

# THE WINDSOR CHAIRMAKER

Newsletter of The Windsor Workshop

January 2011



My thanks to so many of you who sent goodwill messages after receiving my last newsletter where I gave details of my heart problems over last winter. I am pleased to report that The Windsor Workshop is back operating at full stretch and I have already run 5 courses since mid-February, with lots more scheduled for the rest of the year.



I have decided that enforced time-out from a routine is not all bad! It has certainly given me the opportunity to develop new ideas and reassess my chairmaking priorities and the results will gradually emerge over the next year or so.

In a couple of weeks I will be attending the Bodger's Ball (AGM of the Association of Pole Lathe Turners (APT)) and I hope to finally get around to making my own pole lathe shortly afterwards. There is no chance that I will be offering pole-lathing on my courses in the foreseeable future, but I feel the need to become proficient in this aspect of traditional chairmaking. Similarly I hope to make some ladderback chairs over the summer using some of the techniques that I have developed for making Windsors.

Watch out for new-shaped spokeshaves in the next few months though the travisher will remain unchanged. Interestingly the majority of sales of these tools are currently from the USA – the power of the internet to make this possible continues to amaze me!

I wish you a good summer. The current amazing weather can surely not continue for ever and I hope that we will receive some rain soon otherwise southern England will resemble southern Europe before too long!

James Mursell

## Win a FREE course!



Visit the Classic Hand Tools website [www.classichandtools.com](http://www.classichandtools.com) and enter their competition for the opportunity to win a 5-day chairmaking course at The Windsor Workshop. Answer just five simple questions (you'll find the answers by browsing through [www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk](http://www.thewindsorworkshop.co.uk)) for an excellent chance of winning.

Don't put off booking a course in the hope of winning the competition! If you have already booked and then win, I'll refund your deposit and there'll be nothing to pay.

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

## An Amazing Windsor Chair!



Over the past few months I have had the pleasure of working with Katie Walker, furniture designer, on her new rocking chair. Katie lives locally and works extensively with Roger Smith. I visit Roger's workshop regularly to thickness and join seat wood for courses and to prepare blanks for my tools.

Through conversations about Windsor chairs Katie decided that she would like to make a Windsor version of her iconic 'Ribbon Rocking Chair'. Not having acted as a 'consultant' before it was great fun to encourage her in this venture and to be able to demonstrate the techniques involved in making the new chair, such as measuring the



The Ribbon Rocking Chair

spindle angles, shaping the seat + spindles and drilling all the holes.

Roger took on the steam bending of the bow using the former from the previous chair and settling for four sections joined together to make the complete bow.

The new chair is currently in the Saatchi gallery in London and Katie hopes to get into small production runs. I look forward to producing many of the components for her.

Shortly after the first chair was finished, I sat down with Katie and she told me a little about her background:

*Katie explained that the underlying philosophy of her furniture is that 'the structure is the form'. She dislikes added ornamentation as it is the fundamental structure that interests her.*



Drilling the Bow  
Roger Smith, Katie Walker, James Mursell

*Katie was interested in woodworking from her school days and after school took a one year foundation arts course before enrolling in the Furniture and Product Design course at Ravensbourne. Subsequently she spent 3 years at the Royal College of Art studying furniture receiving her first commission in 1993.*

*Katie believes that 'chairs are the ultimate pieces of furniture as they are so difficult to make really well'. She pointed out that making 'one-off' pieces is very expensive and it is difficult to achieve the necessary price from the final design – a sentiment that I completely agree with!*

*Her first rocking chair was unique. She explained that she knew that she wanted to design a rocker, but didn't know the form, other than that she wanted the frame to be continuous and to flow. Inspiration came from endless studying of other chairs, sculpture and nature – she is fascinated by the patterns and geometry in the growth of plants and animals.*

*With the structure of the frame decided on, the question then became how to make it. In the end she and Roger Smith settled on an industrial bandsaw blade as the ideal former for laminating. This proved a great success with just a single joint in the complete band.*



'Weight and See'

*I asked about the design process and she explained that 'I usually have to work hard to produce a design, though occasionally it just clicks into place. However I am always a little worried if it is not a struggle – I need a little torture in the process!'*

The ribbon-rocker was a great success, winning several awards, but with its high price sold few examples. The new Windsor rocker is considerably less expensive to make and it is hoped that not only will it be well received artistically but will also become a commercial success.

