



WINDSOR CHAIR MAKING IN AUSTRALIA & THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CENTRE FOR RARE ARTS & FORGOTTEN TRADES

Engagement and growth in heritage trades for the next century

An International Specialised Skills Institute Fellowship.

GLEN RUNDELL

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i. Acknowledgements

The Fellow would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who generously gave their time and their expertise to assist, advise and guide him throughout his Perpetual Eddy Dunn Fellowship.

Awarding Body – International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)

The ISS Institute plays a pivotal role in creating value and opportunity, encouraging new thinking and early adoption of ideas and practice by investing in individuals.

The overarching aim of the ISS Institute is to support the development of a “Smarter Australia”. The Institute does this via the provision of Fellowships that provide the opportunity for Australians to undertake international skills development and applied research that will have a positive impact on Australian industry and the broader community.

The International Specialised Skills Institute was founded 28 years ago, by Sir James Gobbo AC, CVO, QC, and former Governor of Victoria, who had a vision of building a community of industry specialists who would lead the up-skilling of the Australian workforce. The Fellowship Program builds shared learning, leadership and innovation across the broad range of industry sectors worked with. Fellows are supported to disseminate learning's and ideas, facilitate change and advocate for best practice through the sharing of their Fellowship learning's with peers, colleagues, government, industry and community.

Since its establishment 28 years ago, ISS Institute has supported over 450 Fellows to undertake research across a wide range of sectors which in turn has

led to positive change, the adoption of best practice approaches and new ways of working in Australia.

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The Fellow sincerely thanks the Perpetual Foundation and Eddy Dunn Endowment. In 1998, the Perpetual Foundation (the 'Foundation') was established to provide a way for benefactors to contribute to improving the lives of others. The Foundation is structured in a way that enables specific endowments to be established in their own name. While the Foundation supports a range of charities and causes, a key objective is to direct funds towards projects that focus on preventative measures and education. In addition, to projects that address the root cause of problems, rather than providing short-term remedies.

The aim of the Eddy Dunn Endowment International Fellowship is to promote the acquisition of higher-level skills and an appreciation of international best practice in the traditional trade fields, with a particular interest in mechanics. It is intended to examine innovative approaches that demonstrate potential benefits for the Fellow and for Australian industry and enterprises.

Personal Acknowledgements

The Fellow wishes to acknowledge and thanks the following individuals for their time and assistance.

- » Mr. Norbert Gutowski, Program Tutor for the Conservation & Restoration of Furniture and Related Objects, West Dean College
- » Ms. Francine Norris, Dean of Education, West Dean College.
- » ISSI Fellow Ms. Bronwen Glover
- » Mr. James Mursell, The Windsor Workshop.

ii. Executive Summary

The aim of this fellowship was twofold. Firstly, to visit learning institutions in the UK, who have a strong focus on providing education in traditional skills, trades and crafts, to investigate the mechanics of these facilities with a view to understanding how a similar facility could be established in the State of Victoria.

Secondly to gain further understanding of specific methodologies and techniques in the making of English Windsor Chairs, with respect to design, characteristics and timber species with a view to 'reintroducing' the English form of Windsor Chair to this country in an Australian interpretation of the form.

The Fellowship enable the Fellow to travel to the UK to West Dean College and Weald and Downland Open Air Museum in West Sussex, England. Additionally, the Fellow attended at the home and workshop of respected English Windsor Chair maker and tutor, James Mursell, in West Chillington, West Sussex.

The recommendations from the Fellows studies in England are clear. Australia is in desperate need of an institution solely focused on the restoration of Traditional Trades skills and education. The Fellow and his wife created a proposal and business plan for a school of this kind in their home town of Kyneton.

As a result of the learnings from this Fellowship, the Fellow has developed a newly designed chair incorporating aspects of an English style Windsor Chair. This chair design will be the focus of a unique Windsor Chair Making Class to be taught at Sovereign Hill living museum.

It is hopeful that in the future there will be an opportunity for the Fellows findings regarding the operational mechanics of West Dean College to be continuously utilised in some form in a Traditional Trade School such as the model proposed for

CRAFT. To this end the Fellow is now working with various industry stakeholders in the Ballarat City region to form a working party who will create a new business plan for that city to build a CRAFT type education facility, with a direct focus on providing recognised education in a wide variety of traditional trade and craft skills across a range of mediums.

Finally, the Fellow will directly impart the learning outcomes gained from his time learning specific English chair making skills by sharing those skills and techniques with chairmaking students during classes held in the Fellows Kyneton Workshop.

1. Fellowship Background

Australian Situation

"There is a lack of skilled traditional carpenters able to undertake sympathetic repair to historic timber structures."

ISSI report - PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF TIMBER HERITAGE STRUCTURES, Amy Chan, SWOT Analysis - Weaknesses - Page 11, Point 3

"As traditional carpentry is not commonly practised or consistently taught in Australia, this knowledge can only be gained by visiting workshops and sites overseas where traditional carpentry techniques are still widely used."

