

Book Review

The Men Who Made the CELEBRATED CHAIRS: Windsor Chair Making in Tasmania

Denis Lake. Limited edition 500 copies (numbered and signed) A\$99.00. Pagunta Press, 2016, 178 pages, 163 illustrations, mostly black-&-white, and two maps. ISBN 978 0 9945386 2 8. Available from several Tasmanian booksellers and the author.

This profusely illustrated book arrived unannounced and what a wonderful surprise it turned out to be. Although many British people have relatives in the Antipodes not many have actually been there and possibly even less to Tasmania which lies off the Southern shores of mainland Australia.

The book is the story of two men, George Peddle (1855–1933) and his brother-in-law Harry Hearn (1856–1932). Both were born in High Wycombe and brought up in the traditions of local chair-making. They then took these traditions with them when they emigrated to Tasmania; George Peddle travelled out in 1884 and then encouraged his brother-in-law and family to come in 1895. While 'Mr Peddle', as most people called him, made chairs in the High Wycombe fashion he expanded into the logging business and was very successful. Harry Hearn continued making chairs all his life.

It is the story of these two men that is so interesting. Very different in character it is very difficult to tell apart who made which chairs – the difference lay in the way that the legs were turned. Both men used local blackwood timber – a wood rarely encountered in the UK. The trees were huge 100ft high monsters that were fairly easy to work and took a good polish. It was the forests of blackwood trees that George Peddle exploited and the book has much concerning the logging trade and some splendid photographs, including one of moving large logs, pulled by horses, along a track made of wooden rails.

Celebrated Chairs has been written by a long-time RFS member Denis Lake, who is also a London-trained cabinet-maker and conservator. The book is written from both the story of the chairs themselves and of the men. As one would expect from a professional cabinet-maker there is much detail on how the chairs were made and what marks were put on them. Indeed, at the end of the book is a fine checklist of the chairs and their variations

The book is a wonderful story of the transfer of chair design and working practices to Tasmania as well as it is the story of the growth of early Tasmania; George Peddle Jnr (for example) was killed on the Western Front in 1917

and both George Peddle and Harry Hearn appeared before colonial government commissions on the future development of railways in rural Tasmania. Perhaps the saddest comment in the book was the loss of nearly all the buildings associated with the men, most demolished only in the last few years. This book is great addition to the library of international regional furniture books.

Treve Rosoman



A Hobart-pattern chair made from blackwood by George Peddle