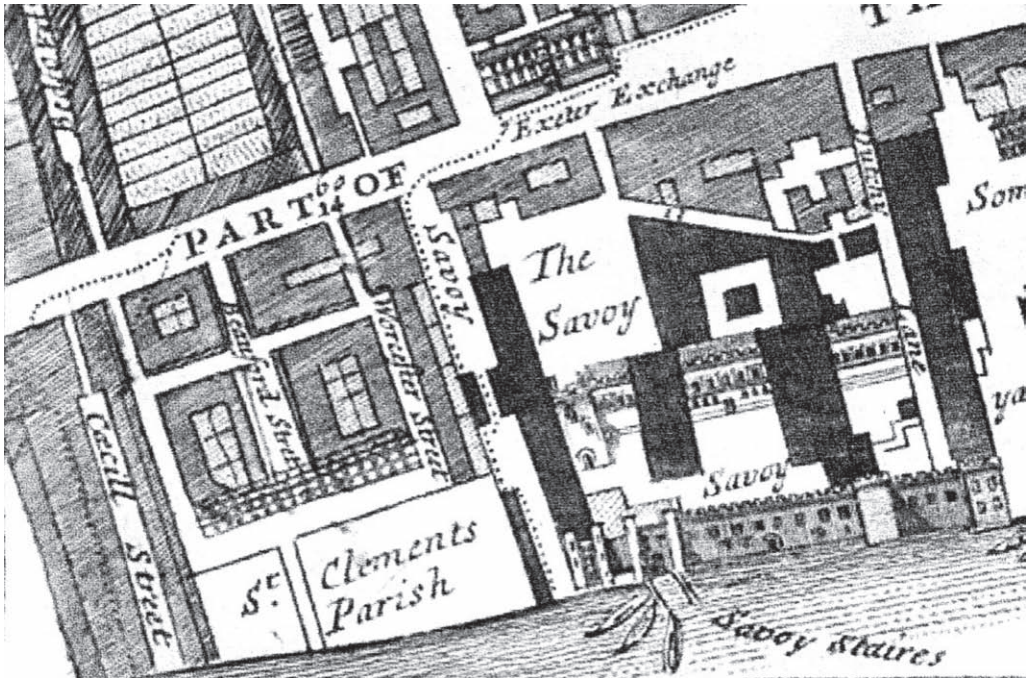


5 Receipt from John Kennedy to Lord Irwin for 8 Forrest chairs purchased on his behalf by Coll Cramer, 1720.
West Yorkshire Archives

as a 'back stool'. In fact, this usage continued well into the eighteenth century as Ince and Mayhew in their *Universal System* refer to some side chairs as 'back stool chairs'.[20]

The proposal being put forward here is that 'Forrest' and, rather confusingly, sometimes also 'Windsor', were contemporary names for garden chairs whereas other types of fashionable outdoor chair made to resemble, or artistically constructed from, branches and twigs were probably those described at the time as 'rustic' or 'rural', which has a rather different connotation to the more noble 'forest'.[21] Assuming this to be the case, then an earlier reference in the accounts of the Ingram (Viscounts Irwin) family, shown here in full (Figure 5), seems particularly pertinent. This is an account dated 4 April 1720, discovered by Christopher Gilbert in the Temple Newsam archives.[22] It concerns 'eight forrest Chairs at six shilings each' that were supplied by Jno: (John) Kennedy. These were bought on behalf of Lord Irwin (Richard Ingram, 5th Viscount Irwin, 1688–1721) by one Coll (Colly?) Cramer. Kennedy wrote that he had received payment on Cramer's account from Lord Irwin, finishing his script with 'by m' ('by me'?) before making an elaborate, but rather shaky, signature. There was a charge of 6*d*. each for 'Caredge' from Windsor to somewhere referred to as 'the savoy'; this was probably the old Savoy Palace near the Strand. However, as overland travel was difficult before the turnpike roads were fully established transport of goods and

[20] Edwards (1954), I, p. 26, mentions two 'back stool chairs' illustrated in Ince and Mayhew's *Universal System of Household Furniture* (1759–63).
[21] Manwaring's *Cabinet and Chair-Makers Real Friend and Companion* (1765) shows a design for a 'Rustic chair' and also illustrates 'Rural chairs for Summer Houses'. In *The Chair-Maker's Guide* (1766) he states that 'Many of the Rural Kind may be executed with rude Branches or Limbs of Trees &c.'; Cotton (1990), p. 76, shows a 1768 invoice from John Prior, Windsor chair maker and turner of Uxbridge, for 'One Rurall Chair' costing £1 1*s*. He suggests that this probably refers to a rustic seat.
[22] Gilbert (1967); West Yorkshire Archives, WYL 100/EA 12/5.



