

The Wilcock Family of Lower Bentham, North Yorkshire

In the RFS journal for 2010 Susan Stuart discusses the various sub-contracted workshops producing Windsor chairs for Gillows during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.² One family prolific in making such chairs were the Wilcocks of Lower Bentham in North Yorkshire, fifteen miles from Lancaster — home of Gillow & Co. James Wilcock Snr and his son James Jnr made an abundance of Windsor and common chairs, peaking in production during the 1770s and 1780s, with the family continuing their work as sub-contracted chairmakers into the early nineteenth century.

Stuart comments on how Messrs James Wilcock were Gillows' main suppliers, illustrating two Wilcock Windsor chairs in her article, both displaying distinctive characteristics. The first is a sketch of a high back Gillows Windsor chair made by Joseph Wilcock in 1806, located at the Westminster Archive Centre.³ Next is a c. 1800 Gillow-style Windsor chair in ash, likely made in



above left A Gillow-style hoop-back Windsor armchair in ash. *Photo Oliver Barling*



above right A Gillow-style hoop-back Windsor rocking chair in ash. *Photo Oliver Barling*

right Detail of the rocking chair showing the spindles fastened to the seat with wooden pegs. Remains of green paint can be seen under the seat and on the further back leg. *Photo Oliver Barling*



the Wilcock family workshop, which spent part of its life in a decorator's shop in Bentham in the 1920s and 30s.⁴

Earlier in 2021, during trips to Norfolk, I acquired two hoop-back Windsor chairs in the Gillows pattern — one a rocker. This took me into discussions with RFS members William Sergeant and Simon Green, who kindly offered their thoughts and insight. After several phone conversations and further reading, we concluded that both chairs share remarkable similarities with the Wilcock chairs discussed by Susan Stuart.

The first image is of a shapely hoop-back Windsor armchair in ash. Displaying remnants of an original coat of green paint, it shares a similar profile and features to the chair described above.

The particularly well chamfered, figured slab seat, pronounced stretcher bow and pegs driven through the rear of the arm bow are reminiscent of the chair with a Bentham provenance (Stuart fig 15). Likewise, all the spindles are secured to the back bow with nails, unusual in Windsor chairs. The only decoration comes in the form of ring turnings on the substantial front legs, drawing comparisons to the Joseph Wilcock example.

Secondly, a curious hoop-back Windsor rocking armchair in ash was acquired from the same place, displaying remnants of its original green paint in between the sticks and underneath the seat). Its composition is incredibly similar to the Bentham example and a Gillow Windsor chair located at the Judges Lodgings Museum, Lancaster.⁵

Wooden pegs have been driven through the arm bow and seat to secure the sticks, a feature uncommon in Windsor chairs. In addition, the chamfered bell-shaped slab seat with criss-cross markings leads one to believe this chair spent part of its life in a working environment. A scribe line has been added on the outer rim of the seat and its legs are 'through mortised and wedged' — both are characteristics shared with the Judges Lodgings chair.

In conclusion, when directly compared with Susan Stuart's findings regarding the Wilcock family of Lower Bentham, it seems highly likely that both chairs form part of the substantial sub-contracted group of chairmakers following Gillows' design.

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² Stuart, Susan, *More about Gillows' Windsor and Common Chairs*, *RFS Journal*, XXIV 2010, pp. 83–120

³ Stuart (2010), p. 88, fig. 3

⁴ Stuart (2010), p. 103, fig. 15

⁵ Stuart (2010), p. 102, p. 99, figs. 9–11 and p. 103, figs 15–17