

# Sale of a rare 'two-faced' Windsor chair

March 2010 saw the sale by Christie's of John Parry's marvellous collection of early walnut, oak and yew furniture. John, an RFS member, will I am sure be known to many of us as an enthusiastic and discerning collector with a real eye for quality and originality. However, among the many fine examples of walnut cabinet-making on display there was one vernacular item that stood out. This was lot 59, a very characterful windsor chair (Fig1), dating from perhaps the 1740s, which exhibited a number of unusual features. It was constructed of walnut and ash with an elm seat and had pointed feet, front cabriole legs and four stretchers. The well shaped and grooved saddle seat was of a type found on very early 18th century windsors but, unusually, none of the legs were through-mortised. Similarly, the one-piece back splat was slotted through the arm-bow rather than being lap-jointed, as would be expected in a Thames Valley chair.

The most interesting aspect of this unusual chair is the very fine fretted splat which bears some resemblance to the type of decoration seen on Welsh love spoons. However it was Chris Pickvance who pointed out that, although not immediately obvious, there is a 'smiling face' to be seen if one looks at the pierced decoration of the comb-rail and the top of the splat (Fig 2). More striking, however, is the 'sad face' visible in the top of the splat if one turns the chair upside down (Fig 3). These features seem to represent some kind of rural joke and appear to be unprecedented in windsor chair design. Fittingly, before passing through the hands of R.G.Cave & Sons Ltd. in Ludlow, from whom John Parry acquired it, the chair resided in a west country inn where it perhaps provided a talking point and a source of amusement.

It was originally thought that this windsor chair was unique until an illustration of another example was found.<sup>1</sup> This second chair is remarkably similar in design

although close inspection reveals a number of subtle differences. Clearly, the chair maker responsible for the design constructed two, or possibly more, of these chairs but unfortunately, and rather typically, did not leave us his name. However, none of this seemed to matter on the day of the sale. As might have been expected, there was much interest among potential buyers, so much so that it more than doubled its estimate to sell for a hammer price of £26,000; probably a record for a comb-back English windsor.

**Bob Parrott**

*(With thanks to Simon Green and Chris Pickvance)*

<sup>1</sup> David Knell, *English Country Furniture 1500-1900*, 2nd Edition, Antique Collectors' Club, Woodbridge, 2000, Colour Plate 84, p328.

Fig 1



Fig 1 The 'Parry' chair (courtesy of Christie's)

Fig 2 The 'smiling face' in the comb-rail and splat

Fig 3 The 'sad face' at the top of the inverted splat

Fig 2



Fig 3

