

FURNITURE NOTES

SOME 19th CENTURY TAVERN TABLES

Trestle and X ended tables have been made for centuries, since the days of the medieval hall and before. Their tops were often detachable so that the whole piece could be cleared away after a meal. The simple constructional style was used for drinking tables of the 18th and 19th centuries. These narrow tables frequently formed part of the fixtures and fittings of local inns and taverns. By definition, a narrow, Trestle or X ended table made from indigenous timbers is usually referred to as a tavern table.

Figure I shows a tavern table with a scrubbed elm top and a mixed wood underframe (ash, pine and fruitwood). It measured 66" long by 24" wide and was probably made between 1840 and 1875. The table has an unusual base and has a brand on the underside of the table top which read: "STAPLE'S of SOHAM" in large capital letters. Soham is a tiny market town in the middle of the Cambridgeshire fens and between the years 1840 and 1875 Edward Staples ran a retail brewery business in Paddock Street, Soham. The last record of his establishment was in 1875 and thereafter there is no mention of either Edward Staples or of a brewery in Paddock Street.

A further table, also bearing multiple brands of staples of Soham is of much poorer quality, having a pine top with a pine and elm underframe.

Figure II shows the general shape and outline of the piece which is similar to the first table; whilst Figure III clearly shows the name of the brewer E. Staples stamped underneath the top.

Another tavern table shown in Figure IV is made from oak. It has two planks in the top with cleated ends and a very simple base with a single cross-stretcher. Carved into the stretcher is the initials G.R. I was astonished to discover that between 1847 and 1855 a certain George Robinson was a registered beer retailer in Wisbech, and that these initials may relate to him.

The fourth tavern table shown in Figure V is made entirely from pine. It has a scrubbed top which was fixed to the darkly stained base but there are no names or initials on this example. Its origins have been traced to a London saleroom and the table was presumably made at about the same time as the previous examples. However, it seems that in Cambridgeshire, at any rate, many local brewers marked their tables, which is a useful guide to the more accurate dating of such unstylistic pieces of furniture.

Penny Rumble



Fig I

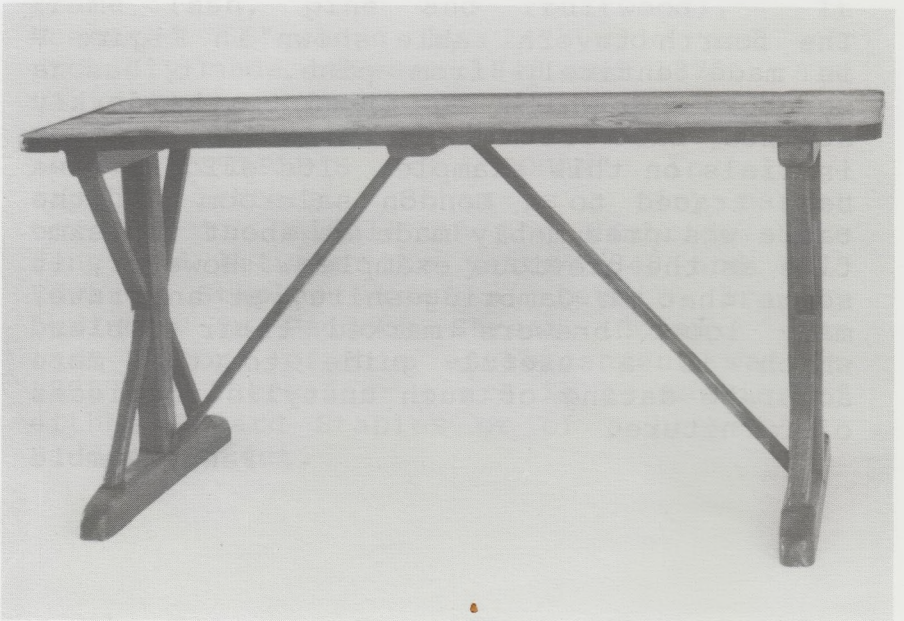


Fig II



Fig III



Fig IV



Fig V