

April Meeting – Jeremy Lain

Jeremy runs “Treeincarnated” a company specialising in hand-crafted traditional furniture. Having started working with his father, he has now been in business on his own for 3 years.

Jeremy started by talking about bodgers who would fell their timber in spring and make chairs over the winter. The last “true” bodger stopped work in the 1960’s. Over time different areas of the country developed different styles of chair and used different woods, for instance in Buckinghamshire Beech and Elm were the main timbers used while in the North West Ash was more prevalent.



The bodger felled the timber, cut it to length, cleaved the logs into sections with a froe and then after rough shaping with a draw knife, they turned the legs and spindles on a pole lathe. The seats, commonly made of Ash or Elm, were shaped with an adze. Nowadays, Jeremy uses an Arbotech grinder to shape the seats and so saving considerable time.

For the bent parts, arm bows and backs the bodger would bend the wood while it was still green, bending it round a former and tying it into shape with string so that it could be removed from the former and left to dry. Now a steamer is used and Jeremy has constructed his own consisting of a Burco boiler with the lid off and a box over the top. Air dried wood is put in the box and steamed for 10—15 minute before bending round a former. He reckons on 75—80% success rate as it is not an exact science. Steaming allows the fibres in the wood to move over each other in the process of bending.

Bodgers did not use adhesives but relied upon the fact that as the wood dries out it shrinks. They used round pegs in round holes and by correctly aligning the components the shrinkage actually tightens the joints. The advent of animal glues prolonged the life of the chair joint but animal glues dry out and are not flexible and so do not move with the chair. Jeremy uses modern, more flexible, PVA adhesives for his chairs.



Jeremy had brought along several chairs to show us but he first explained the definition of a Windsor chair. A Windsor chair consists of three separate parts, the underframe, the seat and the top frame. The underframe and the top frame are both inserted into the seat. Other forms of chair differ from this in that the back legs of the chair are integral with the back of the chair as shown in the photo. This chair is a Suffolk variation of an East Anglian chair and is unique in that it has a curved seat, most chairs of this type have a rush or flat wooden seat.

Windsor chairs are the most comfortable chair available and surprisingly no body knows why they are called Windsor chairs as they did not arise from Windsor and nearly every region of the country has variations that can be clearly attributed.

The remaining photos are all “Windsor” chairs that have been made by Jeremy. The first example is a Bergere Bow chair, familiar as the type of chair seen in films on paddle steamers on the Mississippi River.



The second is an example of a Lancashire style chair made mostly from Ash.



The next two are true Suffolk chairs being examples of Mendlesham Chairs. The Mendlesham chair is unique among Windsor chairs by being the only one named after a village and its design possibly is traced back to the Day family of Mendlesham in about 1840. The Mendlesham chair is also unique in that it uses cabinet makers’ joints in its construction—there are mortise/tenon joints in the back, a diminishing dovetail joint between the arm post and seat. Also the back spindles do not reach the seat. The two chairs differ in the back top rail, one being steam bent.



Jeremy then described how to make a Winsor chair and explained the process he uses. He reckons that for one chair it takes about 60 hours work, including cutting out and French polishing. The final photo shows Jeremy between his chairs with a child’s Windsor chair behind.

Judging by the applause and discussion at the end this was a thoroughly informative and enjoyable evening, even though not strictly woodturning.

If you are interested in finding out more about chairs, Jeremy recommended a book by Bernard Cotton titled “The English Regional Chair” and published by The Antique Collectors Club.

