



'Kubbestol' dug-out chair. *Stavanger Museum*

'Kubbestol': Something to get your teeth into

On a recent visit to Stavanger museum in Norway, our son Ben noticed an interesting vernacular tradition. A series of these typical scoop-back dug-out chairs, mainly of birch, known as 'kubbestol' (from 'kubbe' meaning a log) and mostly of nineteenth-century date, are displayed and a number have teeth embedded in the wood round

the edge. By tradition these are the milk teeth of children and they are treated in this way in the belief that the children's adult teeth would then have a firmer footing and last longer.

This practice seems to pertain to Southern Norway and there are other examples in the Norwegian Folk Museum in Oslo and the Telemark Museum in Skien. The chairs are frequently decorated with painting, carving and piercing and the seats usually have an oval inset softwood board with the teeth set into the end-grain around it. Whether they were used with any sort of cushion or covering is unclear, but they are generally worn quite smooth.

All round the world it seems that countries have different ancient rituals connected with the loss of milk teeth, but I wonder if this idiosyncratic custom has been observed anywhere else? By the by, this observation of Ben's does rather neatly illustrate a link between his own chosen career path in biology and the regional furniture with which he was confronted as a child!

Reference has been found in these articles:

Østby, Jon Birger, 'Kubbestol, The Chair You Can Sink Your Teeth Into', Artikkel 1, *The Sons of Norway Viking*, vol. 86, no. 7, s. 6–8, (Minneapolis 1989).

Cournier, Sissel M., 'The Raising of the First Felled Milk Tooth', *Tidende, The Norwegian Dental Journal*, 2003

Christopher Claxton Stevens



'Kubbestol' chair, detail showing teeth inserted along the edge. *Stavanger Museum*