

FRED^K PARKER & SONS'
COLLECTION
of
ANTIQUÉ CHAIRS

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A COLLECTION *of*
ANTIQUÉ CHAIRS





A William and Mary walnut chair covered in original Cordovan leather. Toes to front legs (missing) would have been the Spanish type. This model has been in the possession of Frederick Parker and Sons, Ltd., for twenty-five years.

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Introducing Ourselves

FOR more than forty years the firm of Frederick Parker & Sons, Ltd., of London, has specialised in fine reproductions of seventeenth and eighteenth century chairs.

¶ It has always been our endeavour to maintain our reproductions at the standard of fine craftsmanship and artistic beauty achieved by the great designer-craftsmen of the historic periods.

¶ In order that we might have our seventeenth and eighteenth century models actually before us, and thereby be enabled to reproduce every detail with fidelity, Frederick Parker & Sons, Ltd., have devoted long years to collecting fine antique chairs, rare and intensely interesting in themselves, to serve as originals for our own work.

¶ Our collection now numbers more than 350 chairs. Among these there is not one without its own peculiar interest ; and many are unique.

¶ It is the purpose of this brochure to introduce one or two examples of these chairs to lovers of period furniture. The article which follows was first published in the issue of *The Cabinet-Maker* dated November 2nd, 1929, and is now

reprinted by courtesy of the Editor of that journal, to whom we are indebted for permission to republish.

¶ All who are interested in period furniture are cordially invited to visit our Showrooms in Newman Street, London, or our Workshops at High Wycombe, where many other examples of these chairs are on view.

Frederick Parker & Sons, Ltd.,
20, Newman Street,
Oxford Street,
London, W. 1
&
High Wycombe,
Bucks.



*One of a pair of Queen Anne walnut chairs. Has the ogee back,
foot and balloon shaped seat.*

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Ribbon and acanthus motifs are seen in the open back of this Chippendale model. The toes are unusual and show leaf carving growing from below upwards.

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A COLLECTION OF ANTIQUE CHAIRS

HOWEVER vigorously the exponents of modern art press the claims of this generation in the design of furniture fitted specially for the requirements of to-day, there will always be a need for study of the methods of those who may be called the "old masters" of furniture making, and collectors will continue to search for and possess the best models by these eminent cabinet makers of the past. The competition which exists for fine old chairs is to be found in perhaps greatest intensity among private collectors with long purses, who either attend the auctions of St. James's themselves or have an understanding with dealers to attend and buy for them. In consequence of this, very many of the most beautiful examples of English chairmaking are, as far as the furniture trade is concerned, hidden away in places where they can neither be seen nor studied. It is, of course, true that from time to time loan collections come about, and private collectors exhibit their possessions to the public. Only a very small proportion of chairs from private houses, however, are thus made available for inspection, and then only for a limited time. The public museums we have, and their collections are perhaps even more worthy of study than the trade realises. From time to time they record very interesting new acquisitions, but, as is well known, their funds are comparatively slender and they cannot stand competition with the wealthy private connoisseur.

Now the chair-making industry which centres in High Wycombe has not in the past fully realised the great



Another Chippendale style old model. It has Gothic details in the back, and the French toes, a touch of Rococo feeling being observed in the carving of knees.

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advantage of collecting and retaining for study exceptional examples of its most interesting craft. It has been content to go on generation after generation working on traditional lines—almost, as it were, by rule of thumb—responding instinctively to the demands of fashion, and apparently oblivious to the advantage of retaining the masterpieces of its ancient art. It has been engaged in business, in meeting the needs of its markets, in doing its job honestly and well and letting it go at that. But within recent years a belief has grown up that the fine old chairs of the past should not entirely be given up for the enrichment of the collections of private individuals, and as appreciation of first-class craftsmanship has grown, so a demand for close reproductions of rare models has extended. But it is one thing to realise the trade value of beautiful old chairs, quite another to obtain them to copy from, and those who know the art of reproduction in its highest sense, know also that close copies cannot be made from drawings. The model must be in the workshop.

Notwithstanding the general apathy towards the advantage of retaining possession of fine old models in High Wycombe, there have been certain prominent individuals in the industry there who have had the imagination to see the importance of forming a collection of beautiful old chairs to be an inspiration to the trade. Among them was the late Mr. Frederick Parker, founder of the firm of Frederick Parker and Sons, Ltd., who, about forty-four years ago commenced the collection of old chairs which to-day is recognised as one of the finest in the trade. This collection, from which, by courtesy of the firm, we are able to reproduce photographs in these pages, has been brought about gradually. The models are not only the result of painstaking search, but



Definitely French in influence this type shows Rococo detail and is consequently a little more flamboyant than the other Chippendale models.

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A very beautiful old settee of Hepplewhite type, originally covered in brocade. It is in mahogany, the more common material for this style of furniture being beech, painted. Note the front, which is in three Serpentine waves in plan. The back sweep of legs is an exceptional feature.

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This example of a Hepplewhite chair, under Adam influence, has an upholstered shield-shaped back and seat with moulded front and fluted legs.

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have been selected because they are really fine representative period pieces, sometimes of unique design. They have individual character and many of them are obviously done by master craftsmen. The firm use these models as the basis of their business in making close reproductions, and it should be emphasised here that a reproduction is not merely a copy of the general form and design of structure and ornament. These can be recognised at a glance and can be copied without particular difficulty. A first-class reproduction should have more than these elements. It should have individual touch and refinement of feeling in the execution of the work. It should show appreciation for what we may call the modelling of the chair, and the copy should show that subtle variety in surface treatment, whether carved or plain, which cannot be observed without close inspection of the original. In short, it should be a work of art.

