A Child's Weighing and Exercise Chair

A most unusual child's weighing and exercise chair has come to light. Clearly the product of vernacular ingenuity, the chair's upper half, made in Yew with an Elm seat, is supported by three lower turned supports of Oak, which are suspended in the high position on two springs. The intention was to sit the child in the chair when its weight would depress the springs, which are calibrated to a side scale marked in pounds. The foot-rest is detachable, presumably in order to gain the full weight of the child on the spring balance device.

Interestingly, a metal plaque nailed to the top of the stand reads "Newton Wilson & Co. Royal Patent No: 5588 344 High Holbourn London". Research shows that the firm were not the makers of the chair, but a patent agent, who would have applied on the maker's behalf for an initial registration of patent, and the number sequence indicates that this could not have been before 1881.

Why is this the only child's weighing Windsor chair so far recorded since the design seems both attractive and useful? Further research shows that the patent was abandoned and the chair may, therefore, be the prototype. A number of reasons may explain this non-continuance in making this design, but the most likely reason is that a chair design had already been recorded at the British Patent Office in 1857 by Edward Jacob Emmons of Massachusetts, USA on behalf of Joshua Stevens of the USA for a "new or improved nursery chair" (Ref: 2841 AD1856). This chair did not closely resemble the Windsor chair design shown here, being square in its frame with a cane seat and a curved arm bow and a shaped rear splat; but the mechanism was similar in principle, but not precisely the same in its mechanical application.

Whether the maker of the child's Windsor chair was aware of Emmon's original design is not known, but its existance probably led to this later Windsor design not being ultimately accepted by the Patent Office. However, Emmon's design throws light on a further aspect of the Windsor chair design, in that prominent metal handles are fixed to the top Elm plate of the stand and pose a question about their use. Were they to carry the chair or were they intended to be grasped by the child? Emmon's patent application specification indicates that the child was to use his chair for exercise and amusement in stating that,"... by throwing his weight on the seat (the child) may produce vertical motion of the seat and himself that may be sufficient to exercise and amuse him". It seems probable, therefore, that the handles on the Windsor chair were intended to allow the child to exercise itself by pulling on them. It sounds fun as long as the child didn't shoot out of the chair!

The Windsor chair is intriguing and is made in a tradition of furniture which had metal components to create a further use which lay beyond wooden structure alone; what a pity more chairs of this style were evidently not made.

Details of the chair:-

Height 96.5 cms. Width 33 cms.
Depth (of chair seat) 24 cms.

Chair section: Yew, with Elm seat.

Lower frame: Oak legs and seat support rods.

Some Birch cross rails.

Elm upper platform.

Regional Origin: Unknown. Attributed to Yorkshire.

Date: Circa 1881-1900.

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