

A Table from Goldhill Farm, Co. Durham

At a recent farm sale of old implements in County Durham, I noticed an old railway box van in which I discovered what appeared to be an early oak table. The table was standing on a floor of packed earth mixed with a goodly amount of rat muck, covered with old sacks, oil cans and veterinary bottles. After a quick investigation, I persuaded a couple of farmers to help lift the table out to see what condition it was in. Amazingly it was still relatively sound, so having negotiated its purchase, it was loaded into my van and off home for a better examination.

What is it? A long oak dining table, of late 17th-/early 18th-century date, in original condition, with a three-plank top, 94 inches long, 34½ inches wide, braced underneath with three battens. The top is much worn, the original thickness of 1⅞ inches being reduced by wear in areas to ⅝ inch. The underside of the planks show pit saw marks. The frame of the table lifts the height of the top to 30¼ inches.

The frame is in fair condition but very worn, with considerable wear on the four bottom stretchers, which gives the frame a very attractive 'soft' look. The bottom of the frame appears to have been chewed by rats in places as, rather like woodworm, they seem to go for areas of softer sap wood. The three-plank top has had various repairs, where knot holes have been filled with round pieces of oak. One hole at the edge of a plank seems to have been capped with a piece of leather or perhaps lead of similar thickness.

Where was it from? The table was found at Goldhill Farm, Waskerley, near Consett, Co. Durham. The Armstrong family who worked the farm have all died, so no further information is directly available. Most items in the farm sale pre-dated 1950, and very little seems to have been bought in recent times. It is therefore presumed that the table came from Goldhill Farm, or from a nearby farm at Combfield, which the family also owned. The farms are at the edge of the heather moorland, at around 1000 feet above sea level, and farming would never have been easy at



Long oak dining table, late 17th or early 18th century



Nail holes show the position of a former patch on the table top

this height. This may explain why the table was repaired and used for many generations, until it was finally abandoned in the shed and used as a work table or for storage.

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