



Society members getting 'hands-on' at the Abbotts' Windsor chair day.

A Day in a Green Wood Workshop

Saturday & Sunday, 8 & 9 April

Two small groups were invited to Dunmow in Essex, by Nick and Kathleen Abbott for a demonstration of chairmaking in their workshop. First we were shown how an arm bow was bent. The already shaped piece of ash had been steamed in a horizontal tube with sealed ends, the underside connected to a steamer, for approximately one hour, working on the principle of one hour for each inch thickness of timber. The wood starts to lose its elasticity after three minutes, so the bending must be done quickly. Nick gave us a perfect demonstration of how to do this. The arm came out and was placed on a jig with a pattern of the required shape. A steel strap was fitted on the outside and started to be bent by hand, sash cramps were then used to bend it further and hold it, while steel wires were fitted to the ends of the steel strap and a winch incorporated in the jig pulled it tightly round the arm. Nick told us that when the arm came out the inside measurement would be four inches shorter than the outside of the bow. The piece to be bent must be split along the grain to stop any splitting or tearing when being bent, and he showed us how he used an axe and beetle (mallet) to do this.

Next, we all used a shaving horse to make a split section of ash round enough for us to turn on a pole lathe. Nick and Kathleen demonstrated how they plan the angles, drill the seat and legs, fit the stretcher rails and put the base of the chair together. Our break for a wonderful home-made lunch gave us a chance to talk to each other.

Back in the workshop we were given a demonstration of using dry (not glued) joints in chairmaking. This can be done on the leg joints with wedges, but can split the seat and leg if forced too far. We were then shown how to lace up the back of a stick back and fix it in place.

Nick showed us how he uses stain on the sapwood of an elm seat and polishes with Danish oil; linseed oil can give the wood an orange colour.

Asked about the seating of framed chairs, Nick and Kathleen gave us a demonstration of cutting strips of bark from a small-leaved lime (best between May and August) and, after soaking it overnight, how to plait the seat.

This report details only a small part of that we were shown and talked about during the day. Our hosts gave freely of their wide knowledge and we can only thank them for such a wonderful experience. Another day is being organised, and I would strongly recommend it to members. (See Dates for your Diary, page 6).

Robert Williams