

THE WINDSOR CHAIRMAKER

Newsletter of The Windsor Workshop

February 2010



Welcome to my first newsletter of 2010. I have a wide range of items for you and hope you find them interesting. The snow has been a major event in the two months since the last newsletter and it has had a big impact here. For the first time in five years I had to cancel a course, due to the snow, and what began as a precautionary move turned out to be spot on with fresh snow and ice during the week making roads in the village impassable in anything other than a 4 x 4. The extra time has been well spent reorganising the workshop, with three brand-new benches and an extra lathe. There is now capacity for six people on a course, each with their own tools – I have never been so organised!

I wish you a productive and enjoyable woodworking year and hope to meet a good number of you at shows and on courses over the next twelve months.

James Mursell

THE SNOW

Depending on Windsor chairs since the age of 5!

Looking through my father's collection of transparencies recently, I came across this photo of yours truly learning to skate during the famously cold winter of '62/'63 on the farm's reservoir. Even now I clearly remember the difference that the chair made to my progress across the ice. I had no idea at the time that it was a Windsor, or that I would ever make them, but surely it was my destiny even then! As for the cushion, at least it was somewhere useful and not on the chair itself, which anyone knows would have made it less comfortable!



Tobogganing



Another memory from '62/'63 was tobogganing behind the LandRover around fields and being thrown off around corners. I have had to wait over 45 years to do it again. Three pieces of ply and two pieces of wood produced a most satisfactory sledge in 1 ½ hours. The whole family took turns, reaching a maximum of 20 mph and taking tumbles when the driver managed to sling-shot the sledge on the corners!

However, being in the seating business, one part of the design was unsatisfactory. The flat plank on the sledge confirmed everything that I have ever taught my students about comfort in a seat and the need for shaping. A quick rummage in the workshop produced an almost finished Windsor seat which greatly improved the pleasure of the experience.

Those that have seen my new book may recognise the seat as coming from the old chair that is the subject of Chapter 7 !

Not all fun!

The snow in West Sussex was incredibly dense. We had about 8 inches the first night and it gave us some problems. The trampoline in the garden was compressed 2/3 of the way to the ground from the weight of snow, and the roof of the shed where I keep wood and machinery collapsed. Fortunately the galvanised sheeting has not buckled and I believe that the timbers can be replaced and considerably strengthened. Not a job that I had planned on!



www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk

"dedicated to Windsor chairmaking"

BRASS MONKEYS

My thanks to Ken Groom for passing on this article to me during the freeze. I had always wondered where the expression came from.....:

C A N N O N B A L L S ! ! !



"It was necessary to keep a good supply of cannon balls near the cannon on old war ships. But, how to prevent them from rolling about the deck was the problem. The storage method devised was to stack them as a square based pyramid, with one ball on top, resting on four, resting on nine, which rested on sixteen.

Thus, a supply of 30 cannon balls could be stacked in a small area right next to the cannon. There was only one problem -- how to prevent the bottom layer from sliding/rolling from under the others.

The solution was a metal plate with 16 round indentations, called, for reasons unknown, a Monkey. But if this plate were made of iron, the iron balls would quickly rust to it. The solution to the rusting problem was to make them of brass - hence, Brass Monkeys. Few landlubbers realize that brass contracts much more and much faster than iron when chilled. Consequently, when the temperature dropped too far, the brass indentations would shrink so much that the iron cannon balls would come right off the monkey.

Thus, it was quite literally, cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey. And all this time, folks thought that was just a vulgar expression."

WEBSITE www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk

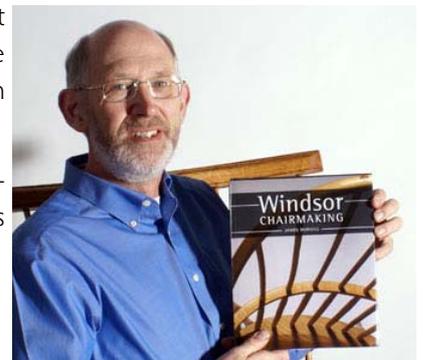
The new website that went live at the end of November has been a terrific success. Thank you for all the positive comments that you have sent and particularly for all of you that have bought items from the online shop. In my opinion the days of cheques and the post are almost over – perhaps it's a slight exaggeration, but my use of envelopes is now tiny. Similarly, in the move to a digital world, my office is still dominated by three large filing cabinets that gather dust and are opened just occasionally. I have reorganised the workshop, next step the office!

BOOK

Sales of *Windsor Chairmaking* have been most encouraging. I am grateful to all that have bought the book even before the first review. These should be appearing in the next month or so in all the main woodworking magazines, and I look forward with crossed fingers for a favourable response.

One benefit that has already been shown is that the book provides prospective students with a good background before a course and also comprehensive course-notes afterwards.

