

# THE WINDSOR CHAIRMAKER

Newsletter of The Windsor Workshop

May 2010



It has been several busy months since my last newsletter which was produced when snow was still uppermost in our minds. Writing this today it doesn't feel much warmer, with a frost overnight and in spite of bright sunshine. I am so pleased that I am no longer dependent on the weather as a grower. The asparagus would be sitting there hardly growing and probably with frosted (damaged) tips; and cell division after pollination of apple blossom would be very slow, promising small apples and poor returns. As a chairmaker I just put on another layer, work harder, or turn up the heating!

I have now run several courses with 6 students since the reorganisations of the workshop at Christmas. This number works well with everybody finishing their chairs and yet receiving individual attention. I only had one week when there was a problem and that stemmed from extended break times caused by too much talking! It's great when everyone gets on so well, but I am now stricter on getting back to the workshop after a reasonable time!

There have been more developments with tools (see below) and the website has been improved further with the inclusion of my first video clips, amongst other changes – please have a look: [www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk](http://www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk)

I will be attending a wide range of shows over the rest of the year (details in the newsletter) and hope to see many of you there.

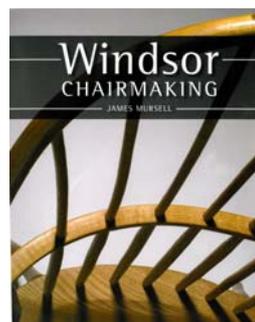
The interest in all aspects of green woodworking throughout the country has probably never been higher, following the Master Craftsman's series on TV which included one programme on chairmaking. A good number of people have signed up onto my courses as a result and other chairmakers/green woodworkers are also reporting great demand. If you haven't tried it already, why not make a resolution to make your first chair – you'll enjoy it and will never look at wood and chairs in the same way again!

James Mursell 12th May 2010

## Book Sales

*Windsor Chairmaking* has been selling well since it came out at the beginning of the year. 550 out of a print run of 2,000 have been sold by the beginning of April, with sales in the UK and US. My publisher, Crowood Press, says that they are usually quite pleased to sell 500 in the first year. Thank you to everyone that has bought a copy – I hope that you have found it interesting and useful.

After a thoroughly positive review in *Furniture & Cabinet Making*, there has been a review in *Good Woodworking* and hopefully others will follow before too long.



## Moving with the Times!

Along with the shopping facility on the website, which has proved popular, I have recently acquired a credit card machine for accepting card payments in the workshop and at shows. This is a mobile machine that uses a SIM card to access the bank. Its first outing was at Alexandra Palace where the steel roof played havoc with the signal and I, along with other stall holders, was to be seen walking around the floor standing on one leg and doing anything we could think of to improve reception! Bring back cash and cheques - no, not really!



[www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk](http://www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk)

*“dedicated to Windsor chairmaking”*

## Tool Kits



Building on the success of the travishers and spokeshaves, and responding to the demand for less expensive tools, I have recently developed a kit version of each tool.

Uniquely, the kits are based around a precision-machined hard maple block with the blade, and method of adjustment, already fitted. This leaves the owner to shape the block to his preferred shape and to profile the nose (in front of the blade) for the intended work. Detailed instructions are included along with alternative profiles.

The spokeshave blades are from Ron Hock and those for the travisher are made by Ben Orford ([www.benorford.com](http://www.benorford.com)). These are exactly the same as for the complete tools.

The following tools are useful (but not essential) for making a useable tool: bandsaw, pillar drill & Forstner bit, drum sander and rasp. I can comfortably make an excellent working spokeshave in 20 minutes from a kit, though more time will lead to a finer finish. The travisher may take a little longer as there is more shaping involved.

There is considerable scope for experiment in shaping the bodies and making truly individual tools.



The table below gives a comparison of costs with the complete tools and also shows prices for blades and blocks individually. The ability to purchase bodies separately means that with a single blade, which is perfectly interchangeable, several bodies can be made for different purposes (e.g. convex and concave work).

	Small spokeshave	Medium spokeshave	Travisher
Complete tool	59.95	69.95	79.95
Kit	39.00	45.00	55.00
Block & parts (ex. blade)	14.75	17.50	25.00
Blade	31.00	32.00	32.50

The complete tools and the kits can be bought direct from the website and in due course I will include the blades and bodies. If you wish to purchase these latter items please email me and I'll send you an invoice by email that can be paid by credit card.