The value of these old chairs to a firm of expert craftsmen specialising in fine reproductions is obvious, but one may also reflect upon the stimulation to greater effort on the part of the chair-making industry as a whole, which is given by such a collection being retained in the trade. It sets a high standard of artistic value in High Wycombe production and suggests the great advantage of a High Wycombe museum of old examples if such could be brought about. Recognition of this was made evident last year when a chronological collection was shown in the Town Hall illustrating the gradual development of the Wycombe chair. Much more, of course, might be accomplished, and it is quite clear that High Wycombe is now quite alive to the advantage of never allowing a fine model to slip through its hands if there be any possibility of retaining it for study.



Mahogany Serpentine fronted Hepplewhite type chair, with completely stuffed seat. Open back may be compared with the upholstered example on page 14.

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There will always be fashions in furniture, however, and it by no means follows that a valuable chair of uncommon characteristics will at once, as it were, pay for itself by orders for reproduction. The present desire for walnut of the periods of William and Mary and Queen Anne is a comparatively recent fashion, and doubtless many a good old example dating from the beginning of the eighteenth century stood for generations unregarded before its turn came to appear in the limelight. It may be that even Victorian furniture will one day be appreciated and that old models of sixty or seventy years ago will be searched for to copy.

Photographs of two old chairs are shown which illustrate the William and Mary and Queen Anne periods and readers will easily observe the details which indicate the styles. The William and Mary chair has the old decorated leather seat and back, and attention may be called to the scroll cresting, not frequently seen. The fiddle and vase-shaped splats, of which so many varieties are to be found on chairs dating from about the reign of Queen Anne, were sometimes accompanied by stretcher work between the legs, but later this method gave place to the cabriole legs with shell and scroll carving as seen in the other walnut example shown.

An interesting detailed study may be made by comparing the feet of all the chairs shown in the photographs, the main difference between the various interpretations of the cabriole on the one hand and the straight turned legs of those of later date being easily seen. The cabriole leg is, of course, of great antiquity, but at no period was greater variety in treatment shown than in the first three quarters of the eighteenth century. The scroll form seen in examples of the period of William and Mary



An exceedingly comfortable and gracefully-shaped chair in beech. Originally painted green and gold. It has a sweep back fully upholstered with pads on the arms. In possession of the firm about fifteen years.

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was retained for some time, then came the fetlock finish with hooped foot, and later the spatulated foot, which is to be seen in the photograph of the Queen Anne armchair with upholstered seat and back. Claw and ball and lion paw feet are also used, and the Chippendale school, much later, under French influence, returned to the scroll ending. Points such as these may be usefully studied and are indications of period and style, but in exceptional examples of the chair-maker's craft are always to be found little differences here and there which show individual treatment, small fanciful ideas introduced perhaps from suggestions of the man for whom the chairs were made or from a consciousness on the part of the craftsman that variations in structure or ornament which occurred to him at the bench would be improvements. Period and style are fortunately not cut and dried. It is to the interest of the art of chair-making that styles merge gradually one into another, and undoubtedly some of the most fascinating chairs are those which show indications of change in fashion. Photographs are given of oval-backed upholstered chairs which are so extremely agreeable in appearance and comfortable in use. They were of the Adam and Hepplewhite types and were designed for use in drawing-rooms. French influence is admitted for these fine chairs and the cylindrical legs, fluted and carved, are British interpretations of the refined form used in furniture of the period of Louis XVI. Another type of upholstered chair of about the same period is to be seen in the shield-backed example Hepplewhite specimen. It is in mahogany and has the characteristic fluted seat rail and corner pateræ at the top of the legs which are in this instance square in section. The shield shape with open back is also seen in another high chair, carved with pateræ and showing the sweep shape of the seat rail. During the greater part of the latter end of the eighteenth century fine



Exceptionally large-seated Adam chair, oval back with moulded head and carved bony-suckle motif at crest. Unusual foot to back legs.

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furniture was influenced very considerably by the brothers Adam, the fashionable architects of their day, and many examples are in existence showing how, under the direction of the architect, chair makers responded to the needs of the wealthy public. How much of originality was to be claimed by the architect and how much by the chair maker it is difficult to say, but as the craftsman was working on traditional lines he would be likely only to have his methods modified by the design and would not with absolute accuracy follow the dictates of the drawing board. Hepplewhite's humble effort, according to his *Guide*, was only to "unite elegance with utility, and blend the useful with the agreeable," adding, however, that he has "designedly followed the latest of the most prevailing fashion," this probably referring to the Adam influence. It may, however, not unreasonably be contended, that chair making is much closer to human requirements than cabinet making, for chairs must always be made to accommodate the unalterable proportions of the human frame, whereas cabinets have no such limitations and may be made of whatever scale and structural design the architect pleases.



An uncommon type of bergere chair with saddle seat. Design, of French derivation, has spindles in open back, legs connected by turned stretchers.

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*A beech chair originally painted and decorated. Sheraton type
with cane panel back. Twenty years in possession of the firm.*

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This Sheraton chair in mahogany is an early example of the broad top type subsequently used solid in Regency furniture.

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