

Furniture Surgery

After the AGM and a coffee John Boram took to the stage to present this year's furniture surgery in his usual efficient and well organised manner. Members had brought a huge array of items to discuss including almost 20 chairs, stools,



One of a pair of Norfolk elm chairs with a 'hollow' seat, c. 1770

watercolours, a spinning wheel, a Carolean box, a bed and a trunk. A few highlights follow:

The first 'local' chairs were a lovely pair brought by Mike Copperwheat which had been purchased from the house they had been known to be in for the last 140 years, five miles from Gissing in Norfolk. This pair of elm chairs had the type of 'hollow seat' so typical of this area. Robert Williams explained that this term, which we use freely to describe this type of chair, is more likely a London term for this form which has been recorded also as a 'moulded', 'concave', 'sunk' and 'saddle' seat. These chairs could date to as early as 1770 having features such as the 'bannister' splat and moulding to the outside edge of the front leg that we would expect at this period.

Further chairs from Suffolk were provided by Jan and Tony Howe who brought some great examples from their extensive collection, some of which we were lucky enough to see at Huntingfield Church on the Thursday. My favourites of these were a lovely child's high chair with drop-in rush seat and exaggerated kick on the back leg for greater stability and a wonderful burr elm seated fruitwood 'Windsor' type Mendlesham chair dating to around 1800. Tony and Jan also brought along a small pony skin domed trunk with the maker's label for 'R. Playford of No.5 Dove Street Norwich'.



A child's high chair with drop-in rush seat and curved back legs

William Sergeant's great selection of Lincolnshire chairs answered many questions as well as asking a few. These included a chair by Amos of Grantham that had to date to about 1808 as later models of this chair had turned arm supports. John Amos was a wheelwright of Little Gonerby, near Grantham who realised that the demand for Windsor chairs was greater than supply in the area and diversified his business to fill this gap in the market. He advertised in November 1823 for two journeymen, 'one Windsor and one Turnpin chairmaker who can bottom'. What was a Turnpin Chairmaker? Possibly they made rush-seated ladderbacks. Another important chair shown is believed to be from the workshop of William Taylor that can be precisely dated to 1811 to 1815 and is very significant in that it proves that underarm turned supports were used prior to 1815.

Another particularly interesting chair was brought by Bob Parrott. This rare survivor, having its original green paintwork, is a type of Thames Valley Windsor often referred to as a 'Forest Chair' that would have been used outdoors. Dating from the 1780s it had the typical features we would expect, having a large D-end seat, vase-shaped splat that is nailed into the arm bow and lacking a groove around the seat. This lack of groove can be explained in its outdoor use where, if present, it could collect rain water which could rot the seat.



A Thames Valley Windsor 'Forest Chair' with original green paintwork, c.1780

Another charming chair from the same area was brought by Jeremy Bate. This wonderfully patinated yew 18th-century Gothic armchair had particularly fine turned arm supports with wonderful tracery to the splat and other back supports. This chair had the familiar groove around the seat and was a little more unusual having a hooped back rather than Gothic arch.

David and Valerie Bryant discussed an interesting spinning wheel, designed to flat-pack, that appealed to my interest in campaign and travel furniture. Dating from around 1780 to 1800 this wheel was particularly interesting having a label for Joseph Doughty of York saying he was a spinning wheel manufacturer. Intriguingly this wheel had all the characteristics of those made by John Jameson whose premises were 400 yards away. An interesting mystery. Did Doughty buy his wheels from Jameson and finish them or maybe he bought his stock when Jameson ceased to trade? Hopefully further research will solve this riddle.

Thank you to everyone who kindly brought along items from their collections that always provide an enjoyable finale to the conference. As promised I will carry out further research on the two watercolour interiors I bought along showing a Windsor chair in an 18th-century ship's cabin which you will be able to read in a future issue.

Simon Clarke