

Extra-large Thames Valley Lath Backs

Inspired by Linda Hall's tale about her great great grandfather, Pool Field Davis, and his Great Grenadier's Chair, in *RFS Newsletter* 72, 2020, I thought members might like to see another couple of mighty commemorative Thames Valley lath-back Windsor armchairs, with splat backs, which found their way into Lincolnshire auctions last year.

Both are cherrywood with an elm seat. Each has a curved shaped stay or crest rail which passes over the sawn and shaped back uprights, and a central elaborately-fretted splat with two curved plain splats or laths each side. The left-hand chair has eleven fretted shaped holes, the right-hand chair a remarkable thirty-five. Both have curved shaped arms supported by three decoratively turned underarm supports. The left-hand chair has two flattened large ball and concave turnings on each leg with lower accentuated ring and ball-shaped feet. The right-hand chair has, raised above the fluted upper leg turning, a three ring and concave turning, with lower accentuated ring and vase-shaped feet. Both chairs' legs are connected by H-form decoratively-turned side and double cross stretchers.

The dimensions of the two chairs and The Great Grenadier's Chair are set out in the table below; each largest measurement is in bold:

	L-hand chair		R-hand chair		Great Grenadier's chair
	in.	cm.	in.	cm.	in.
Maximum height	45.5	115.5	49.4	125.5	49.5
Maximum width of crest rail	26	66	27.6	70	30.75
Seat thickness	1.6	4	1.6	4	2.5
Seat depth, front to back	22	56	21.7	55	20.25
Seat width	21.3	54	20.5	52	26
Seat height	16.5	42	17.3	44	16.5
Mid-arm height	27.2	69	28.3	72	31
Bottom of splat to top of crest rail	30.7	78	34.3	87	34



A pair of outsize Thames Valley lath-back chairs with beautifully pierced splats.
Photo Julian Parker



Comparison between the legs of the Great Grenadier's chair (left) and the larger of the pair in the previous image (right).
Photos Linda Hall (left) and Julian Parker (right)

Chairs of these designs and proportions seem to be relatively uncommon survivals. Cotton (1990) shows an example at Figure TV 194:⁸

[...] Attributed to High Wycombe, c. 1820–70. This very large example of a Wycombe chair embodies the highest levels of constructional quality in producing what was probably a commemorative chair. Examples of chairs of this essential style were advertised by many of the Wycombe chair manufacturers, and examples are shown in TV223 taken from Glenister and Gibbons' catalogue (fl. 1865–79). The chair shown as item 124, closely resembles [this chair] and cost £1.00 at the time the catalogue was published.

The Great Grenadier's chair is overall the largest of these chairs: it is exceptionally wide. It is also very likely that it has been cut down at some point. The second picture shows its proper left front leg next to that of the right-hand chair at approximately the same scale. I suspect that either a vase- or ball-shaped turning was originally at the bottom of the legs and would probably have added another 4 inches or 10 cms to the overall height.

The proportions of the three chairs are not identical: the left-hand chair has the deepest seat, the Great Grenadier's the thickest. The right-hand chair has a longer back than either of the other two. The Great Grenadier's arms are set higher than the other two and would have been even higher when it had full-length legs.

The right-hand chair has the fanciest splat. Has anyone come across a splat with more than thirty five piercings?

Julian Parker

⁸ Dr B. D. Cotton, *The English Regional Chair*, (ACC, Woodbridge, 1990), pp. 88 and 95.