ISSI report - PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF TIMBER HERITAGE STRUCTURES, Amy Chan, Page 13, Part 3 paragraph 3.

Artisans and Master Tradespeople such as Bruce Walker, Cooper George Smithwick and the like are more than prepared to share the vast breadth of knowledge gained through decades of practicing their various trades. The issue is, there are no facilities in this country to accommodate them or provide a platform for them to pass on these important skills and vital information.

There seems also to be a prevailing attitude which has gained both increased momentum and acceptance in the last decade of digital progression. It is an attitude that promotes the falsehood that somewhat capable amateur craftspeople, who have uploaded videographies of techniques and aspects of various crafts and trades can somehow fill a void of learning, if or when a trade ceases to be regularly practised or taught by professionals or Masters. A similar attitude prevails in some

circles that books on trades and crafts can also take the place of one individual passing on skills and instruction to another person, directly. Indirectly, one may believe that because a trade or craft is practised elsewhere in the world, there is little risk in that trade or craft ceasing in Australia, as skills can simply be relearned from practitioners abroad.

The Master and Apprentice form of passing on skills and trade knowledge has been in existence for thousands of years, for good reason. It has been practised in this country since the first fleet landed some 247 years ago. Indeed, with respect to our European cultural history, it is immensely important.

The Master and Apprentice form of learning is not new, nor is it antiquated. As humans, we learn best through aping or being shown 'how.' In almost every stage of life we practice this methodology. We do not place pre-school age children into a room with a video screen and a pile of books and tell them to 'learn.' We provide them with a navigator for that knowledge. A teacher.

Whether a would-be scholar or apprentice plumber, we provide them with a professor or a Master. Those Navigators are there to assist students and apprentices through the many and varied avenues in which they may err or make mistakes and to then steer them in the right direction or provide the requisite tuition for them to flourish. Books and video's rarely provide this information and can never provide the depth of understanding, learning from an expert can.

With respect to Australia's continuing demise of traditional trades and skills, we must consider the following circumstance.

It has long been understood, since Darwin's theory of evolution, the importance of adaption and evolution of various species. These 'favourable traits' that allowed a species to flourish by adaption to their environment.

If we again examine the trade of the Cooper, it is evident that this exact evolution occurred in Australia in the last 200+ years, within this trade. Coopers practicing their trade in England, Europe or The United States of America, utilised Oak or various 'Quercus' species to make vessels from. The 'Quercus' species of tree does not exist naturally in Australia, so Coopers had to adapt their trade to utilise Australian native species in lieu of Oak, which was too costly to import.

In the case of most breweries, particularly in the Southern States, Blackwood was utilised to make barrels. Victoria's Otway Ranges were home to teams of men known as 'Stave Cutters' who felled gun barrel straight Blackwood trees by hand for this very use. However, the naturally occurring tannins in the Blackwood timber, meant that the barrel could not simply be assembled and filled with liquid. So, the Australian Cooper kept those tannins at bay by lining or coating the barrels in 'pitch,' the resin from Pine which sealed the timber and imparted no flavour to the beer. The Blackwood was also much different to Oak in its working properties, the way it worked with hand tools, the manner in which it bent, weather by applied heat from flame or steam.

In essence the Coopers Trade in Australia, which has all but ceased to exist, was an Australian adaption of that trade, with its own knowledge base, understanding of native timbers and unique skill set, which cannot be re-learned elsewhere. Those 'favourable traits' allowed the Coopers Trade to prosper in this country to the point that in the early part of the 20th century, The Federated Coopers Union of Australia was one of the strongest trade unions in the country. Fast forward 100 years or so to 2017, that trade union has ceased to exist and there are no more than a handful of true Coopers still practicing their trade. This could be said of in numerous other trades practised in Australia, such as Windsor chair making, wheel wrighting, and all manner of decorative trades.

It is not as simple as explaining away the loss of a traditional trade or craft, from a region, state or country, by simply suggesting that those specialised tradespeople may be bought in from afar when necessary. Crafts, Trades and techniques are often far more complex than just their namesake would suggest or the basic association with what they create. They are quite often peculiar to a region, landscape or country.

For example, numerous differing styles of hedge laying exist across the United Kingdom. Often these are in response to the hedge flora itself or what species may grow in certain soils or altitudes. It would be folly to suggest that hedge laying in a singular style would be representative of that craft across the United Kingdom. Even the hedge layers tools, such as the billhook, differ in design and use from region to region.

In addition, dry stone walling in the United Kingdom varies greatly in practice and technique, largely dependent on the stone peculiar to that region and also the terrain. Different regions have different patterns, different techniques and of course different skill sets. This is echoed in other numerous trades. Again the trade of the cooper could relate to a 'white cooper' who primarily made vessels for the dairy industry, buckets and pails, butter churns and the like, the 'dry cooper' who made non water tight dry goods barrels for all manner of industries, to hold everything from grain and flour, to nails, screws, bolts and hardware and of course the 'wet cooper' who produced water tight vessels, mainly barrels, of many sizes from a brandy flask to a winery vat, tankards and barrels too numerous to list, for beer, wine and spirits.

