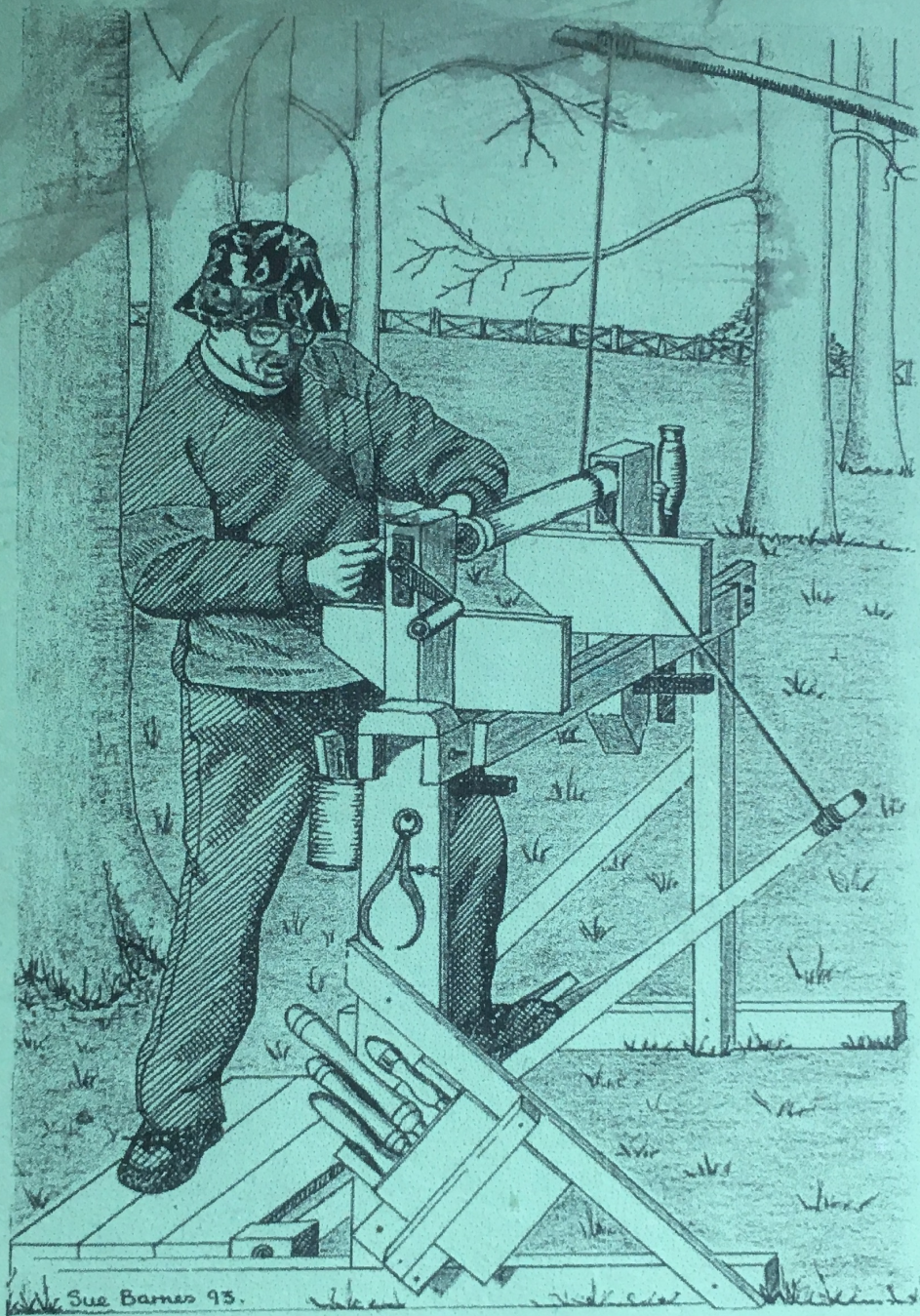


From Tree



Sue Barnes 93.

