Chair

Place of origin: England (Made)

Date: ca.1760 (made)

Artist/Maker: Linnell, William (Maker)
Linnell, John II the younger, born 1792 - died 1882 (Maker)

Materials and Techniques: Frame: Solid mahogany, with mahogany veneers on the back rail and faces of the stiles; beech stretchers.
Upholstery: leather; jute; cotton; horsehair; linen.

Credit Line: On loan from National Museums Liverpool, Lady Lever Art Gallery

Museum number: LOAN:LADYLEVER.1-2012

Gallery location: Furniture, Room 135, The Dr Susan Weber Gallery, case BY8, shelf EXP

Public access description

This carved, veneered and upholstered chair is from a set of four which belong to the Lady Lever Art Gallery. The set appear to have been carved by three different hands, which suggests that they formed part of an even larger original set. A closely comparable suite comprising eighteen chairs, most likely from the same workshop as this chair, is believed to have been manufactured for the Summer Dining Room at Stowe.

The chair, which has been carved from mahogany, has a trellis back consisting of three plied layers. Trellis backed chairs were popular in the period 1760-1800 and their design was often informed by Chinese lattice work.

The upholstery, which comprises a red leather seat cover, stuffed with horsehair, is not original. It was first applied to the chair in 1899, but was subsequently removed and reinstated in the middle of the twentieth century.

Descriptive line

A carved mahogany chair with a serpentine top rail and a trellis back and upholstered padded seat.

Physical description

A carved mahogany chair with a serpentine top rail and a trellis back and an upholstered padded seat. The canted seat is raised on square legs, the rear two gently raking, which are joined by stretchers. The slightly concave back is carved with an open trellis of hexagons with a turned roundel at each point. The bowed and serpentine top rail demonstrates carving with a central shelly lambrequin and leaf sprays at the corners. The back is framed at the sides by stiles, which have a channelled moulding on their front face. The square front legs are carved on the front face with a vertical bead-and-ribbon inside moulded borders. The raked back legs, which kick back at a sharper angle below the side rails, are plain but chamfered on their inside. The back edges of the stiles and the upper back edge of the bottom rail are also chamfered. The legs are joined by H-stretchers, and a slightly higher back stretcher.

The mahogany surfaces have been French-polished with a clear shellac, concealing all evidence of the original finish. The chair is upholstered with a red leather seat covers, which was first fixed to the chair in 1899.

Construction:

The chair (one of a set of four) is made from mahogany, apart from the seat rails which are beech. The back rail has been veneered in mahogany. The carving of the top rail and front legs is solid, but on the faces of the stiles it has been applied as a thin facing. The trellised seat back comprises three layers. The grain runs vertically in the front and back layers and horizontally in the middle. The splat is accommodated in the stiles by the back and middle layers, and in the top and bottom rails by the back layer. The back-frame is tenoned to the stiles, with the splat tenoned to the bottom rail and the stiles and splat tenoned to the top rail. The seat rails are tenoned to the front legs and back stiles, with the front joints originally having been strengthened with open braces, keyed to the rails. A flat mahogany plate is pinned to the back rail over the upholstery. This is a replacement in a paler mahogany and it demonstrates moulding of a slightly different profile to other chairs in the set.

The outer stretchers are joined to the legs by bare-faced tenons, whereas the middle stretcher is joined to the side stretchers by a horizontal tenon and by a separate, v-shaped tongue above, which is exposed on the top face to neaten the appearance of the joint. The middle and right stretchers are replacements; the middle one joins each side stretcher with dovetails which are exposed on the top and stopped on the underside. The seat frame has been strengthened at all four corners with beech blocks, which are screwed to the rails. These blocks replace the open braces at the front corners.

Upholstery:

The chair is upholstered with a red leather seat cover, stuffed with horsehair, which was first fixed to the chair in 1899, but has subsequently been removed and reinstated c.1945-60. (For more details see Lucy Wood, Upholstered Furniture, p.569). Some small holes in the leather have been patched from the back. The upholstery materials (webbing, base cloth, stuffing, cover and top cover) are fixed to the top of the back rail.
Dimensions
Height: 98 cm, Width: 54.9 cm, Depth: 59 cm

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Object history note
Purchased with three comparable chairs and other decorative objects from D.L. Isaacs, 4 July 1899, £210.

A closely comparable suite of furniture comprises eighteen chairs, which in part substantiates the argument that the four chairs are from a larger set. It is believed that the larger 18-piece set came from the Summer Dining Room at Stowe. Although the Stowe suite is plainer in treatment, Lucy Wood believes it to be from the same workshop as this chair.

The chair also is not dissimilar to an armchair with trellis back in the V&A’s collections: 559-1901? The trellis back of the armchair is however formed from a single piece of mahogany as opposed to plied layers. There is no firm evidence to suggest that the armchair came from the same workshop. For other comparable examples see Wood, The Upholstered Furniture in the Lady Lever Gallery, 2 vols (Liverpool, 2008), 2, p.571.

The set of four chairs to which this belongs appear to have been carved by three different hands, which suggests they come from a substantially larger original set. This chair presents the most conspicuous differences from the others, especially with regards to the top rail. The lambrequin is of a different overall shape and much of the decoration (including the c- and s-scrolls, foliate motifs and ribbon moulding) is also worked more delicately. For more variations refer to Lucy Wood, The Upholstered Furniture in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, 2 vols., (Liverpool 2008), p.569.

Historical context note
Loans & exhibitions: Two other chairs from the set of four owned by the Lady Lever Art Gallery were displayed at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 17 March 1992 – 8 August 2000.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1254906/chair-linnell-william/