Whilst some may contend that trades such as the ones mentioned above are no longer relevant, in the Australian context, they have never been more important, as they are uniquely Australian and perilously close to being lost forever.

An Education facility to preserve these often uniquely Australian variations of trades and crafts is an absolute necessity. There is no question of its necessity.

Loss of trade and craft skills in Australia is a loss of indigenous skill sets, no different to the loss of a subspecies of mammal and certainly not protected, conserved or safeguarded by a book or video.

2. International Experience and Discovery

PART 1

The Fellow visited West Dean College, and Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, West Sussex, England.

West Dean College is a magnificent flint building set on 6,400 acres in the South Downs of West Sussex. With origins dating to the era of the Domesday Book and ownership by members of the nobility, The West Dean Estate and manor house was acquired by the wealthy James family in 1891, who were responsible for various changes to the house and gardens.

Edward James, the heir to the James family fortune, was a well-known patron and supporter of the Arts, particularly the surrealists, such as Dali and Magritte, who were known to have stayed for extended periods of time at West Dean House.

It is understood that James was concerned about the future of arts and crafts in England at the commencement of the Second World War and after reading Aldous Huxley's book, *Ends and Means*, was in communication with the author when the seed was planted for the Edward James Foundation.

It was apparently Huxley's advice to 'stick with craftspeople' that had resonated with James. Some decades later in 1964, the Edward James Foundation was created, his vision being an institution that would support arts and crafts for centuries to come. Edward James stated:

I want to establish an educational foundation where creative talents can be discovered and developed, and where one can spread culture through the

teaching of crafts and the preservation of knowledge that might otherwise be destroyed or forgotten.

In 1971 West Dean College opened with a strong focus on education in Conservation and the Applied and Visual Arts.



Photo 1 - Gates of WDC

What is immediately apparent when first entering the gates of West Dean College, then approaching the West Dean College building is the grandeur of the structure, one of the largest flint buildings in England. Notwithstanding its scale, arriving at West Dean House gave the Fellow a sense of inclusiveness and an impressive feeling that this was indeed a special and unique place of learning. The facade of the building and the gardens and grounds, both meticulous in their upkeep no doubt accentuating this sense.



Photo 2 - WDC building front



Photo 3 - WDC building side

Although the Fellow did not view the entirety of the West Dean House, it is apparent that a good proportion of the building is retained in its original state and is utilised by the College for a variety of events, meetings and conferences. Added to this are 58 bedrooms providing a considerable range of accommodation.



Photo 4 - WDC entrance Hall



Photo 5 - WDC Hall

The Fellow was given a comprehensive tour of the teaching facility -class rooms and workshops by Mr. Norbert Gutowski, Program Tutor for the Conservation & Restoration of Furniture and Related Objects.

Mr. Gutowski, a 20-year veteran of the College, explained in great detail about the considered approach that had been taken by architects and designers when converting that portion of the building from a manor house and outbuildings, to a teaching facility.



Photo 6 - Multi Purpose teaching room

What was evident from inspection of the first-class room, a multipurpose room, was how well appointed the space was. This average sized room was well catered for with abundant natural lighting and numerous banks of fluorescent lights. 'Track' style 240v power cords clipped to the walls which could be located at and desk/ bench in any location in the room, numerous desks, water and sink, black and white boards, built in benches along all walls and a hard-wired data projector. From this point, viewing of the entirety of the facility was simplified by the fact that most if not all the classroom spaces were interconnected or adjoined via shared corridors or storerooms. This provided a 'flow' throughout the premises where a no stage did it feel as if any of the spaces were poorly located or thought-out, as perhaps a re-purposed building might be interpreted.



Photo 7 - General purpose woodworking room

Specific medium workshops were again fitted out in accordance with not only Health & Safety considerations, but also plentiful hand tools, workbenches and spaces, machinery and associated equipment. These were inclusive of various metallurgy workshops, woodworking conservation, stone and ceramics / pottery, visual arts, paper conservation / book binding and musical instrument making.



Photo 8 - Stone Workshop

Interestingly, small rooms which may have served as ante rooms, bathrooms or walk in robes in their original state, were not remodeled or engulfed by the larger rooms during the conversion. These small rooms now serve purpose as storage rooms, and all manner of job specific uses, a size for which they are ideal.



Photo 9 - Metallurgy ante room

Situated on the ground floor and accessed via the central dining courtyard is the 'Craft Shop.' This student and staff only store provides onsite artists supplies of virtually all every kind needed for both full time and short course students. An invaluable asset to the College which saves valuable time and money for students.



