

Spinning Wheels

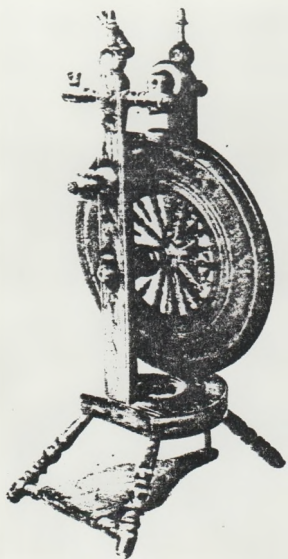
The popular vision of the farmhouse and artisan kitchen is firmly that of home and hearth, a vision of food preparation and eating of meals, of light and warmth, and the community of family life. Like all stereotypes, this image no doubt holds truth, but what of paid domestic work too? Those writing on the furnishing of the traditional kitchen have probably given most attention to domestic furniture and other specialists in metal ware have written detailed works on the many ingenious devices and utensils used for cooking and preparing food. Latterly, interest in laundry utensils and Dairy equipment has drawn attention to these areas of domestic work which were usually undertaken near to, but not in the kitchen.

Amongst this array of domestic furnishings, one item which spanned both work and the place of the hearth in the home, has been curiously neglected, that of the Spinning Wheel. Certainly authors have written on the subject of spinning and its historical background, but largely for an audience of practising or would-be spinners. The emphasis has been on the function of different forms of wheels as mechanical items, and perhaps because of this emphasis furniture historians have largely ignored the spinning wheel as an item of domestic furniture. Reading the literature on spinning wheels produced for spinners and weavers, one is left doubtful whether the types of wheels which are described represent other than a brief account of national designs: Celtic wheels are shown to be manifestly different from typical English styles but the issue of whether English spinning wheels are regionally designated seems not to have been confronted at all.

From the view of regional furniture history, this question is surely an important one, and one which has come to the forefront since a spinning wheel was recently offered for sale in a member's Saleroom in the West Country which bears the stamp "KERRY EVESHAM" in three places. This exciting find raises questions of who made spinning wheels and whether each region had its own stylistic variation in a similar way to chair patterns. Certainly Trade Directories in the 19th century list spinning wheel makers, but very probably others were made by Windsor chair makers, chair turners and general wood turners. In the case of the Kerry wheel, this refers to one of two John Kerrys, uncle and nephew, chair turners, who worked in the main street of Evesham between 1820 and 1854, producing a range of traditional ladder back chair styles, many of which were also stamped with their name and place of work. Since this wheel has been recorded, a further wheel stamped P ANDERSON 1835 has been recorded. This is a different style of wheel and may refer to P. Anderson, a turner of Bradford recorded in an 1837 Trade Directory. Windsor chair makers may have been spinning wheel makers too. One well documented chair maker, T. Allen of Boston, Lincolnshire, fl.1790 - 1828, was recorded only as a spinning wheel maker, and although many examples of his secondary trade (that of making Windsor chairs), have been recorded with his name stamp and place of work, so far no spinning wheel by this maker has been recorded. It will be an important and exciting find if an example of this maker's spinning wheels can be found, and would clearly help in indicating whether the idea of regional styles is credible.

An article written for the Spinners, Weavers and Dyers Journal asking the owners of wheels to look carefully at their wheels for makers' marks may result in more evidence appearing. In the meantime, if you have access to a spinning wheel, please take a look too. Perhaps in this way we can bring the spinning wheel into our orbit of study.

B. D. Cotton



Spinning Wheel

Vertical Spinning Wheel. Mechanism incomplete and one leg missing. Elm, unstained, decorated with red painted edges to some turnings. Stamped: KERRY EVESHAM, on base and uprights.