

INTERESTING ITEMS FROM THE COLLECTION



Image 1: NIM3167 Wicker platform rocker



Image 2: Glass-plate from Auckland Museum online collection



Image 3: Comparison between glass-plate detail and close-up rocking chair arm.

Museums all over the world have artefacts in their collections with murky backgrounds. Sometimes they were donated without clear provenance, or the descendants no longer remembered their importance. Often these artefacts are difficult to display because little is known about them. That is why, when a puzzle piece is found that sheds greater light on an artefact's history it is especially exciting.

There is an old chair in the collection that seems to have entered the Norfolk Island Museum Trust collection at its very inception in the 1980s (image 1). The only information accompanying it was 'Cane chair from an old Island home'. Happily the rocking chair is quite iconic. It is called a Wicker platform rocker complete with metal springs. The platform base stopped the chair creeping forward while it was rocked and was manufactured mainly out of America as early as the 1870s.

The rocking chair is a beautiful example of different weaving techniques for wicker (also referred to as cane or rattan). The distinctive plait decoration running along the arms and back of the chair was what made it recognizable for museum staff searching the Auckland Museum's online collection (image 3). The Auckland Museum holds a collection of glass plates from well-known photographer John Watt Beattie. One photo is captioned 'Mrs Nobbs, Kingston, Norfolk Island. 120. Beattie, Hobart/copyright' (image 2). Sarah Nobbs, granddaughter of mutineer Fletcher Christian and wife of George Hunn Nobbs is shown seated in a (very familiar) seat at the steps of No.10 Quality Row.

Despite the clear designation on the glass-slide that Beattie is the photographer his trip to Norfolk Island was in 1906 which raises questions (Sarah Nobbs passed away in 1899). The probable photographer was Bishop Montgomery who visited the island in 1892, making Sarah about 82 at the time of the photo.

Considering its estimated age, perhaps being more than 120 years old, the little rocking chair is in fair condition. It does show signs of repeated repair attempts indicating it was a well-loved piece of furniture. String, metal wire, screws and nails are all used to reinforce and strengthen the chair, especially the arms.

If you would like to view this lovely piece of Island furniture please feel free to ring 23788 or email us at info@museums.gov.nf to organize a time.



Image 4: Detail of right arm of NIM3167 showing string and screw

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