



Fig. 10 William Wheeler's workshop, 1901

A FURTHER NOTE ON WILLIAM WHEELER OF ARNCROACH,

Since my article on the Wheelers of Arncroach (Regional Furniture Volume V, 1991), additional information on this workshop has emerged. The accompanying photograph, illustrated above, pictures William Wheeler the elder (centre) with a group of his craftsmen. The photograph accompanied an article in the Scots Magazine (Volume 71, April 1959, p. 50-3) on Robert Fowler of Abercrombie, Fife, who appears in the photograph second from the left, at the age of seventeen. Fowler was apprenticed to the Wheeler workshop in Arncroach, then established his own business in Abercrombie, carrying on the tradition of reproducing historical furniture types.

Another development was the discovery by Jo Lynn, a post graduate student at St. Andrews University, of a newspaper article on William Wheeler the second. The article, "Romance of East Fife Village Craft: Making New Furniture Old". The "Gossip Chair" was found in a scrapbook belonging to the St. Andrews Preservation Trust, and is, unfortunately, unreferenced. This article credits Professor James Lorimer (1818-90), father of Robert Lorimer, for first encouraging Wheeler the elder to reproduce historical designs.

Interestingly, the derivation of the rather perplexing term "gossip chair" is also revealed. According to Wheeler the second, Sir Ralph Anstruther's sister-in-law commissioned the workshop to make a scaled down version of a dining room chair she owned: "I carried out her suggestion and the result was a very neat little chair with a fretted back, which I learned was to be used for the fireside". The chair's proposed destination prompted its name. Wheeler calculated that he had sold several hundred of these chairs in a period of twenty to thirty years.

The article finishes with a reference to what Wheeler considered one of the best commissions, the provision of reproduction antique furniture for a rancher's home in Australia; the workshop's products were, apparently, also exported to India and Africa. This, of course, disarms my earlier scepticism of the Wheelers "world wide connection!"