6 The parishes of St Clements Danes and St Mary Savoy (detail), showing the Savoy stairs on the Thames and footpath (dotted) to part of the Strand, engraving. Reproduced from John Strype, *A SURVEY OF THE CITIES of London and Westminster* (1720), Vol. 4, p. 109.

people to and from the capital was often by river. Therefore, it is likely that the chairs were brought from Windsor by water and unloaded at the Savoy public stairs (i.e. landing place), where there was pedestrian access to the Strand through the old palace walls bordering the river (Figure 6). From the Savoy there was a second, presumably shorter, road journey ('Caredge' only 3*d*. per chair) to 'C.....'. However, as Lord Irwin's residences were near Leeds (Temple Newsam) and Horsham (Hills Place), this second journey was obviously not to either of these places.[23] Perhaps he also had an as yet untraceable London home, or maybe the chairs were delivered to Cramer's London premises where transport for the final leg of the journey was arranged; in this connection, the illegible word might be 'Cairers', i.e a misspelling of 'Carriers'. Also, it is possible that Coll Cramer, whose name appears to be Continental, was some sort of agent or middleman like Kingsmill Eyre.

Significantly, this receipt suggests that 'Forrest' or Windsor-type chairs were actually being made at this time in or near the town of the same name. Perhaps this is how 'Forrest' chairs initially made in the Windsor area soon also came to be known as 'Windsor' chairs. However, although this document makes the all-important link with the town of Windsor, the local record office was unable to provide any more information about John Kennedy. Also, whether the fact that Lord Irwin's mother, Lady

[23] Evans (1979).

7 Summerhouse designed by Inigo Jones, previously used as a banquetting house, at Charlton House, Kent. *www.greenwich-guide.org.uk*

Isabella, moved from Temple Newsam to live in Windsor in 1718 has any relevance in this context has not been established. Furthermore, even though Windsor had readily available sources of timber (Windsor forest) this would also be true for other places and cannot be a sufficient explanation for the origin of the design. Precisely why this particular town came to be associated with the production of this new style of chair is still unclear (although see later discussion). However, as is well known, Windsors were subsequently made throughout the Thames Valley, especially in and around the Buckinghamshire towns of Chepping (now 'High') Wycombe and West Wycombe in the late eighteenth century, as well as in other parts of the country.[24]

Another interesting finding comes from a probate inventory of the estate of the 2nd Christopher Wandesford, 2nd Viscount Castlecomer, made in 1719.[25] This lists a 'Forest' chair in the hall of his house in Middlesex and a further 12 'in the banquetting house' on the green at his residence in Charlton, Kent (note that Forest/Windsor chairs were also supplied to Chevening in multiples of 12).[26] Charlton House was rented out after the death of its owner Sir William Langhorne in 1715 and Castlecomer was married in the same year.[27] Therefore, it seems likely that he moved into the presumably unfurnished house with his new bride and that the chairs were purchased soon after, some time between 1715 and his death, aged 35, in 1719.[28] Charlton House is still standing, as is its summerhouse attributed to Inigo Jones (Figure 7), which may have served as the banqueting house.[29] Castlecomer was Secretary at War 1717/18 and, as a member of the Whig government, one wonders whether he knew Kingsmill Eyre and also possibly asked him to supply Forest chairs to Chevening? In this connection, it

[24] Beard and Gilbert (1986), *passim*; Beckett (1985), *passim*.
[25] Evans (1979).
[26] Centre for Kentish Studies, U1590 E12/1;U1590 E206/1.
[27] www.greenwichguide.com.; www.thepeerage.com.
[28] www.thepeerage.com.
[29] www.greenwichguide.com.