Photo 10 - Craft supply shop

The West Dean College facility/building is clearly not the sole reason for its outstanding reputation. The Faculty, consisting of both full time, part time and guest instructors is renowned globally. Equally, West Dean College offers a range of education and courses which are recognised by industry and peers as the best of their kind in the world. For example, Diplomas, Post Graduate Diplomas and Masters in Conservation in Metalwork are known as the only examples of their kind worldwide.



Photo 11 & 12 Paper Conservation workshop

The same can be said of education in paper conservation in the field of Books and Libraries. Indeed, the Fellow met with fellow ISSI Fellowship recipient Bronwen Glover, who is currently undertaking studies for a Masters in Paper Conservation. Ms. Glover is employed by the Library of NSW; however West Dean College is the only facility in which she can attain these valuable skills and accreditation.

It is interesting to note that West Dean College did not commence operation in the capacity it operates in today. In its infancy the College offered small craft-based classes and tradition-based education. Throughout its 47 years West Dean College slowly progressed in terms of the accredited courses it offered to the point where today it offers accreditation to the level of master's degrees in various subjects, all validated by the University of Sussex.

As the Fellow toured the facility with Mr. Gutowski, he was continuously astounded with the vast array of precious items in the various classrooms, either there for restoration, preservation or study.



Photo 13 Woodworking Conservation workshop

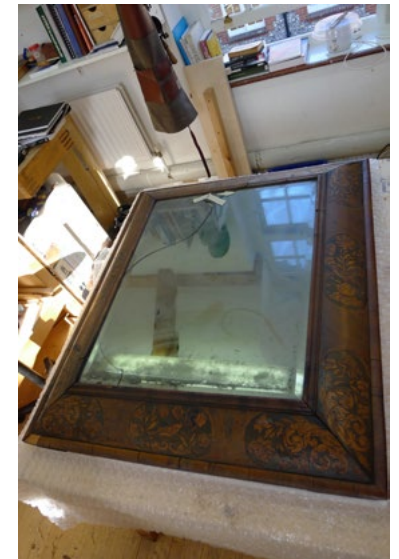


Photo 14 & 15 Petworth Park Looking Glass

A priceless 17th century 'Looking Glass' from Petworth Park in the Furniture Conservation classroom for restoration, repair and conservation, an early 1500's wrought iron and timber Tower Clock in the Horology faculty for restoration, Roman edged tools from British Museums sent for conservation in the Metalwork workshop.

It is evident that West Dean College has a unique position in the English Education System and its reputation in the field of conservation is so well regarded that both National Museums and private collectors alike see it as the benchmark facility of its kind. It was explained to the Fellow that the College is acknowledged as leaders in the field of metal conservation and preservation, resulting in historically important and valuable artefacts, unearthed in archaeological excavations, often being sent to the college for such work.



Photo 16 - Horology workshop



Photo 17 - 15th century tower clock for restoration

The Fellow met with various members of the West Dean Faculty during lunch in the dining room. A large open plan dining hall, opening out on the central courtyard and annexed by a 'reservation only' smaller dining room. As was stressed to the Fellow by several members of the faculty, communal dining, particularly during lunch is an important part of the ethos of the college. Lunches are included in all tuition fees, whether full time, part time or day classes. Dining together in this sense being seen as an important part of the fabric of the college and allowing students to bond and form better relationships with fellow students and tutors. The range of fair available during meal times was equally impressive, with both hot and cold meals, some self-served others served by kitchen staff, fresh fruit, tea and coffee and prepackaged drinks also.

At the conclusion of the tour of the facility with Mr. Gutowski, the Fellow met briefly with the Director of Education, Francine Norris. Ms. Norris gave valuable insight into the importance of preservation of skills in Great Britain and the focus of the West Dean College's vision and direction for the future, a vision that looks towards the next century, not just a few years in to the future or the present situation.

The West Dean Estate is also renowned for the West Dean Gardens, situated only a few hundred metres from the main house.



Photo 18 - West Dean Gardens

West Dean Gardens, although administered under the Edward James Foundation is a separate entity to the College. Open to the General Public for a small fee, West Dean Gardens are set on an astounding 90 acres consisting of the Garden Entrance, Walled Gardens, the Pleasure Gardens and St Roche's Arboretum. Gardens have been situated in that area since 1622, however the walled gardens are period to the house and contain some 28 Victorian era Cast Iron Greenhouses and numerous meticulously maintained garden beds.



Photo 19 - Green houses



Photo 20 - Green houses

The Garden complex also houses a Cafe and small gift shop. Impressively, the Gardens provide a good deal of the fruit, vegetables and herbs for both their own cafe and the kitchen of the College. Admission ticket to the gardens also allows for several garden walks, both short and considerable, some of which take in St Roche's Arboretum, parklands and surrounds of the college too.



Photo 21 - Apple greenhouse showing heirloom apple varieties

Just as West Dean College supports the preservations of traditional crafts and skills West Dean Garden is renowned for its collection of heirloom varieties of fruit, once prevalent in its own garden but also across the British Isles. Over 100 varieties of Apples (from the known 1,500 of the 1880's) and 45 varieties of pears alone are grown in the gardens, preserving these lesser known species for generations to come, consistent with the West Dean ethos of preservation and education.