To Chair

by Ian Brown

From Tree to Chair

For many centuries, British woodlands were worked by craftsmen who made a wide variety of hand crafted products, from simple tools, to intricate and beautiful chairs.

As a general rule the woods, from which the craftsmen extracted their raw materials, were not over-exploited. Small areas were coppiced and left to re-grow; different areas being cut in following years until the re-growth was sufficient to allow the coppicer to return to the original area. This ensured an infinite supply of wood for succeeding generations.

One of the results of this work was that each area within the woodland was at a different stage of growth, thereby ensuring suitable conditions for a wide variety of wildlife.

Today, some of our woodlands still show the benefit of the work carried out by our woodland craftsmen through the centuries.

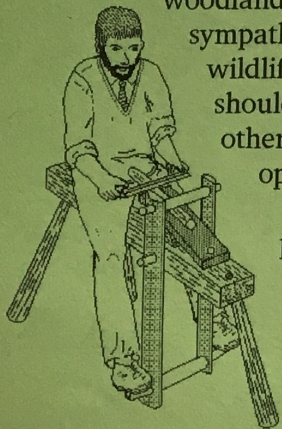
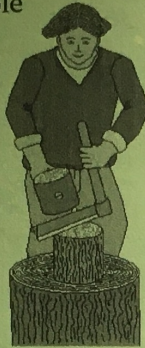
Unfortunately, during the first half of the 20th Century, traditional woodland crafts started to die out. Mass production led to quicker and cheaper methods of manufacture.

Fortunately, the skills were not entirely lost and a recent revival of woodland crafts has taken place. Many craft associations have sprung up (the Association of Pole-lathe Turners has over 250 members) and their members are making hand crafted goods which, because of their beauty and longevity, are still good value.

In this time of Local Agenda 21 it is appropriate that we should be using local materials to produce goods for local sale. There are many woodlands in Manchester (and elsewhere) which need sympathetic management to improve their value for wildlife. The wood derived from this management work should not be wasted. Planting in the Red Rose, and other Community Forests, should present increased opportunities for employment in woodland crafts.

In the early 1970s, a screen of trees was planted alongside the M63, on the southern edge of Kenworthy Fields in the Mersey Valley. These trees are now (1995) maturing and in need of thinning.

Manchester Wildlife started to coppice this woodland in February 1995.



February 1995 -
The coppicing is
started

Here the density
of growth, and the
size of the more
mature trees, can
be seen.



Spring 1995 -
The finished
coppice

Spring 2000 -
Showing re-growth





Handles for rakes, and other simple tools, can be made from the lighter coppice poles.



Shaving Horse - used in many crafts for shaving wood. A chair bodger will use one to prepare billets for turning on the pole-lathe.

From Tree to Chair - Page Four



The Pole-lathe



The pole-lathe is operated by a treadle using a pole as a return spring. A cord between the two is wrapped around the billet of wood. This rotates the work. The application of a chisel removes wood to shape a chair leg.

Pole-lathes have been in use for about 3,000 years. They were employed to make round section parts, mostly for chairs and stools. There are two main types of traditional chair; the slab-and-stick, or Windsor, and the post-and-rail.

From Tree to Chair - Page Five

Post-and-rail stools and chairs



The post and rail stool on the left is made of Sweet Chestnut from Eastham Country Park in Wirral. This has fancy turned legs, rails and spindles. The seat is woven in seagrass in a chevron pattern. The stool on the right is made of willow. This wood was stolen from Bruntwood Park, in Cheadle, after trees had been felled to make way for the Sainsbury's superstore which was built on the hay meadows. The seat is again in seagrass but is of the more traditional pattern used by rush weavers.

The chair is made on the same principle; a back stool in 17th Century style. These traditionally had fancy turned spindles and finials on the top of the back posts. The wood used here is Alder, from Parrs Wood Rural Studies Centre in Didsbury which is now defunct as a multiplex cinema, and other delights, are being constructed on the site. The seat is Jute, woven in a twill pattern.