First shown at Collect, 6 – 9 May 2011 at the Saatchi Gallery, London  
[www.katiewalkerfurniture.com](http://www.katiewalkerfurniture.com)

## Jack Goodchild Chairs

Last December I received an email asking if I might know anybody who would be interested in a couple of chairs made by Jack ('last of the bodgers') Goodchild. I telephoned to find out a little more about the chairs with the intention of making a few suggestions, but as the conversation continued I began to consider buying them myself. By the end of the call I had made an offer which was accepted. I am now the proud owner of a full-size chair and apprentice piece made by Jack Goodchild.





If you are not familiar with the name already, Jack's life and work was recorded in some detail and many photos of him and his workshop can be found in books about English Windsor chairs. Carole Leatherhead wrote the following to accompany the chairs:

*"My father, Ron Payne, was given the Windsor chair by his Uncle Jack's widow – Uncle Jack being Jack Goodchild, the Naphill 'Bodger'.*

*Uncle Jack used to make the chairs in the barn in the orchard at the back of the cottage in Naphill where they lived and I can remember playing there as a child. The smell of sawdust still evokes memories of that barn to this day.*

*The old cottage had no 'mod cons' and Auntie Liz, Jack's wife,*

*used to draw water from a well in the lawn of the garden, which was surrounded by real country garden flowers such as hollyhocks, delphiniums and roses.*

*I was born just around the corner in Louches Lane, so after we moved, my mother and father still visited Auntie Liz at the cottage and after she had to move to another house in the village, right up until her death in 1972.*

*My father died in 2006, so I have now inherited 'the' chair and its apprentice piece and, although loathe to part with them, I am happy in the knowledge that they will be finding a home where they will be not only be properly cared for, but appreciated by others for the works of art which they are."*



These two chairs are now admired by every person that comes on a chairmaking course at The Windsor Workshop. They are the first Windsors that I have ever bought, apart from two (very uncomfortable) eastern European kitchen versions and that was years before I made my first chair!

Keith Lane, who attended a course at The Windsor Workshop last year and who owns a Jack Goodchild chair of his own, recently sent me some photos of chairs made by Jack's brother Sidney. These are 'gothic' Windsors with their characteristically pointed bows. The photos were taken in Naphill, the village where Jack lived.



## Tools

I recently bought some fabulous tools from Glen Rundell in Australia. He has worked with Curtis Buchanan from the US who favours tapered joints in his Windsors and Glen has produced these tools from Australian hardwoods.

Glen wrote:



*The tenoners ( not an ideal name but at least we know what we mean! ) are a copy of the tools we used in Tennessee, where we learnt to make the continuous arm chair from Curtis Buchanan, who is without doubt one of America's finest. I have seen similar tools for sale on the Classic Hand Tools site in the U.K., the only difference being the shape and perhaps the angle of tenon. Curtis explained to us that he uses 6 degree tenons as it allows for smaller dimensioned parts, legs etc and therefore a more refined or delicate*

*looking chair. There are still several makers in the US who use 11 or 12 degrees but their chair parts and therefore their chairs have a much heavier look. When teaching I use the analogy of a 45 degree mortise and tenon in comparison to say a 2 degree. The 45 physically would not and could not stay together, whereas the 2 degree is identical to a morse taper and could virtually be assembled without glue, the friction fit is so good. That seems to resonate with most students and really sells the slighter angle.*

*The Yankees use maple for their tools but we have settled on gidgee as it is as strong as iron and resists wear and tear. It also machines and turns beautifully and looks great too. The reaming tool we use is again a copy of one popular in the Southern states and is very simple in use and very accurate to. In fact we ream the angled hole in the tenoning tool with the matching reamer so that you are virtually guaranteed of a fine fit. These tools are paired together and sold as sets. I would agree that it does add an extra degree of difficulty in the chair making ( teaching ) but if approached cautiously the results are more than worth it, as a wedged tapered tenon is virtually indestructable.*

*I've pasted a few photos of the reamer and tenoners, there are two of these, one for the arms and one for the legs. The gidgee is so hard that the handles of the tenoners and the reamer are not even finished with product but are just polished on the lathe with sawdust and metal cutting compound as you would steel !*

*As for woods for the chairs, we use green blackwood for the spindles, which are hand shaved in a shave horse, and sometimes blackwood for the steam bent crest rails also. Although we have also been using 100+ year old green elm from several trees that died from the drought, which has been very good also for bending. For our seat bases we use a number of different species. Queensland Kauri pine, Queensland Hoop pine and also Tasmanian Huon Pine which is by far the most spectacular. These are very close to the US yellow pine, favoured by the Americans. We are going to try Tasmanian Myrtle next year also which again is a beautiful timber in it's own right and could be utilised for the entire chair.”*

I have never used tapered tenons in my courses as there is not time for this extra level of complexity, but there is no doubt that the joint is superior to the standard parallel-sided mortice and tenon. I used to use tapered joints (12 degrees) on my chairs but have got out of the habit in the last few years. I expect that owning this set of beautiful tools will rekindle my enthusiasm for this joint.