Photo 22 - Espalied fruit trees

On the edge of the West Dean estate sits the Weald and Downland Living Museum.

Set on 40 acres of the West Dean estate and gifted by the Edward James Foundation, Weald and Downland is a unique facility dedicated to the preservation of vernacular buildings of the South East of England (The Weald and Downlands).



Photo 23 - Littlehampton Granary, 1731 - Weald & Downland Museum



Photo 24 - Pendean farmhouse, 1609 - Weald & Downland Museum

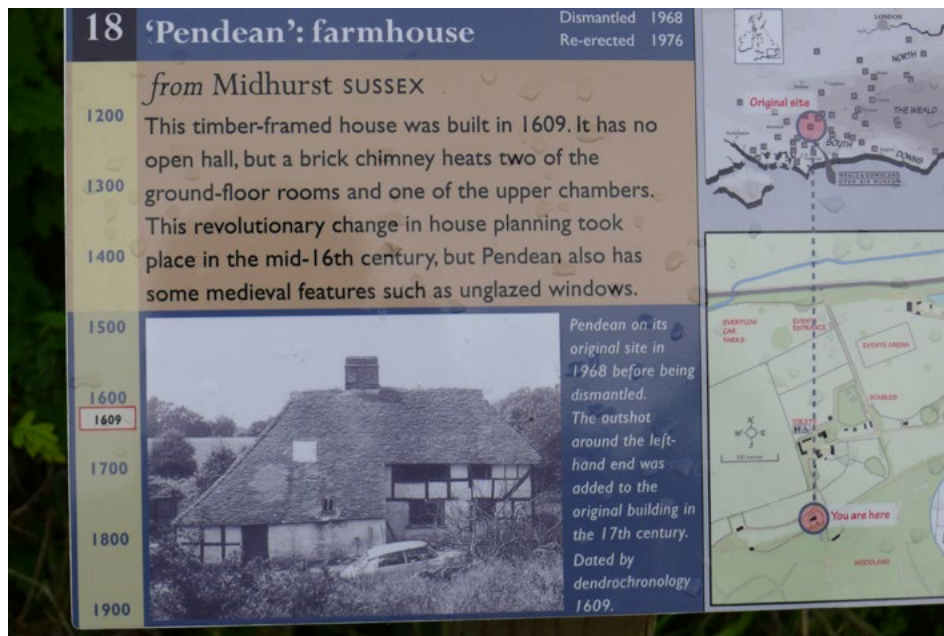


Photo 25 - Pendean farmhouse information board.

The Museum has over 50 examples of period buildings dating back to the 1300's which have been painstakingly removed from their places of origin (most often under threat of destruction due to urban expansion) and reassembled at the museum. The Museum also runs an impressive list of classes in traditional trades and crafts, inclusive of Masters Level accreditation in Building Conservation, validated by the University of York.



Photo 26, 27 & 28 - Weald & Downland Autumn Countryside Show

At the time of the Fellows visit, Weald and Downland Museum was in preparation for and held one of the largest events of its calendar, The Autumn Countryside Show, so the Fellow was unable to speak at length with Head Curator Julian Bell. However, a tour of the extensive grounds of the Museum and the list of educational opportunities available throughout the year, illustrate that it holds an important place in the preservation of traditional skills within Great Britain, particularly with respect to building and construction trades and skills.

PART 2

The Fellow attended at the home and workshop of respected English Windsor Chair maker and tutor, James Mursell, in West Chillington, West Sussex. Mursell is renowned in England as one of the country's most prolific practitioners in the art of making traditional English style Windsor chairs.



Photo 29 - James Mursell's Workshop

The Fellow had secured a position on a course to build an English Double Bow Windsor Armchair over 5 days, with another 5 chair making students. As with the Fellows own chair making classes, students begin with some parts of the chair pre-prepared, such as the turned legs and other material in its raw state, such as Ash for the spindles and steam bent parts and Tulipwood or Poplar for the seat. The Fellow was particularly interested in the methods Mursell was to employ to enable a chair of that size to be completed by novice students in 5 days whereas in his own classes (and those of comparable US makers) a chair of that size and complexity required 6-7 days tuition.



Photo 30 - Sample chair being constructed in class.

The course commenced with preparing the 15 spindles from rough sawn Ash blanks. These blanks were initially 'chucked' into a large drill and driven through a mechanical dowel cutter, turning them from square to a uniform round shape. These round spindles were then hand planed to a slight taper at one end. Students then moved to the dedicated Steam Bending Room where square section long lengths of Ash had been placed into a steam box and steamed for approximately 40 mins. On removal these steamed lengths of Ash were immediately placed into a bending form and 'winched' around the form with a bending strap attached to a hand wound boat winch. On being bent they were removed from the bench and set aside in a drying box to dry and set in shape.