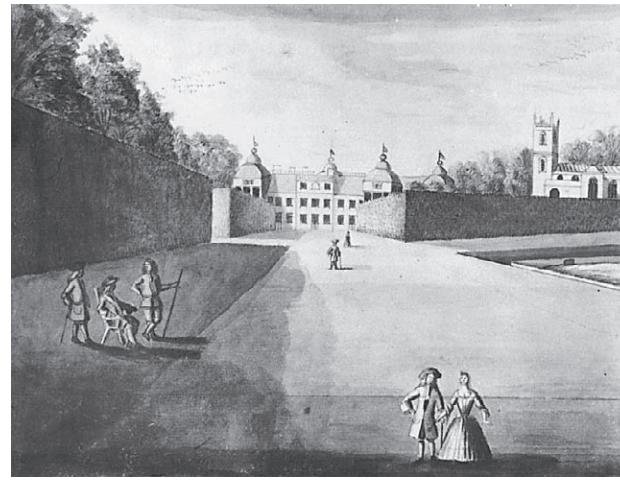
would be interesting to know whether other government ministers acquired Forest chairs for their country seats.

There is also an earlier, but unfortunately sketchy, description of garden seating in a journal written by George Smith, vicar of Braughing, Herts. This relates to the garden of 'Hamels', a house inherited by Ralph Freman in 1713. There are various references to garden seats by the bowling green, near the yew trees and in the wooded plantation. In addition, there is a mention of '12 wooden chairs for the garden' in March 1716. It is unclear whether these were Forest chairs but the fact that they were a group of twelve is interesting. Significantly however, this appears to be one of the earliest known reports of chairs, as opposed to seats, being supplied for garden use.[30]

A 1733 inventory of the contents of Montague House, Bloomsbury, lists 'One Forest Chair' in Room No. 76 and '2 Forest Chairs broke' in the Coachmen's Room.[31] Similarly, reports of the indoor and outdoor use of Forest chairs around this time have previously been noted in bills (Henry Williams, 1734–40) and other inventories (Colonel Chudleigh, 1739; Lord Abervagenny, 1744).[32] However, the evidence presented above indicates that Forest/Windsor chairs were being used to provide seating for use outdoors, in garden buildings, and sometimes indoors, in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, perhaps as early as 1716. Unfortunately though, very few contemporary illustrations showing this usage of Windsor chairs have been found. In fact, the earliest known engravings are those of drawings by Jacques Rigaud (1733) and John Rocque (1739). Rigaud shows a comb-back (an American descriptive term) mounted on a wheeled platform in Stowe garden (Bucks) and Rocque illustrates three more in the grounds of Claremont (Surrey), two standing under a temple portico and another on the grass.[33] Recently, however, another illustration that may show a Forest/Windsor chair has been discovered. This is one of a series of topographical drawings made by Edmund Prideaux between 1714 and 1730.[34] The picture (*c.* 1725), which is of Euston Hall, Suffolk, (Figure 8), shows a gentleman seated outdoors in a chair resembling a comb-back Windsor. The splay of the simple legs and the rake of the back are true to type but there are no spindles visible in the back or below the arm bow; also the crook underarm support is incorrect for a chair of this date. However, Prideaux was an amateur artist and the chair is only a detail, possibly drawn from memory. On balance, this may well represent a Windsor-type chair being used as a garden seat and, if accepted as such, it is the earliest illustration thus far to have been found.

A search for even earlier illustrations of outdoor Windsors was made by looking through Britannia Illustrata, published in 1707.[35] This consists of minutely detailed bird's-eye views of seventy late seventeenth-century country houses and their estates executed by the Dutch artists Leonard Knyff and Jan Kip. The majority of these have baroque gardens laid out in the Continental fashion with formal parterres, straight

30 Rowe (2001).
31 Murdoch (2006), pp. 41 and 48.
32 Evans (1979). In a letter from the 1730s, the Duchess of Marlborough wrote: 'In the first entry into the house, which is very small, but where a forest chair or two would have been convenient 'tis filled up with several pedestals' [quoted in Thompson (1943), p. 22].
33 Rigaud (1739), plate 13; Rocque (1738) in Campbell (1767–71), plates 19–23.
34 Harris (1964), p. 60.
35 Knyff and Kip (1707).