From Tree to Chair - Page Six

more Post-and-rail chairs



On the left is a reproduction 17th Century Carver in Laburnum from Vernon Park, Stockport. The tree was blown down in a gale. Again with fancy turned spindles but also fancy rails and even fancier finials. The seat is again of seagrass, woven in the traditional rush style. John Carver, after who this style of chair is named, was the first Governor of the Plymouth Colony in North America. He is reputed to have taken a plan of these chairs with him on the Mayflower. Whether or not Mr. Carver made these chairs is not known.

A natural progression from the Carver is the ladder-back. With curved back posts and slats these are more comfortable and arguably more attractive. The carved crest rail is of a style employed by John Jackson, a late 19th Century chair maker, from Billinge, Wigan. Usually, Mr Jackson's chairs had a single, fancy-turned front rail and the back legs were octagonal, in section, from the seat downwards. He also used a treadle-lathe with the power supplied by an apprentice. This chair is made of Ash from Kenworthy Fields in the Mersey Valley.



From Tree to Chair - Page Seven



A simple slab-and-stick stool in Laburnum from Vernon Park. The seat is Elm. This form of construction is very strong and durable, and there are many examples of this type of stool, and chair, which are 200, or more, years old. The chair is a child's Windsor in cherry (from a garden in Hale). The

seat is reclaimed Mahogany and the Beech comb-crest was rescued from a skip. The pair of comb-back chairs below have turned parts in Sweet Chestnut (one from Eastham Country Park, the other from the garden of the house outside which they are standing). The seats are reclaimed Mahogany.



From Tree to Chair - Page Eight

Bow-back Chairs

Bow-back chairs did not appear until the early 18th Century as steam-bending was not perfected until that time. With steam-bending the "cooking time" is critical and there must have been a lot of broken wood before they got it right.

This Chair is in Laburnum, from Vernon Park, with an Oak bow and Elm Seat.



Arm Chairs

Before steam bending, arm chairs were usually comb-backs with carved arms fitted to the back stiles.

The chair on the left has the comb-crest, back splat, arms and turned parts in Alder, from Big Wood in Wythenshawe. The seat is reclaimed Mahogany.

This was my first attempt at making an arm chair.

The comb-back on the right has turned parts in Ash, from Kenworthy Fields. The seat is Elm and the comb-crest and arms are carved from Lime (found at Hereford College).

This type of chair is very complicated to make, by hand, and, as far as traditional chair-making is concerned, this is about as good as it gets.



From Tree to Chair - Page Nine

Sustainable Development

The 1992 Rio Summit (an International Conference on the environment and natural habitats) discussed ways in which people could live in harmony with the planet in the 21st Century. The outcome of this conference was Agenda 21, the main policy of which was sustainable development. You walk to your local wood and, using hand tools, fell a tree and make a chair, in situ, and walk home with your chair. This is sustainable development; learning to live our lives without depleting the Earth's finite resources or degrading the natural environment.

Becoming involved with traditional woodland crafts is a good way of putting sustainable development into practice. Any British native trees which are felled will re-grow to produce wood for future use; nothing is destroyed and the environment is not degraded. Why not have a go at bodging, or make a traditional chair. You will find it most satisfying and a very healthy activity. The first five contacts in the list below are people, and organisations, undertaking courses in chair-making and related crafts. There are other people, and places where courses are available but these have been selected because they are fairly close to Hereford. For a comprehensive list, contact the Association of Pole-lathe Turners.

Useful Contacts

Jo Alexander, Penmon, Anglesey. Tel. 01248 490198
Courses on bodging and chair-making.

Mike Abbott, Clisset Wood, Ledbury, Herefordshire. Tel. 01531 640005
Courses on green woodwork and chair-making.

Hugh Roberts, Bodorgan, Anglesey. Tel. 01407 840249
Courses on Welsh and Windsor chair-making.