## Upcoming Shows

Rather than reproducing the list on my website, please click on the following link to see the dates and venues of the shows that I will be attending over the rest of the year: <http://thewindsorworkshop.co.uk/shows-and-chair-making-exhibitions>

Of particular interest may be: the **Festival of the Tree** at Westonbirt Arboretum, Gloucestershire, over the August Bank Holiday; the **Weald Wood Fair** at Bentley, East Sussex in September; and the **European Woodworking Show** at Cressing Temple, Essex, in October.

Please come and say hello!

## Chairmaking Equipment on a Shoe-string!

Colin Wyatt attended a course here in January making an English stick-back chair. He has been busy since he returned home to France and is now almost ready to begin making chairs. Here is his story in his own words:



*“I have been as busy as time allows since the course and have built the two important pieces of equipment, The Bending Frame and the Steam Box. I must emphasise that I decided the main consideration was cost. I am proud to announce therefore, that apart from 4 little bolts and a few screws, all from stock, everything else was "found". The steam box is made from leftover poplar roof boards and is lined with steamproof (I've tested it) roofing membrane. The steam is provided by our wallpaper stripper. The frame consists of an old pallet and more roof boards. I was for a while confounded by the problem of your spring steel strip and end blocks. However, I have utilised an old, worn out bandsaw blade with the teeth ground off. The winch looks a bit odd, I know, I turned it on my lathe, but I have made it detachable as otherwise the whole thing won't stand in the garage.*

*Do they work? I've no idea! I have tried and failed to locate any suitable wood to have a go with. A friend of mine is burning ash in her boiler but it's in metre lengths and the grain is very distorted.”*

I replied with a minor suggestion that 'wings would be needed to support the blank and strap just before bending:

*“I made them with two bits of ply, the bottom of an old drawer. I have used two G clamps. Had I fixed these wings permanently the whole thing takes on the dimensions of a Boeing, but it has to be stored. In mitigation I would point out that the G clamps are from a set of 3 for £1 in the pound shop.”*

I hope that Colin will be able to find suitable wood, but if necessary he will collect some from me next time he is returning to France. I take my hat off to him for his ingenuity in producing these large and potentially costly pieces of kit for almost nothing!

## Jack Goodchild Chair

On the same course as Abigail and Vagn (see next item) was Keith Lane. He wished to make an English stick back chair as he owned several chairs made by Jack Goodchild that had been in his family since they were first bought, just a year before Jack died. Along with a chair made by Jack Goodchild he brought a copy of a letter written to him in 1979 by the relation that originally ordered the chairs, and with Keith's permission I reproduce it below:



Keith with his, and Jack Goodchild's, chairs

*(Jack Goodchild contd.)*

*"... Jack Goodchild's name, as you probably know was Harold Edward Goodchild. When I approached him to make me four kitchen chairs he was interested in my name – Knight. Eventually we discovered that he and my father were apprenticed together and worked next to one another for several years. My four chairs and Renes cost 5/- each. They, as you appear to realise, are very fine examples. This is evident in their stance, proportions and finish. The turnings are refined and lightened, placed at an ideal angle to support the seat. If placed by many contemporary Windsors in the same design and price range one notices that the seat is lighter and thinner and has this further improved by bevelling the bottom edge and putting a small 'scratch' bead round the top edge...."*

If you do not already know the name, Jack was the last of the High Wycombe bodgers and he features in many books written on Windsor chairs – though not mine! Google his name and 'chairmaking' and you'll find lots more.

It was a special opportunity for me to have the chance to examine one of Jack Goodchild's chairs in great detail, and for it to have such a direct link to the person that ordered it. Keith also brought a couple of other interesting chairs from his collection of Windsors.

## Reading Bench



Assembling the undercarriage

Last week a couple made a settee on one of my courses. Abigail had made a double bow chair with me previously and Vagn was a very competent woodworker. They had seen pictures of many of my chairs and had set their hearts on making a 'reading bench' for use against their kitchen table. This was a design that I had developed for a client 6 years ago and had only made once, so I dusted off my plans and prepared some wood for them.

The result of their busy week was superb. They had to make: 33 spindles, 6 legs, 5 stretchers and 2 armposts, a 61" seat individually carved for 3 people and 4 pieces making up the arms and back. The seat and arms were elm and the rest ash.



Completed reading bench

I would not offer this as a course to individuals, as much of the time you need two sets of hands, but if you have a friend/partner who would like to come and help and you'd like to make one, do get in touch!

## Course Dates

Course dates for the rest of the year are on my website. Please click this link to go to the appropriate page: <http://thewindsorworkshop.co.uk/courses-at-the-windsor-workshop/course-dates-booking-and-prices>

Booking can now be made online, though please check with me first, by email or phone, to check that there is space available on your chosen course.

**James Mursell**

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