8 Edmund Prideaux, 'Euston diagonall walk towards the South Front', pencil drawing, *c.* 1725. Reproduced from Harris, 'The Prideaux collection of topographical drawings', *Architectural History*, 7 (1964).

tree-lined avenues and very regular plantations of clipped trees and shrubs. Many of the engravings show people walking along the avenues, horse riders, animals and groups of individuals apparently playing games on the grassed areas. However, only one, of Burlington House in London (pl. 29), depicts any form of garden seating, in this instance, a pair of large seats on the forecourt. This might suggest that these English formal gardens were intended at this time to be enjoyed by promenading and sporting activities rather than by sitting and contemplating the view. The Continental approach, however, was rather different, perhaps because the climate was better suited to sitting outdoors. For example, a French gardening manual translated into English in 1712 suggested that 'you can scarce ever have too many [garden seats]', and that they were usually made of marble, freestone or wood, either as benches fixed to the ground or seats with backs that could be stored undercover in winter.[36] It was also recommended that 'You should observe to lay one Colour in Oil, either green, or other, upon all that is exposed to the Wet in a Garden, and is subject to rot . . .'.

From the foregoing, it is conceivable that the idea of the garden as a room 'without doors' in which one could sit down and survey, socialise, or be entertained, may have arisen in concert with the new, less formal, approach to garden design that was developing in England around the turn of the century. Such pastimes would require a type of chair that was not only portable, in the event of rain, but also in harmony with this new more naturalistic type of garden. Clearly, the ubiquitous, and by then rather old-fashioned, cane chair would not have met these requirements.[37] By contrast, the new Forest/Windsor style of chair was ideal for this purpose being lightweight, strong and, in addition, having a stick back. The latter not only relates to twigs and branches but also allows the background scenery to be viewed when the chair is not in use. Moreover, these naturalistic elements become all the more relevant if the chair is

[36] Dezaillier d'Argenville (1712), p. 78.
[37] Cane chairs were, however, suitable for garden buildings — ' In the somerhouse — 6 cane chaires' [Bristol Record Office, AC/AS/3/4].

painted green, with the paint finish also providing weatherproofing. In fact, the five earliest extant Windsor, or more correctly, Forest, chairs (one comb-back and four low-backs) were originally painted greenish black (possibly light green now oxidized darker in hue) and have backs consisting of sticks without a central splat.[38] Such survivals are rare as many of these outdoor chairs have either been stripped and polished for indoor use or have probably rotted away, out of fashion and forgotten, in garden outbuildings.

Whilst the more informal style of garden may have provided the stimulus for the first outdoor chairs, exactly how the Forest/Windsor design came to fulfil this role remains uncertain. There is, of course, the as yet unproven possibility that one of the growing band of naturalistic garden planners was responsible. For example, it has been noted that Charles Bridgeman (1690–1738) used a Windsor chair in the room wherein he conceived his rather formal garden designs, but it is not known whether he also supplied garden chairs to his clients.[39] Another likely candidate could be the poet and garden designer Alexander Pope (1688–1744) who lived at Binfield Manor on the edge of Windsor Forest (also the title of his poem published in 1713) between 1700 and 1715, before returning to Twickenham in 1719 where he built his house with its famous grotto.[40] Did Pope come across a type of primitive stick-back, perhaps made from a woodman's stool, during his years spent rambling in Windsor Forest and did he subsequently introduce this concept (i.e. a 'Forest' chair) to his London acquaintances, such as his patron the highly influential Lord Burlington? Certainly at a later date, Burlington's remodelled Palladian house at Chiswick had a Windsor chair standing in the Bagnio.[41] Interestingly, a correspondent writing to the *Newcastle General Magazine* in 1748 about Pope's garden made the following comment concerning a large mount completed about 1725; '... among which a narrow intricate Path leads in an irregular Spiral to the Top; where is placed a Forest Seat or Chair; that may hold three or four Persons at once, overshadowed with the Branches of a spreading tree. From this Seat we face the (Shell) Temple ...'.[42] Also, a probate inventory of Pope's effects in his Twickenham villa mentions '6 Windsor Arm Chaires' in the Hall, four in the Great Parlor and ten 'Wood Chaires & two Arm Windsor Chaires (in the Garding)'.[43]

