

# Darvel Chair

## Acquisition by East Ayrshire Council

For some time East Ayrshire Council did not hold a 'Darvel' chair in the museum collections, despite this being an important piece of local history. Although chair-making developed in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee, it did not have the same impact on Scottish society as it did in England. However, the equivalent of the 'Windsor' chair was seen in the Irvine Valley (just outside Kilmarnock, Ayrshire) and between 1780 and 1890 a small but significant chair-making industry developed in the towns of Darvel and Newmilns. There are a range of different styles, but they all have a characteristic tall, combed back, with an arm that follows the seat outline.



Darvel chair, purchased with funding from The National Fund for Acquisitions (NFA). *Dick Institute Museum and Art Gallery in Kilmarnock, East Ayrshire Leisure Trust*

In 2015 East Ayrshire Leisure Trust, who manage the Council's collections, was contacted by an ex-colleague who was the Chairperson of the Civilian Committee of 327 (Kilmarnock) Squadron, Air Training Corps. The Squadron had been given a Darvel chair in the past by a previous Commanding Officer, Bill Prentice MBE, and were looking to find a new home for it, preferably locally, and where it could be appreciated by the public.

The chair was inspected via photographs by Stephen Hunter of Ardrishaig, who conducted a survey of Darvel chairs in 2000, and who operates the website [www.darvel-chairs.co.uk](http://www.darvel-chairs.co.uk). At least 4 named makers are recorded, but very few Darvel chairs carry a maker's stamp or mark. One of the main makers was Hugh Shields, who used 10 spindles in the comb. Another, John McMath (b. 1797), was more willing to experiment with styles, and the verticality of the legs on this chair indicated that it was a McMath (Shields used much more splayed legs). The comb of this chair has 9 spindles, while most of the chairs of this style have 10. It is finished in orange shellac, and the style of the turnings on the arm pillars and legs support the mid-to-late Victorian date. The chair is in good, unaltered condition. The legs have not been cut down as can happen.

Funding was applied for, and gratefully received, from The National Fund for Acquisitions (NFA), which is provided annually by Scottish Government and administered by National Museums Scotland (NMS). The Fund helps museums, galleries, libraries and archives in Scotland to purchase objects for their collections, and helps non-national museums, galleries, libraries and archives throughout Scotland to develop and strengthen their collections for the benefit of all.

The chair is now on display at the Dick Institute Museum and Art Gallery in Kilmarnock.

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