## Past-Students' Work

Past-students have been very busy over the last few months and they have kindly sent me details of their work:

### Bob Easterbrook

Bob has taken three classes in the past year and now is the proud owner of a full set of chairs (4 bow backs and 2 continuous-arms). Bob lives not far away and for the last two courses has collected wood from me prior to the course, turned his legs and stretchers at home (he is a fine woodturner) and completed at least 2 chairs during each week's course. Great chairs!





## Dave Cripps

Dave attended one of my courses at West Dean several years ago and with the help of his course notes and a copy of my book has made his first chair at home. Here are a couple of pictures of the equipment he built and his fine chair.



## Jane Tribe

Jane also attended a West Dean course several years ago and she has just completed a course in Australia (where she lives) and has made a fan back chair from the plans in my book (pp. 123 – 126). Nice chair!



Apologies if I haven't included your photos in this newsletter – do please keep sending them to me and I'll do my best to include them in future editions.

## Time-lapse Photography

If you have looked at my website recently you may have seen my latest photographic venture – a time-lapse video of a 5-day course <http://youtu.be/983cpCPnvOw>

The video clip is less than 4 minutes long and gives a good impression of just how much work is involved in making a chair.

My thanks to Percy, Christian, Norman, John, Nigel & Brenda for their patience during the course while the photos were being taken. I took around 13,000 photos during the 5 days and then converted them into a video before editing it down to 4 minutes. The biggest problem with taking so many photos was ensuring that there was always power in the camera's battery – regular re-charging and replacement of batteries was essential.

If you'd like to know the technical process of creating the video do get in touch and I'd be happy to share it with you

## Shows

My diary of show dates is complete for the rest of the year.

A couple of weeks ago I attended, for the first time, the Yandles Spring Show in Somerset and had a very useful time meeting people and selling tools. The show attracted lots of visitors and there was a wonderfully relaxed atmosphere – well worth a visit.

This show is repeated in the Autumn on 9/10 September. Sadly I can't make it, but I hope to return for next year's Spring Show.

### **7 – 8 May**

APT Bodgers Ball, Brockhampton, Herefordshire

### **11 – 12 June**

Sussex Guild

Parham House, Storrington, W. Sussex

### **2 July**

Weed & Wildflower Show, Bignor, West Sussex

### **16 – 18 September**

Weald Wood Fair

Bentley, E. Sussex

### **1 – 2 October**

European Woodworking Show

Cressing Temple, Essex

### **5 – 6 November**

Sussex Guild

Hurstpierpoint College, W. Sussex

### **3 – 4 December**

Sussex Guild

Midhurst, W. Sussex

### Links:

APT

<http://www.bodgers.org.uk>

Sussex Guild

<http://www.thesussexguild.co.uk/>

Weald Wood Fair

<http://www.bentley.org.uk/#/events-september/4533778606>

European Wood Show

<http://www.europeanwoodworkingshow.eu/>

Yandles

<http://www.yandles.co.uk/>



## Course Dates

Here are the latest course dates, including the new weekend courses, through to the end of 2011

May	15 - 20 28 - 29	West Dean Stool
June	6 - 10 20 - 24	Intermediate Introductory
July	4 - 8	Introductory
September	5 - 9 19 - 23	Introductory Intermediate
October	10 - 14 23 - 28	Introductory West Dean
November	7 - 11 21 - 25	Introductory Intermediate
December	12 - 16	Introductory

Course Prices	£
Introductory	470
Intermediate	495
Stool	200

If you wish to book a course please check with me first that there is a vacancy ([james@thewindsorworkshop.co.uk](mailto:james@thewindsorworkshop.co.uk) or 01798 815 925). A deposit of £150 will secure a place on the course and it can be paid via the website (card or PayPal) or by sending a cheque to The Windsor Workshop. All payments will be promptly acknowledged.

### James Mursell

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