



Mendlesham child's chair. H 21 in (53 cm), W 10 in (25 cm), D 12 in (31 cm)

A Mendlesham child's chair

Last year I was lucky enough to purchase a Mendlesham child's chair. Even in East Anglia, where I have traded for almost forty years, they are as rare as hen's teeth and rarely come onto the market. It took some persuading to purchase this from a fellow dealer who had had it for quite a long time. It was in unrestored condition, and whilst it is always my intention to conserve rather than restore, work could be done without detracting from its value or its originality.

I am fortunate in having a very skilled restorer who has that unique quality of empathy with the item; he is able to understand the age and the quality of workmanship and can relate to the finish that would be appropriate. I was quite happy to hand the chair over to him, having discussed the short-comings and the work that needed to be done. Basically, the chair was totally original. After much discussion, we decided to re-tip the front legs which had been worn down, or probably cut down, and we have now re-instated it to its original height. A small amount of inlay on the middle of the splat was missing and has been restored skilfully. There were earlier repairs that had been done, possibly by a local blacksmith or tinsmith, which we have left because

I feel this adds character and compliments the originality of the piece that was probably made around about 1790.

During conservation several things were noted, in that the timber used came from a variety of trees; there was some fruitwood, some yew, some ash and possibly some other wood that was difficult to identify. So we have a chair that was made originally from a composition of local timbers. I have been pondering long about why this should be. We have to think about where it was made, in the small village of Mendlesham, almost certainly by the Day family. It is easy to go along with the theory that it was an apprentice piece, but I do not hold totally with that idea.

In glass-making, vases and bowls which had a mixture of glass in them, using up left-over materials and resulting in a multi-coloured effect, were given the very appropriate name of 'end-of-day-glass'.

Could this be the answer to the child's Mendlesham chair? At the end of a working day, could there be pieces of timber left over, not large enough for a full-size chair, that in skilful hands could be made into something of beauty using the off-cuts. I would like to put forward this theory and see what members think. I feel this is quite plausible and in no way detracts from the interest or the value. If anything I feel it enhances it, as there was good house-keeping going on in the Day family workshop.

Whatever your feelings are about the chair, I must say that I am a very proud owner of this item. I am sure it will be a long time before I see another one, let alone be able to purchase it.

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