



Fig 1.



Fig 2.

John Wesley's Chapel and St John the Baptist Church

Saturday afternoon, 29 July

The ground floor of the chapel, enlarged in 1748, survives today in a style bearing many similarities to its 18th century design and layout. In this respect the backless benches still retain the directness of purpose and simplicity of the originals.

The preachers' quarters, acting as a base camp for the south-west preaching circuit, is situated on the first floor and comprises a large common room with five adjoining study-bedrooms. Except for John Wesley's four-poster bed, the furniture we see today includes tables and numerous 18th and 19th century Windsor chairs from the Thames valley and the south west regions, which have few direct links to the Wesley household.

However, one of the low-back Windsor armchairs, with its shallow elm seat, Cornish/Devonshire legs and faceted spindles piercing the arm rests, has an unusual compound arm joint for the south west region, which normally employs scarf jointing (Fig 1). The compound jointing is similar to the step joints on the mid-18th century Oliver Goldsmith Windsor chair. Is this one of the early Bristol workshop traits?

It is also worth noting the construction details of an 18th century bureau in the same room, with its exposed tenons, exposed dovetailing to the top edges of the carcass, and a round hole facilitating access to a covered well (instead of a lip edge).

Our next visit was to the church of St John the Baptist, built into the city wall. It dates from 1350 but was extensively modified in the 19th century. Within the church is an outstanding early communion table which is essentially intact. The churchwardens' accounts make reference to its purchase in 1635 for £3.14s. However the table top is now pocket screwed to the rails: originally one would expect it to be loose or fixed with wooden pegs. The frieze rail is decorated with gadrooning between cherubs' heads and Tudor roses, the latter suggesting an earlier date than 1635.

The tapering legs, flanking the table, integrate with capped stretchers resting on carved foreparts of lions. A centre leg support takes the form of a draped figure holding a chalice (possibly Faith), and witness marks where wings might have been attached (Fig 2). The blackened finish we see today was probably considered to be an essential medieval look required for all early furniture discovered in the 19th century and was probably created using a dark varnish.

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