

Two Forest Chairs

The development of the Windsor chair from the 18th century Forest chair has been well recorded by Bob Parrott and others. I was familiar with them from reading articles on the history of chair making but never had the opportunity to handle one, so when I was shown two old chairs that had been locked away inside a crypt of a Nottinghamshire church I knew immediately what I had found: two very early Forest chairs. As it happens, the churchwarden had been given instructions to dispose of them and was just waiting for the opportunity to take them to the local council tip when serendipity intervened and I chanced upon them and persuaded the church to let me keep them safe for posterity.

The condition of both chairs was very poor with dry wood, loose joints and ancient repairs. Both had been stripped back to the bare wood but many places showed ample evidence of several layers of paint including the final dark green finish. Every component appears to be made from ash wood, the seats being extremely thick and well-shaped. All legs were let through the seat and there never had been any stretchers while every component seemed original. The long spindles had been shaped and rounded with a draw knife and socketed into the back comb while the short ones were let through the armbow. One chair, believed to be the earlier chair, had been branded with the motif "HH" at least eight times in various places while the

other had no markings. There is no provenance to go with them save the fact that they had been stored away for decades as they were unsafe to sit in.

The Victoria and Albert Museum have an almost identical chair but in better condition, item no W.11-1969. I was hoping that the readers of this newsletter may be able to shed some light on their origins and suggest where they were made and by whom. I am sure that they were produced several decades before Windsor chairs were made in Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire and probably have no association with the East Midlands. However, Edward Haytley, an 18th century landscape painter, used very similar chairs in some of his works including one in front of Haigh Hall, Wigan around 1750.

Please contact William Sergeant, email williamsergeant@hotmail.com



Detail of the underside of the earlier chair, showing the thick seat, leg and spindle joints and dark green paint



The earlier Forest chair



Chair no. 2, believed to be a later copy