

## ‘The Ross-Shire Chair’, Dingwall Museum, Highlands, Scotland

This stick-back chair, accession number 1561, was noticed by the author on a visit to Dingwall Museum in early 2022. Little is known of its origins and no surrounding information is recorded, other than that it has always been known by museum volunteers as the ‘Ross-Shire Chair’. It is assumed to have been made and used within the museum’s catchment area of Dingwall and Beaully, within Inverness-Shire.

Unlike other stick-back chairs from within the Highland region, where seats are formed from a thick D-shaped slab, the Ross-Shire Chair’s seat is thin at only 25 mm, reinforced underneath by shaped 22mm-thick panels at the back and sides leaving the centre front single thickness only. Rectangular profile nails have been used to secure the two thicknesses together, and the protruding nail ends have been bent underneath rather than cut. The thinness of the front of the seat is masked by a rectangular trim of wood.

The chair has two combs, with an arm bow made from a single piece of naturally curved wood mirroring the seat’s outline, and a top rail which is a shorter, shallower natural curve. The two end spindles are single height and tenoned through the arm bow. The five double-height spindles pass through the central arm bow and are tenoned through the top rail, tightened by cross

wedging. All lower spindles have three decorative rings created by turning. Unlike the comb-back chairs of the Irvine Valley which have backs that markedly recline, the Ross-Shire Chair’s back is upright with little backwards angle. Wear has caused the cross-wedged tenon legs to push through the seat and all legs are roughly circular, shaped by draw knife. The back legs are canted backwards and there is no evidence of any stretchers. The original dark brown paint is well worn on the top rail and arms.

Comb-back chairs of the vernacular type appear rare within this area of Scotland, with none represented within Bernard D. Cotton’s book *Scottish Vernacular Furniture*, or found within the extensive Highland Folk Museum collection. Two Irish examples seen within Claudia Kinmonth’s *Irish Country Furniture and Furnishings 1700–2000*, p. 81, are of similar design but with shorter upper combs and shallower arm bows.

Rachael Thomas



The Ross-Shire Chair from Dingwall Museum.  
Photo Rachael Thomas



The underside showing the reinforcing panels.  
Photo Rachael Thomas



The lower spindles showing the decorative rings.  
Photo Rachael Thomas