Gudrun Leitz, Ruskin Mill, Stroud, Gloucestershire. & Clissett Wood, Ledbury, Herefordshire. Tel. 01531 640125
Courses on making pole-lathes, green woodwork and chair-making.

Greenwood Trust, Coalbrookdale, Shropshire. Tel. 01952 432769
Various traditional craft courses.

Association of Pole-lathe Turners. John Burbage (Secretary), Scullsgate Cottage, Benenden, Cranbrook, Kent. TN17 4LE Tel. 01580 240608

Bolton Greenwood Group - Ian Brown. Tel. 0161-437 7040

From Tree to Chair - Page Ten

Useful reading

Green Woodwork by Mike Abbot - Guild of Master Craftsman Publications Ltd. ISBN 0-946819-18-1 - Mostly on pole-lathe turning and chairmaking

Traditional Woodland Crafts by Raymond Tabor - Batsford ISBN 0-7134-7500-5 - Covers most woodland crafts except pole-lathe turning

Green Woodworking by Drew Langsner - Lark books. ISBN 0-937274-82-8
An American book with some unusual and interesting crafts included.

The Forgotten Arts by John Seymour - Dorling Kindersley. ISBN 0-86318-052-3 - An interesting book covering a wide range of country crafts.

CHAIR SEATING - Techniques in Cane, Rush, Willow and Cords by Kay Johnson, Olivia Elton Barratt & Mary Butcher - Dryad Press Ltd. ISBN 0-85219-736-5 - At £25 a little expensive.

Dictionary of Woodworking Tools by R.A. Salaman - Unwin/Hyman ISBN 0-04-440256-2 A fascinating book; you wouldn't believe so many different tools had been made. Expensive at £40 but could be found second hand.

Country Chair Making by Jack Hill - David & Charles. ISBN 0-7153-8767-7
An excellent book but leg angles on the Windsor chairs seem a little bizarre.
THE COMPLETE BOOK OF Baskets & Basketry by Dorothy Wright - David & Charles. ISBN 0-7153-9856-3

These books should be available at a Central library. If you have any books to recommend, please let us know.

Tool Suppliers

Ashley Isles (Edge Tools) Ltd., East Kirkby, Spilsby, Lincolnshire. PE23 4DD - Tel: 01790 763372

Wood turning, Wood carving & Carpentry chisels and gouges. Send for catalogue & price list

Bryony Driver, 47 Kingston Road, Camberley, Surrey. GU15 4AG
Hand made craft tools - send s.a.e., for a catalogue and price list

Stretton Antiques Market, Church Stretton, Shropshire.
Some second hand tools - worth a visit, if you're passing.



Published by Manchester Wildlife

c/o Ian Brown

82 Crantock Drive

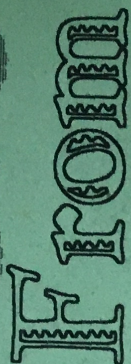
Heald Green

Cheadle

Cheshire. SK8 3HA



From Tree to Chair - Page Eleven



to



Working in the forest, harvesting the wood.
Thank the Lord for Nature's bounty and for all things good.
Use regeneration, sustain the world with care.
Treading softly on the Earth, working from tree to chair.

Consumerism makes pollution, mass production feeding greed.
Simple living's the solution, making what we need.
So you're making loads of money, pumping all them oil wells dry.
Now you tell me you're not happy, and you ask me why.

Craftsmen through the ages, working with their hands,
Making all that was required, not feeding our demands.
Serving local markets, made with love and care.
Treading softly on the Earth, working from tree to chair.

How we slash and burn the forests, transport goods from the Earth's end.
Now's the time to change our habits, and to make amends.
No more belching factory chimneys, roads that kill where nature died.
Offices and supermarkets, destroying countryside.

Change your way of living, leave all that behind.
Show them that you love your country, show them that you mind.
Heal the World's destruction, all the harm repair.
Treading softly on the Earth, working from tree to chair.

We must Tread softly on this Earth, and work from tree to chair.

Ian Brown