

THE WINDSOR CHAIRMAKER

Newsletter of The Windsor Workshop

January 2007



Happy New Year to all chair enthusiasts! Last year saw major developments in The Windsor Workshop, with the building of the new workshop and the increase in student numbers from two to four per course. At the end of the year I had two marvellous opportunities to study early English Windsors (more below) and this experience will feed into courses in 2007 and beyond. This coming year already looks busy, with a highlight for me being a planned trip in June to visit the Winterthur Museum in Delaware, USA. Winterthur is the former home of Henry DuPont (founder of the eponymous chemical company and collector of American furniture including Windsor chairs). I hope to meet foremost American experts on Windsors, and learn new lessons about their chairs. A new advanced course will be held this year, and a simple child's high chair will also be offered. Finally, we have Chairs 2008 to look forward next year, to be held at St Fagans in Cardiff.

Details of this year's courses are to be found at the end of this newsletter, and on the website. I hope you find something of interest.

Good chairmaking to you all!

James Mursell

English Comb-back Armchair (c. 1750) *History!*

Possibly the best known Windsor chair in the UK – this chair appears on the dust jacket of Bill Cotton's *The English Regional Chair*. I was given the opportunity to study and photograph this chair last month, in order to learn more about English (as opposed to American) Windsors. The chair was a revelation. The maker had left his tool marks all over the chair (out of sight of the casual observer), so that his method of making could be read (from the tool marks) like instructions from a book. One of the most interesting findings was that the short (Yew) spindles had been turned. A dimple was found on the base of a short spindle where it



had been held on the lathe, and turning marks were found, by enlarging a photograph taken with an angled light. These marks were on the outside of the chair, and so had not been worn off by the clothes of sitters over the past 250 years.

The existence of so many tool marks raises the interesting question as to how the chair would be judged if it was made today and entered into a competition. My guess is that judges would eliminate it on the basis of

poor workmanship because of the tool marks. However it must be one of the finest Windsor chairs around – so what's going on?! I will continue to urge students to concentrate on shaping each piece beautifully in preference to trying to achieve the perfect finish.

Sharpening a Scraper *New Technique!*

The cabinet scraper has to be the least expensive tool in the workshop, but unless it is sharpened effectively, it is worthless! A recent student, Peter Picthall, who has already made two chairs and is coming back for his third in February, suggested putting a bevel on the blade, and turning just one hook per edge. The effect was excellent, but it still required filing, and took a fair time, particularly for the curved scrapers.

I have found that the bevel can be made extremely quickly on both rectangular and curved scrapers by using a belt sander, mounted upside down. I use mine for sharpening turning tools, with an 80 grit belt. Grind the bevel, and then consolidate the edge by rubbing the surface opposite the bevel with the burnisher. Finally, roll the hook with one, or at the most two passes of the burnisher. The edge achieved is superb, and in a very short time. No reason now for not always having sharp scrapers! Tool marks look out!



1. Grinding bevel on belt sander



3. Rubbing edge with burnisher



2. Filing off burr from sander



4. Rolling hook with burnisher

Free-course Competition

Many thanks to all who entered the competition, (details in the October newsletter) which was run in conjunction with Classic Hand Tools. The winner will be making his chair on a course in July.

Over the next year there will be a series of competitions for other woodworking courses available at: www.classichandtools.com

www.the-windsor-workshop.co.uk

“dedicated to Windsor chairmaking”

THE ALUMNUS ARTICLE

Phil Carpenter sells sophisticated software to the oil industry, and in the last year he has made two chairs at the Windsor Workshop. Here he shares a few of the lessons that he has learned (some the hard way!).



I completed my first chair under James' guidance in January 2006. Soon after, I started to make a bow-back with a lovely elm seat for my godson's 21st birthday in

June.

Perhaps I was over-ambitious. I have not yet finished this chair. So, as my godson approaches 22, I thought I would share some lessons I've learned.

- The elegant seat of the bow back looks clunky when you start with a thicker 2 inch blank.
- It's a lot more work to shape a seat in elm than cherry or tulipwood.
- Drilling the seat with a brace and bit is hard work and it's easy to get the angle slightly off.
- Finding a good supply of straight clear green timber is not easy.
- It is much harder to cleave yew than sweet chestnut.
- You can't just go out and buy a steam box.
- Everything is much easier when you've got James close by!

I planned to make a sack-back rocker as a surprise Christmas present for my Mother. This was a hard deadline so I returned to James in November.

Of course, my Mother is thrilled with her chair but I had one more lesson to learn.

When attending a course at the Windsor Workshop please consider how you will get your chair home.

A rocking chair doesn't fit into a two-seater car!

PC

29 Jan - 2 Feb FULL	Bow Back
12 - 16 Feb FULL	Bow Back
26 Feb - 2 Mar FULL	Continuous Arm
12 - 16 Mar	Bow Back
26 - 30 Mar	Bow Back
23 - 27 Apr	Bow Back
6 - 12 May (West Dean)	Sack Back
21 - 25 May	English Comb-back
2 - 6 Jul	Continuous Arm
18 - 22 Jun	Bow Back
16 - 20 Jul	Bow Back
3 - 7 Sep	Bow Back
7 - 12 Oct (West Dean)	Wheelback
29 Oct - 2 Nov	Bow Back
12 - 16 Nov	Sack Back
26 - 30 Nov	Bow Back
10 - 14 Dec	Bow Back

COURSES 2007

The introductory bow-back course costs £395 (incl. vat), and all other courses cost £430 (incl. VAT) . The price includes all materials, food/drink during the day, and use of the tools.

If you wish to book a course please phone/email to check availability, and then send a deposit of £150 (cheques payable to The Windsor Workshop) to secure the place.

Courses highlighted in yellow are advanced courses can only be taken once the bow back chair has been made.

New Advanced Course English comb-back armchair 21st – 25th May 2007

Owners of Michael Harding-Hill's book *Windsor Chairs* may recognise this style. I spent an afternoon with Michael last November, photographing and measuring this chair, and will be running a course in May, to make a similar chair but with a crinoline stretcher. The course will be open to those that have already made two previous chairs. The reason for the restriction is that there are many more parts than in the standard course chairs (bow, sack, and continuous arm), and speed will be essential to complete it!



New Course Child's High-chair

On the last course before Christmas Diana Walton made two high chairs for her grandchildren. This simple Windsor chair pushes up to a table, and is ideal when children no longer wish to sit in a baby's chair. The legs and stretchers are turned; the arm is steam bent; the spindles are shaved; and the seat is carved in the same way as any other Windsor.



My great niece in her high chair!

If you have children or grandchildren who would appreciate a new chair, come and make your own. You should be able to make two in the time available. This can be done on any bow-back course. The cost is £430 (incl. VAT).

Diana describes her experience:

"I came across the Windsor Workshop on the Internet whilst searching unsuccessfully for a Windsor highchair for my grandchildren. I was inspired when I read that no previous experience of carpentry was needed and signed up immediately for a 5 day course.

Every stage, from the initial splitting of a tree trunk to the final polishing, was a steep learning curve as I had never used any of the tools before.

I enjoyed every moment of the course and am now looking at dates to enrol for another. If you have any inkling to do anything like this don't hesitate - you'll find it an inspirational and really rewarding experience."

DW

James Mursell

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