

## **Windsor Chairs Glossary**

### The craftsmen who made the chairs

Sometimes a whole chair could be built by one craftsman, more often though, up to six specialist craftsmen would supply components or skills.

### Bodger

An itinerant craftsman, often living and working in the woods, making legs and stretcher components for Windsor chairs. These parts would be made from newly felled timber, usually beech, turned on a pole lathe. A few bodgers were still working in this way as recently as the 1950s.

### Benchman

The benchman typically worked in a small town or village workshop and was responsible for the sawn components of the chair, the seat and the back splat. He would have used a variety of bow saws depending on the component being cut; heavy duty for the seat, finer for the decorative piercing of the back splat. Often shaping the upper side of the seat was left to another specialist craftsman known as a 'bottomer'.

### Bottomer

A specialist craftsman responsible for shaping the upper surface of the seat. His most important tool was the hollowing adze, which would have had a 28 inch (71 cm) wooden handle, and a razor sharp blade approximately 9 inches (23 cm) long by 3 inches (7.5 cm) wide.

### Bender

The back bow is made from a single piece of timber, usually ash or yew, bent round with each end fitted to the seat. The bender prepares the timber then boils or steams it until pliable. Using a bending table the timber is wedged into position and allowed to cool. A temporary strut is fitted so that the bow will maintain its shape, and then it is delivered to the framer.

### Framer

Probably the most skilled craftsman, the framer fits and assembles the individual components to make up the chair. His first task is to smooth the components that arrive in an unfinished state from their

makers. He drills round holes to fit the turned components; the legs and the sticks for the back. Square or rectangular mortices are chiselled out for back splats and arm supports. All by eye and without the aid of the power tools and jigs that you would find in a modern furniture factory. All the components are then glued or wedged in place.

### Finisher

Worker responsible for cleaning, staining, polishing and/or waxing the chair according to the requirements of the framer. Cleaning was carried out using nitric acid, a job often left to young trainees. Staining involved immersing the whole chair in a vat of wood chippings in solution of warm water. Better quality chairs were French polished, a job requiring considerable skill. Others were waxed. Early chairs were painted green, though few surviving examples retain their paintwork.

### The terms

#### Adze

A tool similar to an axe, but with an arched blade at 90° to the handle. This is the main tool of the chair bottomer.

#### Bending table

A jig used to ensure similar curvature on multiple components, i.e. the back bow for wheelback chairs. Used by the bender, this tool often consists of a series of pegs mounted in a flat panel.

#### Bow back

Type of Windsor chair where the back is framed by a curved outer bow, often terminating at the seat. Many examples in Kettle's Yard also have an arm bow into which the ends of the back bow are fitted.

#### Bow Saw

This is the main tool of the benchman. A saw in which a narrow blade is stretched in a light frame. The tension on the blade is adjusted using a twisted cord.

### Mortice

A hole or recess in one component, in this case the seat, designed to receive a projection on a second part, legs, back bow, sticks or splat.

### Pole lathe

An ancient form of lathe operated by a treadle attached by a cord to a springy pole or tree branch. The cord passes round the work piece which rotates backwards and forward with the action of the treadle. The pole lathe was mainly used by the bodger to produce legs, stretcher components and back sticks. Because of the treadle action it is only possible to work components on the down stroke. Often the pole lathe was constructed by the bodger himself.

### Repairs

Many Windsor chairs have had a hard life, a life extended by crude repairs. It is not unusual to find metal screws, nails and brackets used to strengthen failing joints. Such repairs might reduce the collectable value, but in a context such as Kettle's Yard they become an important part of the history and story of the chair.

### Splat

The vertical rail at the centre of the back, cut from fairly thin plank, often decoratively pierced.

### Sticks

The vertical rods used in the back of the chair. Cylindrical in form, the same diameter is used over the whole length. (If they swell in the middle, narrowing top and bottom they are referred to as 'spindles').

### Stretcher

In its simplest form, a construction of three components in an 'H' shape linking the four legs and thus providing rigidity. The stretcher ensures tension between the legs and the mortice holes in the seat.

Several chairs in Kettle's Yard use the so-called 'crinoline stretcher' in which a steam-bent component links the front legs, with two diagonal pieces connecting to the back legs. This type of stretcher was said to better accommodate large skirts, but in practice makes little difference. Probably more of a fashion statement.