

A HARVESTER'S WORK

So called 'home-made' furniture like the chair illustrated here, rarely survives with any provenance, so the offer of two pieces made for a Weardale farm in the second half of the nineteenth century was particularly welcome to The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle.

The two came from the estate of a woman who had lived in Oxford, but they had been made for her grandmother's family, the Sandersons of Snowfield farm, Stanhope, a farm about three-quarters of a mile south west of the small town. Unfortunately it proved impossible to date the pieces more precisely than in the first paragraph.

Both are now painted green, 'to prevent woodworm' (as the donor's daughter recalled). The stool is a turner's piece, in elm and other woods, showing dark brown varnish under the green paint which has been applied after the homely upholstering in horsehair, ticking and leathercloth. The chair on the other hand



Fig. 16 Chair and stool made for Snowfield Farm, Stanhope, Weardale, Co. Durham. 2nd half 19th Century From The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle Co. Durham (Acc. Nos. 1990.10.9, 1990.10.10)

is clearly home-made and the family tradition is that it was made by an itinerant worker hired for hay-time. When the weather prevented hay-making, he turned his hand to this chair. As Bill Cotton has pointed out, it shows influences from the Thames Valley in its form, but also an awareness of Celtic traditions. The second influence may be explained by the fact that many travelling harvest workers were Irish. The legs and back uprights are formed with a spokeshave or draw-knife, rather than the lathe. The crest rail is of elm (as is the seat, by assumption) but thick coats of paint prevent identification of all woods used. At least three successive greens have been applied, the underside of the seat showing cream and brick-red under these.

The Bowes Museum is more usually known for its collection of French furniture, but regional furniture has been collected over several years and we are pleased to acquire these two pieces.

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