

FURNITURE NOTES

Notes on a Field Trip to Worksop

The following anecdotal information is hardly a contribution to furniture scholarship, but perhaps deserves to be recorded. In 1981, I visited Mrs. Jean Ashurst who owned a yew child's Windsor chair made about 1903 by William Gilling & Sons, one of the last Worksop chairmakers. She drove me to the home of her father William Mark Gilling (b. 1900) who possessed an ash high back Windsor which he had made up in 1926 from old components saved when the firm ceased trading about the time of the Great War. Although the firm are not known to have identified their chairs with an impressed stamp, he showed me a metal punch lettered 'GILLING' which he thought was used when, early this century, the company diversified into the general cabinet making and upholstery trades in an effort to survive. Mr. Gilling introduced me to his aunts the Misses Gilling (aged 87 and 93) who still lived in the family house adjoining the old premises in Eastgate, Worksop. They also allowed me to photograph three turned chairs inherited from their parents - a stick back yew Windsor side chair with crinoline stretcher (very typical of isolated labelled examples of the firm's work), a Roman pattern kitchen chair and a broken child's weighing and exercise chair almost identical to the specimen which Bill Cotton published in the first RFS Newsletter (Autumn 1985). Dr. Cotton attributed this unprovenanced example to Yorkshire; but in view of its design and turned profiles it can now be confidently attributed to Gillings, Worksop, Nottinghamshire.

According to notes made at the time, the business had originally been established next to the Golden Ball Inn, about 1840, by William Gilling and his brother Benjamin, who were immigrants from the USA. Benjamin's sons, Frederick and Edwin, inherited the workshop, but, following a dispute, Edwin moved to Sheffield. My informant (William Gilling) remembered the shop in Eastgate before it closed about 1914. There was a sawpit in the yard, a polishing shop upstairs and a lathe shop with six benches. His father (b. 1875) had to turn a quota of spindles before going to school in the morning. Many chairs were sent wrapped in straw via rail to Manchester. The workforce numbered about 40.

Dr. Cotton will no doubt illuminate the Worksop chairmaking community in a highly professional way in his forthcoming major book on the Regional Chair; but the attention of members should be drawn to an interesting file of cuttings, photographs, oral history and ephemera in Worksop reference library. Michael Jackson has contributed useful articles on the subject 'A Bygone Craft', Life and Leisure (November/December 1980) and 'The Last of the Worksop Chairmakers', Nottinghamshire Countryside (Dec. 1970)

Christopher Gilbert



William Mark Gilling (b.1900)
At his home in Worksop, seated on a Gilling
chair.



Chair by W. Gilling, Worksop.
Owned by The Misses Gilling, Worksop.



Child's chair, yew, c.1905, by William Gilling, Worksop, C.1906. Owned by Mrs. Jean Ashurst.



Chair by W. Gilling, Worksop.
Owned by The Misses Gilling.