



The Coronation Chair and Stone of Scone: History, Archaeology and Conservation (Westminster Abbey Occasional Papers)

By Warwick Rodwell

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Constructed in 1297–1300 for King Edward I, the Coronation Chair ranks amongst the most remarkable and precious treasures to have survived from the Middle Ages. It incorporated in its seat a block of sandstone, which the king seized at Scone, following his victory over the Scots in 1296. For centuries, Scottish kings had been inaugurated on this symbolic ‘Stone of Scone’, to which a copious mythology had also become attached. Edward I presented the Chair, as a holy relic, to the Shrine of St Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey, and most English monarchs since the fourteenth century have been crowned in it, the last being HM Queen Elizabeth II, in 1953.

The Chair and the Stone have had eventful histories: in addition to physical alterations, they suffered abuse in the eighteenth century, suffragettes attached a bomb to them in 1914, they were hidden underground during the Second World War, and both were damaged by the gang that sacrilegiously broke into Westminster Abbey and stole the Stone in 1950. It was recovered and restored to the Chair, but since 1996 the Stone has been exhibited on loan in Edinburgh Castle.

Now somewhat battered through age, the Chair was once highly ornate, being embellished with gilding, painting and coloured glass. Yet, despite its profound historical significance, until now it has never been the subject of detailed archaeological recording. Moreover, the remaining fragile decoration was in need of urgent conservation, which was carried out in 2010–12, accompanied by the first holistic study of the Chair and Stone. In 2013 the Chair was redisplayed to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the Coronation of HM The Queen.

The latest investigations have revealed and documented the complex history of the Chair: it has been modified on several occasions, and the Stone has been reshaped and much altered since it left Scone. This volume assembles, for the first time, the complementary evidence derived from history, archaeology and conservation, and presents a factual account of the Coronation Chair and the Stone of Scone, not as separate artefacts, but as the entity that they have been for

seven centuries. Their combined significance to the British Monarchy and State – and to the history and archaeology of the English and Scottish nations – is greater than the sum of their parts.

Also published here for the first time is the second Coronation Chair, made for Queen Mary II in 1689. Finally, accounts are given of the various full-size replica chairs in Britain and Canada, along with a selection of the many models in metal and ceramic which have been made during the last two centuries.

Professor Warwick Rodwell, OBE, is Consultant Archaeologist to Westminster Abbey.

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Editorial Review

Review

"The oldest dated piece of English furniture (1297-1300) made by a known artist (Walter of Durham) to survive has been given the comprehensive study it deserves by Warwick Rodwell, with supplementary chapters on its most recent conservation by Marie Louise Sauerberg and its current display by Ptolemy Dean.' (James Yorke *The Spectator*)

"A warning: this book is very difficult to put down. Skulduggery at dead of night, political contortions, a suffragette attack, scratched initials, the ghost of a plundered loveliness rightly termed "Decorated" ? a deeply scholarly and beautifully illustrated whodunnit." (*Church Times*)

"Perhaps the defining image from the television age's dawn is Princess Elizabeth's crowning in Westminster Abbey on June 2 1953. By then the Coronation Chair was decidedly tatty, but in the middle ages it had glowed with gilding, painting and coloured glass... Now, newly conserved – and thanks to this magisterial book understood – a new history for the chair opens up. Scholarly and fascinating." (Paul Stamper *British Archaeology Review*, 133, November 2013)

"The word 'definitive' is often used casually to suggest the serious intent of a book; only occasionally does a book warrant the correct meaning of being the most authoritative account available. This book, with all its forensic detail, is unquestionably 'definitive'; it achieves this whilst also being excellently written, beautifully illustrated and having a powerful narrative." (John Schofield *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*)

"Warwick Rodwell's book is a worthy - and enjoyable - record of its creation and vicissitudes. Perhaps the time will come when the futile and ignorant political gesture which split Chair from Stone can be reversed. In the meantime this authoritative account is unlikely to be superseded." (Simon Swynfen Jervis *Furniture History*)

It is authoritative, and magnificently illustrated. It is, moreover, like any good detective story, a damned good read, as the authors steer us ably through the archaeological investigations of the Chair and the Stone, interpret the medieval and modern documentation, and dispose of 'mountains of myth'. There can be few national symbols that have been so well served by a publication. (John Clark *The Ricardian*, XXIV (2014))

About the Author

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