Photo 31 - Mursell's Steam bending room

Mursell employed the use of a pedestal bench drill to drill both the initial mortises for the legs and arms in the seat blank and subsequently a tapering cutter to taper the leg mortises to a 12° angle. Seats were then roughly hollowed with a long-handled adze before the shape refined with a 'Travisher' (of Mursell's own construction and design), spokeshaves, drawknives and rasps. Noted was the shallow depth of the seat carving in comparison to the Fellows own chairs, made in the U.S. style.

Fitting of the stretchers between the legs (the structural members connecting the legs to one another to negate them splaying and breaking) was also a much-simplified affair compared to other techniques taught to the Fellow in the U.S. and subsequently practised. In Mursell's class a drill was simply lined up between the two legs sought to be joined, with another student assisting by 'sighting' the drill for the student drilling. This process, like many other techniques practised throughout the course, took considerably less time and employed electrical tools as opposed to conventional hand tools.



Photo 32 - The Fellows completed chair, ready for disassembly and shipping back to Australia.

Necessity to transport the Fellow's finished Windsor Chair back to Australia, meant that the chair was finished with exception to the final gluing and assembly of all the finished components. The finished chair completed in the allocated five days was a pleasing and good example of a Double Bow chair of the English style. Discussions with James Mursell revealed some interesting traits which the Fellow believes are co-incidentally similar in Mr. Mursell's approach to his teaching and the manner in which English Windsor Chairs were made from the 1880's onwards. James Mursell received tuition from both Jack Hill, a noted craft teacher and Author on Traditional English Craft and American chair maker, Mike Dunbar.

Dunbar, who is now retired, is well known for his part in the revival of interest in making Windsor Chairs in the United States as well as the large number of students in his classes, sometimes as many as 20 or more. Dunbar's classes also utilised mechanically turned legs and components, turned on a 'copy lathe' as opposed to the maker turning them individually by hand. Mr. Mursell recalls Dunbar impressing upon his students that it had to be economically viable to teach students and that any passion for making or the love of the form itself was secondary.

James Mursell was previously an orchardist with a reasonably sized farm on the edge of the West Chilington township in West Sussex. Taking an initial class with Jack Hill he created a reasonable, agricultural style Windsor Chair. Drawn to the simplicity of the form and inspired by an article in Fine Woodworking Magazine on Nancy Goynes' book on American Windsor Chairs, Mr. Mursell consequently took the class with Mike Dunbar, recalling afterwards, "I can do this." He continued to make chairs and eventually took the place of Jack Hill on his retirement, teaching Windsor Chair making at West Dean College for several years. Mr. Mursell delights in creating and designing new versions of the form but was quick to point out that teaching was considerably more profitable than attempting to purely make and sell chairs for a living. He quite accurately added, that it was much easier to sell tuition in making the chair than a chair itself.

Mr. Mursell is one of less than a handful of makers in the UK who teaches traditional workshop made Windsor Chair making (as opposed to 'greenwood' style stick type chairs). His workshop is well appointed, spacious and well lit. His curriculum is inclusive for all skill levels, beautifully catered for and thoroughly enjoyable. Largely the Fellow's own chair making classes and that of Mr. Mursell's paralleled each other in most cases, however the latter favoured mechanisation of more techniques.

During the Fellow's time at Mursell's workshop, the editor, Mr. Derek Jones of Furniture and Cabinet Making magazine, a respected industry publication in both the UK and abroad attended met with the Fellow during the class and interviewed him regarding his fellowship. The Fellow subsequently wrote a short article for the magazine which was published in the January 2017 edition, a photograph of the Fellow was placed on the cover.



Photo 33 - Cover photo of January 2017 Furniture & Cabinet Making Magazine.

The Fellow travelled to the town of High Wycombe, arguably the best-known area of Windsor chair making in England. High Wycombe in the 19th century had one of the highest concentrations of Windsor Chair making workshops and makers in the country.

The High Wycombe 1897 Ordnance Survey Map lists no fewer than 66 Chairmakers and workshops for the township, at a time when it is agreed small chair making workshops were steadily in decline. The 'Windsor Chair' derived its name simply from the township of Windsor, where most of the finished chairs of that type were sent for further distribution throughout Great Britain. A Windsor Chair is defined by a style of chair where all parts terminate at the seat, irrespective of design or style. It is largely agreed they have been made since the 1600's, originally by Wheelwrights, who share the same tools.

The English Windsor Chair making workshop of the 18th and 19th century was however, quite different from that of today's makers, who will make an entire chair individually. More often than not tradesmen in these early workshops specialised in singular tasks, such the 'bottomer' who shaped seats with the Adze and other edged tools, the 'framer' who assembled parts into chairs and the 'finisher' who stained and applied the final finish, generally speaking in the form paint, shellac or varnish. Turned components were the domain of the 'bodger,' a term now wrongfully associated with someone who is lacking in any skill.