Signed copies available from www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk
for £19.95 plus £2.70 p&p



LINSEED OIL

I visited the maker of the linseed oil that I use in *Windsor Wax* the other day. Durwin Banks grows the linseed, presses the oil and markets it just five miles from here. He is one of the very few farmers to make his own oil as most is imported. His largest markets are for human and animal consumption, and he even persuaded me to start adding it to my porridge – tastes excellent and gives it a more creamy texture!

You may be interested to read more about his operation on his website: www.highbaroils.co.uk

SHOWS

My show calendar is now almost complete. The first show that I will be attending is **Good Woodworking Live at Alexandra Palace**. If you can make it to this show and any others please come and say hello. Tools, courses and the book will be on sale.

12 – 14 March

Get Woodworking Live
Alexandra Palace – major London show
under new management

8 May

WL West Show
Selham, nr. Petworth, W. Sussex

12 – 13 June

Sussex Guild
Parham House, Storrington, W. Sussex

27 – 30 August

Festival of the Tree
Westonbirt Arboretum, Glos.

7 – 19 September

Weald Wood Fair
Bentley, E. Sussex

2 - 3 October

European Woodworking
Show
Cressing Temple, Essex

6 – 7 November

Sussex Guild
Hurstpierpoint College, W. Sussex

4 – 5 December

Sussex Guild

*They chop down 100 ft trees
To make chairs
I bought one
I am six foot one inch
When I sit in the chair
I'm four foot two.
Did they really chop down a 100 ft tree
To make me look shorter?*

Attrib. Spike Milligan

COURSE DATES FOR 2010

Bookings have been excellent over the winter and as you will see, the next vacancies for an introductory course are in June. If you are considering a course, please don't leave it too long to book in order to avoid disappointment.



Feb	8 – 12	Intermediate
Feb	22 – 26	Introductory – FULL
Mar	1 – 5	Introductory – FULL
Mar	22 – 26	Intermediate – FULL
Apr	19 – 23	Advanced
May	3 – 7	Introductory – FULL
May	16 – 21	West Dean
Jun	7 – 11	Introductory
Jun	21 – 25	Intermediate
Jul	5 – 9	Introductory
Sep	6 – 10	Introductory
Sep	20 – 24	Introductory
Oct	11 – 15	Intermediate
Nov	1 – 5	Introductory
Nov	15 – 19	Introductory
Dec	13 – 17	Introductory / Intermediate

ADVANCED COURSE: 19 – 23 April

If you have already taken an intermediate class why not consider making this lovely 19th century English double-bow chair. We will use ash and elm (for the seat). Turnings will need to be made prior to the course and I will provide patterns, and wood if you are local. If this is difficult, I am happy to make the turnings for you.

This chair has most of the challenges that can be found in a Windsor chair. The two-piece splat and crinoline stretchers will be new if you have only made American style chairs to date and the thick bends and blind mortices are also typically English.

Course fee: £555



WOODLAND HERITAGE

This is a wonderful organisation for anybody who loves trees. Membership ranges from growers to users of wood and also those with a general interest. A range of visits are arranged each year; training courses are offered, covering the journey of wood from woodland to workshop; and there are bursaries available for research. There is also a fascinating journal that is produced once per year. If you are starting to make chairs and need to find green wood in your area, this might be a good place to seek advice.

Their website is at www.woodlandheritage.org

WORKSHOP REORGANISATION

I mentioned in my introduction that I have reorganised the workshop. My younger daughter helped me to make three new benches and we easily completed the task in less than six hours. Fitting the six pattern maker's vices took another three, helped by a simple jig to rout out the recesses. One good day's work for brand new furniture – not bad!



For dust extraction I use dust separators, sold by Axminster (http://www.axminster.co.uk/product.asp?pf_id=23254&name=dust+separator&user_search=1&file=1&jump=0)

They are quieter than most extractors but with three going at once the noise is quite wearing. I found that most of the noise comes out of the filter and so have made plywood boxes to fit over them. They are completely open at the bottom so the air can flow through them unimpeded, but the reduction in noise is impressive. I have done something similar with the extractor for my bandsaw which has two 1.2 kw motors. I have discovered that I used to tense every time I switched it on - the difference is wonderful!

Finally, to cope with six students and to make sure that I always have access to a lathe, I have installed a new lathe. It's my second Record CL1. They are perfectly adequate for all the turning needed for chairs, though the motor is not quite powerful enough to cope with my aggressive turning when on a production run. The secret of making this relatively light lathe a success is to have a very solid base. I have built one from 18 mm plywood and incorporated a sack of cement at the back to increase the mass and damp out vibrations. The limit to its stiffness is now the floor!



New lathe with stand



Back of lathe stand with sack of cement enclosed in box (tool and calliper stand attached).

Note also wooden 'silencer' over extractor filter and low-profile collection box for dust separator.

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