

A North Yorkshire Windsor Chair

I recently bought the chair shown in Fig 1 from a dealer who told me that it had been sold about 25 years ago by Norman Dale, a dealer in Pickering, North Yorkshire, who had acquired it from a local cottage. It is quite similar to a chair in York Castle Museum (Fig 2) which was donated to the museum by a York lady in the 1950s (Accession no. 261/1/50). Both chairs are painted dark green with a light green undercoat, below which mine is primed grey-green. Both are buttressed by a pair of spindles securing the bow to a rear extension of the seat. The York chair has spoke-shaved legs which do not appear to be original. My chair's legs are turned. Both have unusually square seats. The similarities are sufficient to suggest that they came from the same workshop but one striking difference is the construction of the seat of my chair.

The elm seat measures 1.4in. in thickness, compared with the usual Windsor chair seat of about 1.8in. As a consequence there is insufficient depth to give adequate strength to the joint with the arm support. The maker has therefore added a (nominal) 1/2 in. pine batten under the seat (Fig. 3), extending between the lower ends of the arm supports to give some added strength. The batten is secured by hand-wrought nails. It is very fine-grained, suggesting Baltic rather than English pine.

Not only is the seat thinner than normal but it is made up of three boards, a broad central one and two narrow outer ones. The grain on the central board runs concentrically, showing that it was sawn either obliquely through the trunk or, more probably, through the upper section

Fig. 1 The green-painted chair from the Pickering area. Photo courtesy of Dr Bill Cotton



of the trunk where it was dividing into two branches. This impression is supported by the fact that towards the back of the seat the edges of the central board appear to be chamfered (Fig. 4). Adam Bowett has pointed out that this 'chamfered' effect is due to inclusion in the board of the wany edge of the timber.

When a board is sawn longitudinally from the centre of a trunk the edges will be parallel, but as the saw moves further from the centre one face of the board will be wider than the other, the discrepancy in widths being called the wane (Old Norse vana means deficient, lacking, cf a waning moon). Normally the wane is scrapped, but here in order to preserve the maximum possible breadth from his meagre board the maker has used the wider surface for the top of the seat, leaving the wany edge exposed on the under-surface where it would not normally be seen.

We can tentatively ascribe this chair to North Yorkshire in view of its Pickering provenance and its probable kinship with the York Castle Museum chair. Its green paint puts it in the forest chair category, whose early history in the Windsor area has been eloquently established by Bob Parrott who describes how such chairs fell out of fashion by the end of the eighteenth century.¹ It is likely that this chair was made towards the end of the period, by which time the fashion for green-painted garden seats had spread far from its Thames Valley origin.

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Fig. 3 The underside of the seat showing a batten bridging three boards



Fig. 4 The wany edge of the middle board



¹ Parrott, R. 'Forrest chairs, the first portable garden seats, and the probable origin of the Windsor chair', *Regional Furniture*, XXIV (2010), pp. 1-16.

Fig. 2 A similar chair in York Castle Museum

