

# Furniture Surgery

AGM over, the stage was set for a furniture surgery with an extraordinary range of items for consideration including knitting aids, cooking utensils, footwear and beds.

John Boram opened proceedings with a child's rocking chair, which was also a commode. A similar chair in 1762 was priced at 4s 6d. The chair, though not in the rocking and commode combination, was a not uncommon style and Adam Bowett has seen many in West Yorkshire.

William Jefferies showed a rush-seated chair that he had bought in a Carlisle sale in the very room in which the surgery was taking place. It was probably an early to mid-19th-century Lancashire chair with curved plain splats under a turned stay rail above, curved arms turned where they met the back and with urn-like supports. The front legs plain tapered square section with plain square, or round, section stretchers without decoration. The colour and fineness of grain probably pointed to alder though birch was a possibility. Birch was also the wood used for the soles of the clogs that William had acquired in the 1980s. The uppers were of leather and they were said to be very comfortable.

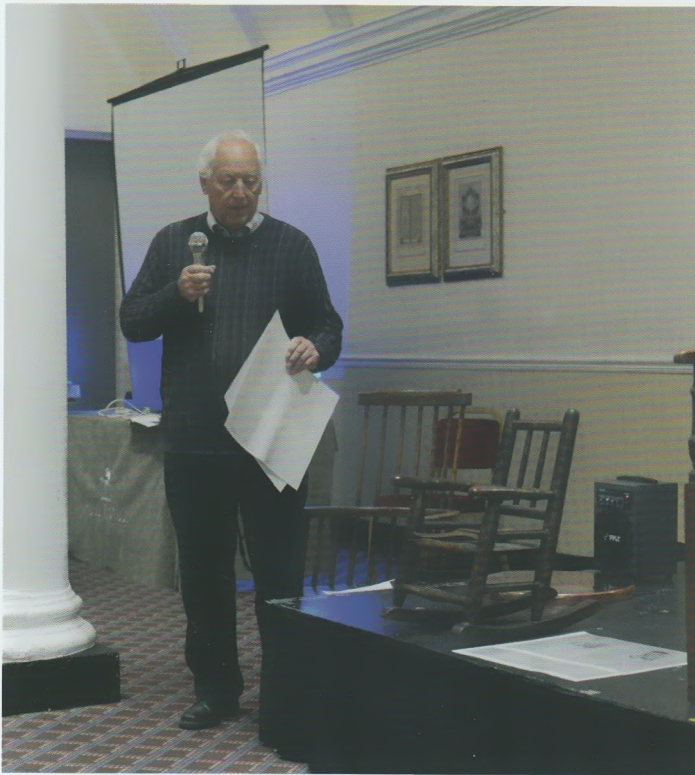


Fig. 28 John Boram's child's chair



Fig. 29 William Jeffries rush-seated chair and his own wooden clogs beside the chair



Fig. 30 Simon Feingold's Chester (?) chair with Peter Owen's tripod table

Simon Feingold presented another rush-seated chair from the North West that he had found in Lancashire. It might be a Chester chair as the bell-shaped foot often appeared in that area. A reel-turned stretcher connected turned front legs. The chair was of alder or birch with ash rails and was probably dated between 1860 and 1900.

North of the border next, with Crissie White showing a Scottish stick back chair and a similar but different Welsh one purchased from her aunt. The Scottish version was an early Darvel chair, plain, ordinary and cheap. The seat was very thick in comparison with the Welsh version and probably ash although sycamore (often called plane in Scotland) was also used. The legs were plain and slightly tapered towards the seat. The finish in a bitumen-based varnish had crackled and blackened over the years. The sticks were plain spoke shaped. The Welsh chair had turned legs and the front arm pillars were also turned. The thinner seat had 'ears' to echo the shape of the arms. The Darvel makers later went on to incorporate turning into their chairs and especially bobbin-turned legs and arm pillars.

Simon returned to the stage to show a high quality shield-backed Lancashire chair that retained its original upholstery. A variant of the design had been found in a 1788 pattern book. The carving was of excellent quality and although the half tenon mitre was not present the chair did seem to have a Gillows connection and may have been made by one of the dozen or so cabinet makers who had worked for Gillow and gone on to set up on their own.



Fig. 31 Crissie White's Scottish chair with her Welsh stick-back behind her

Peter Brears showed a large and covetable shallow round brass tray. Worryingly a ducal coronet, the date 1855 and the initials DCH (Devonshire Chatsworth House) were impressed on the back indicating, perhaps, that it had been stolen from the Duke of Devonshire. Fortunately Simon was able to reveal that he had bought it at the Chatsworth attic sale. It was, in fact, a baking tray; brass being used as it gave an even temperature throughout.

Peter then produced a small partly carved and partly turned wooden object that proved to be a knitting sheath. The narrow turned end had a socket in which a knitting needle was held and the wider shaped end was tucked under the arm allowing the user to knit away happily on three needles. Peter recalled being practically drowned out by the clacking of needles whilst addressing a knitting circle in Wensleydale.

Peter Owen produced another of his marvels in wood engineering where, by making a cut at a certain angle and rotating the joint through 180° he was able to make a strong knee-shaped joint.

Polly Legg and Mike Copperwheat showed a scumble-painted pine bed bought in auction fifteen years previously. It was 5 feet 2 inches long and was pegged in a way that allowed for dismantling. The panelled sides and ends were hinged to the base and could be folded down. This suggested a need for access, and perhaps it was a hospital or possibly a workhouse bed. It was small for an adult and rather large for a child so its use was a bit of a mystery. The hinges were stamped Baldwin a firm from Stourport-on-Severn, founded sometime in the 1770s, and having amalgamated with Kenricks in 1819, continued to produce hinges and other brass and ironware until 1956.

It not being easy to bring a piece of furniture across the Atlantic Daniel Ackermann, the Society's American Secretary brought a virtual chair to the surgery. A handsome chair with cabriole legs and an interesting splat it had some peculiarities of construction. The seat rails had double through tenons and the shoe on the splat had an extra support, perhaps because the rear rail was weakened by lack of space. It was suggested that these measures to

provide secure and stronger joints could indicate the chair being made for somewhere with a drying atmosphere. The chair was walnut and yellow pine and made somewhere between 1745 and 1760. It was known to be one of a set of 18 of which 9 had been accounted for.

As usual, the surgery had produced a fascinating collection of furniture and other artefacts and we are grateful to John Boram for organising it.

*Martin Body*



Fig. 32 (right) Peter Brears with the wonderful copper baking-tray from the Duke of Devonshire's Chiswick House dated 1835

Fig. 33 (below) Polly and Mike Copperwheat with their small softwood bed with folding sides. Possibly for institutional use, mid-19th century

