

Simon Feingold: *The Rush-Seated Chair in the North West of England*

The North West region includes the historic counties of Cumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire and Cheshire. During the industrial revolution, massive population growth was driven by a shift from the rural areas to urban centres, and by immigration.

A wide variety of rush-seated chairs in a remarkable range of design variations were produced. Many chairs from specific rural or urban locations can be identified, as well as similar versions probably made elsewhere in the region and in urban centres like Manchester or Macclesfield.

Early or more primitive examples from the eighteenth century have mostly turned components, are usually of ash and have a single row of spindles to the back. Front stretchers tend to be paired and there is usually a minimum of two side stretchers, and only one back stretcher. The front legs mostly continue slightly past the seat or level with it. Later examples tend to incorporate other regional features, such as a delineation in the back leg between the area below the seat and above it. In simpler examples this is just a change of angle, but in others this can be chamfering to the leg below the seat or a change from turned to flat section.



Two-row spindle-back chair, a common form.

The 'common form' is the two-row spindle-back. Some have three rows if of larger proportions or with arms. These are perhaps better survivors as they were probably made in vast numbers for the burgeoning urban populations, encouraged by increased wealth from the success of the 'King Cotton' economy. The stylised cabriole leg with a pad foot is often found. Some also have an added H- stretcher support. The uprights often have a nipple top but another option is an 'eared' top rail, mirroring high-style chairs. Ladder-backs were very popular with many variants, for instance Macclesfield produced its own version, often with either a picking stick top rail or arm design.

By the mid-nineteenth century even more variety is found, following the use of square cut/sawn timber in the back uprights and back rails.

Marked examples by J. Bancroft are known (see photo in *Newsletter* Spring 2019, p. 24), and several other makers and Fancy Chair Warehouses are recorded.