The Bodger (ironically the Bodgers referred to themselves as 'turners', the origin of the term bodger in relation to them is unknown) of the 18th, 19th and early 20th century however was a skillful greenwood craftsman who worked in the coppiced Beech forests harvesting Beech timber, splitting and rough shaping it, before turning it into Windsor chair legs and other turned components, which would then be sent off to the chair making workshops of the local towns.



Photo 34- High Wycombe Museum

On visiting the High Wycombe Museum, the Fellow had opportunity to view first hand a reasonable collection of Windsor's of various styles, forms and sizes.



Photo 35 - John Pitt Chair - c. 1740

Most notably was a very early Painted and decoratively adorned example made by John Pitt, circa 1740. John Pitt, Wheelwright and Chair Maker of Slough, is to date the earliest documented maker of Windsor chairs known and the four known examples of his work, the earliest chairs attributed to both a maker and region in existence.

This early chair finished with black paint and adorned with gilt paint decoration in the form of floral bursts and the City of Bath coat of arms, presented an incredible opportunity for the Fellow to study a rare and early example of the form. Most notable was the level of detail, the fineness of components compared to more

contemporary English Windsor's and the fact that leg tenons protruded through the top of the seat and were wedged in place. This practice in England was later to cease in favour of 'stopped' mortises in the underside of the seat, which although quicker to produce, offered inferior strength and quality.





Photo 36 37 & 38 - Pitt Chair Joinery and painting detail.

The 'Pitt' chair was purchased from a private English Collection for the Museum with the assistance of three charitable/philanthropic groups at a considerable expense, it is arguably one of the most historically valuable Windsor chairs in existence.

It was distressing for the Fellow to observe that the conditions the chair was kept in were less than suitable or secure. The chair is situated at floor level on a slightly raised melamine platform, in a pigeon hole like opening. This opening was barely wide enough to contain the chair and so shallow in depth that the crest rail was hard against the wall and the front cabriole legs were barely contacting the front edge of the platform.

Whilst the Fellow was carefully photographing and documenting the chair, a young girl, under the age of 5 walked into the room carrying an ice-cream and ran her hands across the front of the seat as she passed by.



Photo 39 - Pitt Chair - in its ill-fitting cubicle.

On arrival in London the Fellow attended the Geoffrey Museum in Shoreditch after research had revealed the Museum housed the Bernard D Cotton collection of approximately 400 English made chairs.



Photo 40 - The Geoffrey Museum

This collection being the basis of his renowned book, *The English Regional Chair*. It was the Fellow's intention to view some of the rarer forms of English Windsor Chairs, aside from the well documented Buckinghamshire chairs.

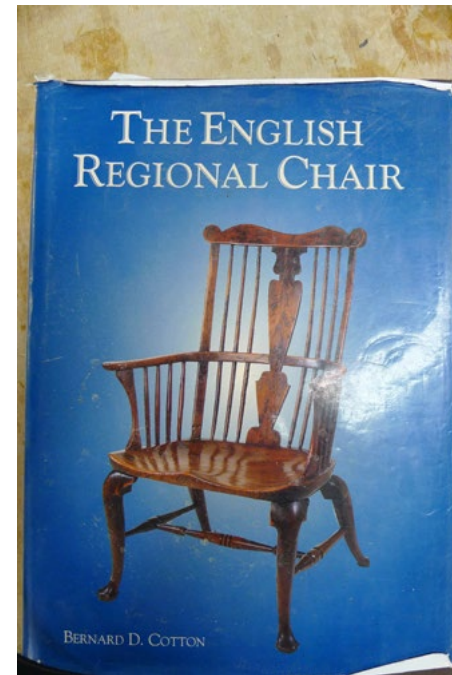


Photo 41 - The English Regional Chair, Bernard D. Cotton.

Despite enquiring and confirming that the collection was present at the Museum a week prior to arrival, the Fellow was informed on arrival that they were not available for viewing as they were stacked “up to four high” in the attic of the Museum. The Fellow was informed that any chairs from the Cotton Collection wishing to be viewed would need to be specifically identified and to return in two weeks' time. Suffice to say this was not possible on the Fellow's timeline for travel.



Photo 42 - Lincolnshire Double Bow Chair, Victoria and Albert Museum

The Fellow attended the Furniture Hall of the Victoria and Albert Museum in Knightsbridge, where one excellent example of a Lincolnshire Double Bow Windsor Chair, Circa 1850, was on display. What was immediately noticeable, despite the excellent craftsmanship was the comparatively exaggerated size of the chairs components compared to the Pitt chair of High Wycombe Museum. Secondly the joinery of the legs was a stopped or shallow mortise and tenon as opposed to the through, wedged mortise and tenon of the Pitt chair, as previously mentioned.



