

A WEST COUNTRY LOW BACK WINDSOR CHAIR

The low back windsor chair (Fig 13) is almost certainly the forerunner of the smoker's bow, and related forms, that became extremely popular from the mid 19th century onwards. However, although the design is known to have originated at the beginning of the 18th century ¹, or even possibly earlier ², surviving examples from before about 1840, especially from the south west ³, are uncommon.

The chair illustrated here has structural features that indicate a west country origin. These include a waisted seat, associated with the Exeter region ³, and a characteristic three part arm ². In this case, the central back rest is spliced into the arms with v-shaped joints and fixed with screws. The underside of the seat is saw cut and the back rest, arms and seat are of elm whereas the legs and spindles are of ash. The chair, which is now partly coated in old brown paint, was originally painted dark green over a gesso base.

Interestingly, there are many similarities between this chair and a recently described comb back ⁴ that is clearly derived from the 'Goldsmith' type ⁵. However, the comb back, which is considered to date from between 1760 and 1790, has spindles that attain their widest diameter at the top, rather than in the middle, and the central back rest has convex, instead of concave, shaped ends.

R F Parrott

1. I G Sparkes 'English Windsor Chairs'
2. B D Cotton 'The English Regional Chair'
3. B D Cotton 'Windsor Chairs in the South West'
4. D Knell 'English Country Furniture (p130)
5. T Crispin 'The English Windsor Chair'



Fig. 13