Another person who might have helped start the fashion for Windsor-type garden chairs is Pope's friend and fellow garden enthusiast Allen Earl Bathurst (1684–1775). Having inherited two estates in 1704, Riskins (or Richings) near Iver, Bucks, and Cirencester Park in Gloucestershire, Bathurst started to transform the grounds, turning the Riskins estate into a French style 'ornamented farm'.[44] Significantly, Riskins is only about 4 miles from Windsor and the garden is known subsequently to have included a group of Windsor chairs encircling a statue. This feature was described by the wife of

[38] Parrott (2005), also illustrates two similar early comb-backs from old photographs but the present whereabouts of these is unknown.
[39] Evans (1979).
[40] www.berkshirehistory.com/bios/apope.
[41] Donowell (1753).
[42] Brownell (1977). This description indicates that, in addition to Forest chairs, Forest settees were made at this time; see also Batey (1983), who quotes another observer: '... at the end of the walk stands a four Seat Forrist Chair, where you set down and view'.
[43] Mack (1969), pp. 252 and 258.
[44] Martin (1984), pp. 69–70.

Lord Hartford, the new owner of the park, in 1740.[45] However, whether the chairs came with the estate or were newly purchased by Lord Hartford is not known. In contrast to Riskins, Bathurst's garden developments at Cirencester Park (1715–40) took a different direction.[46] What he established there was an early example of an English 'Forest Style' of garden as favoured by the garden planner and horticulturalist Stephen Switzer (1682–1745).[47] Possibly, the Forest chair was first associated with this type of garden, perhaps supplied (from the Windsor area?) for the 'Bower' or 'Wood House' that Bathurst constructed for Pope at Oakley Wood in the middle of Cirencester forest.[48]

The premise of this article is that the outdoor Forest chair was the forerunner, and raison d'être, for the type of seat that subsequently came to be known as the Windsor chair. Moreover, such reasoning also solves another outstanding problem, that is, what was actually meant by the description 'Forest chair'? The intriguing question, however, is whether the Forest chair was specifically designed to meet the need for a new form of seating suitable for outdoor use or, whether, as hinted above, it stemmed from the serendipitous discovery of a novel woodman's seat ideally suited to this purpose. In essence, it is a four-legged stool with the addition of a stick back but, as a fashionable chair, it represents a radically new design characterized by a thick one-piece seat into which the legs and a spindled back-rest are separately mortized or dowelled. Therefore, it seems entirely possible that the Forest chair might have humble rural origins, as reflected by the relatively simple form of some surviving mid-century examples.[49] Conversely however, it is important to note that the earliest extant chairs are sophisticated products.[50] These chairs were originally painted and have 'saddle' seats, spirally-turned spindles, box stretchers, ring-turned legs and crown motifs, several of which features relate to cane, and other seventeenth century, chair designs (Figure 9).[51] Thus, even if Forest chairs were based on a rural prototype, the design seems to have been elaborated to include fashionable details and a high degree of finish. Realistically, this could only have been done by chair makers with a knowledge of stylistic developments and appropriate skills, tools and facilities (e.g. for spiral turning). How was it, then, that this might have come about? Could it be that these painted outdoor chairs were originally commissioned for use in Windsor Forest by royal hunting parties and then subsequently became popular as garden seats for the landed gentry? This might explain the generous proportions, saddle seats and crown motifs, as well as the 'Forest' name and the geographical location of Windsor. However, leaving such speculation aside, it is of passing interest to note that the constructional features that define the Windsor/Forest chair are also to be seen in seating furniture depicted in Renaissance artworks. For example, a fifteenth-century painting by Botticelli (the Banquet in the Pinewoods: Scene Three of the Story of Nastagio degli Onesti) clearly shows a three

[45] Evans (1979).
[46] Turner (1986), pp. 74–79.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Martin (1984), pp. 84–85.
[49] Crispin (1992), pp. 27 and 35 (Forest chairs), 36–42 (Windsor, Forest?, chairs).
[50] Parrott (2005).
[51] Ibid.