Photo 43 - Thonet Bentwood Chair, Victoria and Albert Museum

Next to the Lincolnshire Windsor Chair were two fine examples of a Thonet Bentwood chairs. A short précis next to these chairs stated that Thonet was granted his first Patent to bend timber in 1842 followed by a second non-renewable 13-year patent in 1856. So successful was the manufacturing techniques and the wood bending technology he patented, that the annual production rate of 10,000 chairs in the initial years of manufacturing had grown to 1,810,000 units per annum by 1913. This information provided a turning point in the Fellows questions relating to the demonstrable change in the quality of consistency of English Windsor Chair joinery over a hundred-year time span.

It is the Fellows hypothesis that the quality of craftsmanship and joinery techniques suffered in favour of quicker or more timely procedures and mechanisation which allowed the chair making factories and businesses to increase production in answer to the mass saturation of the market from European Bentwood Chairs. In essence quantity over quality. Evidence of just how far reaching this cheap, mass produced chair was is evident by the fact it was available for purchase in Hobart Tasmania in 1885, pretty much on the opposite side of the globe, for a mere 8 Shillings.¹

3. Considerations and Recommendations

Skill Enhancement Area-

1. Learning outcomes with respect to a sustainable and viable education precinct offering traditional trade and craft-based learning opportunities with an ability to expand in the future transition towards accredited and recognised certification in rare and seldom practised trades.
2. Recognised teaching opportunities to offer Traditional Windsor Chair making classes to a broader cross section of the community through offering more achievable outcomes by means of variance to current teaching methodology.

The recommendations from the Fellows studies in England are clear. Australia is in desperate need of an institution solely focused on the restoration of Traditional Trades skills and education. The Fellow and his wife created a proposal and business plan for a school of this kind.

The Fellow has met with the Local Member of Parliament, Mary Anne Thomas, representatives of Regional Development Victoria, Councilors and officers from Macedon Ranges Shire Council and members of the Kyneton community, with respect to the business plan which was earmarked for the recently vacated Kyneton Primary School. Unfortunately for a number of mitigating factors it was determined by Council, and some members of the community that the business plan would not go ahead at the old Kyneton Primary School site.

The Fellow discussed the business plan with a private consortium who recently purchased the Old Beechworth Gaol site. Again, due to difficulties with the site and other determining factors it was decided that the business plan was not a

good fit for that site. Further discussions are now being had with stakeholders and the Ballarat City Council regarding the implementation of the business plan in that city.

Coinciding with this connection the Fellow is also in the initial discussion stages of a working party dedicated to writing, preparing and producing curriculum relating to the traditional trades practised regularly at Sovereign Hill Living Museum.

It is the Fellows earnest hope that with industry support from stakeholders such as Sovereign Hill and with careful and dedicated attention to the process, that there will be a shift in the attitude from State and Federal Government towards supporting a facility dedicated to trade preservation.

The Fellow has developed a new Windsor Chair design, based strongly on the small High Wycombe style of Windsor Chair, so prevalent in the South of England and seen by the Fellow in almost every town and village he visited during his Fellowship.

The Fellow will offer this new design of chair as a new class, over a shorter period of 5 days (as opposed to the usual six or seven day class) with similar learning outcomes to his existing class but offering a range of new techniques and more achievable student targets as identified during his time with English Windsor Chair maker, James Mursell. This new class in essence will be more accessible, due to lower costs, less time spent in class and more achievable learning outcomes. The first of these classes will be held in August 2019.

4. Knowledge Transfer, Application and Dissemination.

The Fellow has presented his Fellowship findings by means of an evening presentation to the members of the Artisans Guild of Australia during one of their regular monthly meetings, at Ravenswood Mansion in Ivanhoe.

The Fellow has presented the aims of his Fellowship to the ISSI board members at the ISSI Carlton Office.

The Fellow has written a short article, 'Windsor Journeyman' regarding his Fellowship and the reasoning behind it, for Great Britain's Furniture & Cabinet Makers Magazine, which was published in the January 2017 edition alongside a front cover of the magazine featuring the Fellow.

The Fellow will directly impart the learning outcomes gained from his time learning specific English chair making skills, simply by sharing those skills and techniques with chairmaking students during classes held in the Fellows Kyneton Workshop.

The Fellow has developed a newly designed chair incorporating aspects of an English style Windsor Chair. This chair design will be the focus of a unique Windsor Chair Making Class to be taught at Sovereign Hill living museum. The first class teaching this new adaptation of a traditional English style Windsor Chair will be held in the Museum grounds in August 2019.

It is hopeful that in the future there will be an opportunity for the Fellows findings regarding the operational mechanics of West Dean College to be continuously utilised in some form in a Traditional Trade School such as the model proposed for CRAFT.

To this end the Fellow is now working with various industry stakeholders in the Ballarat City region to form a working party who will create a new business plan for that city to build a CRAFT type education facility, with a direct focus on providing recognised education in a wide variety of traditional trade and craft skills across a range of mediums. This work is ongoing.

5. References

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» SWOT Analysis. Weaknesses - page 11, point 3.

» Page 13, part 3, paragraph 3.

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