

**VISIT TO THE CHILTERN OPEN AIR MUSEUM,
NEWLANDS PARK, CHALFONT ST GILES AND
CHAIR SURGERY 7th May 2005**

Christopher Claxton Stevens introduced a large group of members to this Buckinghamshire Museum founded in 1976 with the aim of rescuing threatened buildings. He inspired us with his enthusiasm for the integrity of regional vernacular buildings and their interpretation; his guided tour full of informative facts gleaned from extensive research into all aspects of the building.

Our visit started in one of the many prefabricated buildings, the 1899 Blythe Road Pavilion, Hammersmith. On site the building time-span ranged from a reconstructed Iron Age house to a 1947 prefab. First stop – the Caversham Public Convenience of 1906, made from 451 decorative cast-iron panels with original interior fittings in working order, complete with scratchy toilet



Fig. 9 Chiltern Open Air Museum. Cottage with corrugated-iron chapel in background

paper and carbolic soap! Other buildings included timber-framed barns, cottages, a meeting room, laundry building, shepherd's mobile hut, 'privies', granary on staddlestones and a corrugated-iron chapel (fig. 9), practically all dating from the 19th century.

As we visited the buildings the attention to correct furnishing detail was evident. In Leagrove Cottage, part dated to late 18th century, the ground floor was furnished as it may have appeared in the 1920s with a pine table, leather armchair, spindle-back side chairs and small stools. A cobbler was known to have used the adjacent lean-to building and appropriately this is now fitted out as a cobbler's workshop complete with all the tools and materials of his trade. An 1826 Toll House complete with barred windows to deter thieves had 3 rooms furnished circa 1860 and included the toll-keeper's desk, an 1826 clock above the door, a wood armchair, 2 iron bedsteads - one for a child. It was recorded a family of 5 occupied this small space in 1841. Exhibits included a fine hand-cranked wool or thread winder. In the Mission room we found a large set of rush seated chairs with book ledges. The 1947 prefab was built on a concrete slab base coated with candlewax and pitch to prevent rising damp. This compact and well-designed home had a solid-fuel stove heating the rooms and water, even a hot towel rail was installed along

with a fitted kitchen containing mansion polish and sticky fly papers! Utility marked furniture, a bakelite radio, 3 flying duck wall plaques and a home-made doll's cot gave a personal feel to the interior.

For those of a practical turn of mind the wooden artefacts and tools were fascinating. These included a wooden winding mechanism from an 18th century well-head, a 50' long wood ladder for cherry picking, a blacksmith's forge and most exciting of all Elliott's Furniture Factory founded in 1887 which was an assembly shop for green paint.

Windsor chairs. The legs and stretchers made by bodgers were delivered to the factory where they were kiln dried. The seats and legs were hand drilled, assembled and glued together, stained and polished. Later the entire process was carried out on the premises. The upper storey houses the Chesham Woodware Collection, focusing on the wood-working industries of the Chesham area where shovels, broom and brush handles and a wide variety of kitchen and butchery-ware were produced.

Surrounding the buildings the Museum has introduced farm animals, woodland walks, fields and gardens where period crops and plants are grown, a candle-making workshop, pole-lathe demonstrations and the most inventive wood seats designed by students from High Wycombe College.

A diverse collection of chairs was brought along to the chair surgery by their enthusiastic owners who contributed to the lively afternoon debate led by Bill Cotton. Two examples, figs. 10 and 11 are shown here.



Fig. 10. English mid-18th-century hoop-back chair with walnut arm rails. Essentially a hoop-back version of the Truman Thames Valley chair with typical Philadelphia vase and cylinder front legs. Note the original assembly shop for green paint.



Fig. 11 18th c. square cabriole leg Lincolnshire ladderback but with an unusual front stretcher.

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