9 Forest chair (materials unrecorded), first quarter of the eighteenth century. This is the first published photograph of a Forest comb-back chair (legs shortened), then owned by Fred Skull of High Wycombe. Reproduced from Gregory, *The Furniture Collector, Old English Furniture of the XVII & XVIII Centuries* (1916).

legged chair of low-back Windsor form being used at an outdoor table.[52] Nevertheless, tantalising though it may seem, it is doubtful that evidence will ever be found to show that these early Continental Windsor-type seats were the inspiration for the English Forest chair.

To conclude, it seems that the painted Forest chair, the archetypal Windsor, was the first portable English seat developed specifically for leisure use outdoors. This innovation may have been brought about by changes in social behaviour associated with the new fashion for more naturalistic gardens. It is also clear that Forest chairs were being purchased for new or remodelled country house gardens by 1719, possibly as early as 1716, although evidence of even earlier usage may eventually emerge.[53] Some (perhaps most?) of these early Forest chairs were made at or near Windsor and this may have resulted in them also being known as 'Windsor' chairs. For example, these new types of chair arriving in the capital by boat from Windsor may simply have been referred to by Londoners as 'Windsor' chairs. Although often of simple form, Forest chairs seem to have been well-crafted, which is perhaps not surprising given the aristocratic nature

[52] Evans (1996), p.36. The original is in the Prado Museum, Madrid.

[53] An early inventory from Dyrham Park is, unfortunately, unclear; in 1703 there were '8 Wooden bottom'd chairs, two of ym with Elbows' in the greenhouse and, in 1710, green chairs were recorded in the Old Nursery, Closet and Cook's room; whether any of these were Forest chairs is uncertain [Gloucester Record Office, D 1799/E254, E255].

of the clientele for this new type of seating. They became highly fashionable throughout the eighteenth century, as is apparent from their frequent depiction in contemporary paintings of country house gardens, one of the earliest examples being 'The Montague family at Sandleford Priory', painted by Edward Haytley in 1744, which shows green comb-back side chairs.[54] However, the design seems to have been so successful that very soon (*c.* 1725) indoor versions (Windsors) were being made.[55] Those from the Thames Valley region eventually took the form of the stained and polished native hardwood, or yew, Windsor, with its fashionable cabriole legs, large seat to accommodate bulky clothing (a reflection of their original use as outdoor seats? See Figure 8), and shaped back splat, a decorative feature borrowed from contemporary indoor chairs that provided greater comfort. However, it is worth noting that, from early on, sophisticated mahogany Windsors were also being made by London chair makers for more prestigious clients.[56] These mahogany chairs were often destined for use in libraries and halls of grand country houses where some are still to be seen today. Ultimately though, as the outdoor (Forest) chair fell out of fashion in England at the end of the eighteenth century, it was the indoor (Windsor) chair that was subsequently to achieve widespread and long lasting popularity.

[54] A 1740 inventory from Wrest Park, Beds, lists 'In the Closet to the Bowling Green House: … Six Green Garden Chairs under the Piazza …' [Collett-White (1995) p. 266]. These were probably Forest chairs.

[55] In 1725 'His Graces Closet' at Chandos House contained 'four black Varnisht Windsor Chairs … £1 4*s* [Huntington Library, ST 83]; The 1726 probate inventory for the Hon. Brigadier General Munden, Windsor Forest Ranger, listed one Windsor in the Wardrobe, six in the Little Hall and four in the Green-House of his Egham residence, 4 miles from Windsor [Evans (1979)].

[56] In 1729 Henry Williams, joiner and chair maker of Long Acre, London, supplied Frederick Prince of Wales with 'a very neat Mahogany Windsor Chair' for the library at St. James's Palace and two similar 'richly carved'chairs for the Blue Room, each chair costing £4 [Beard & Gilbert (1986), p. 980]. In 1739–40 he also supplied a set of six mahogany 'Forest chairs covered with scrolls &c' for the Royal establishment at Swinley Lodge. Interestingly, Swinley Lodge and its surrounding park was in Windsor Forest and was where the Royal staghounds were kept in the 18th century; it was much favoured by Queen Anne as a hunting lodge.

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