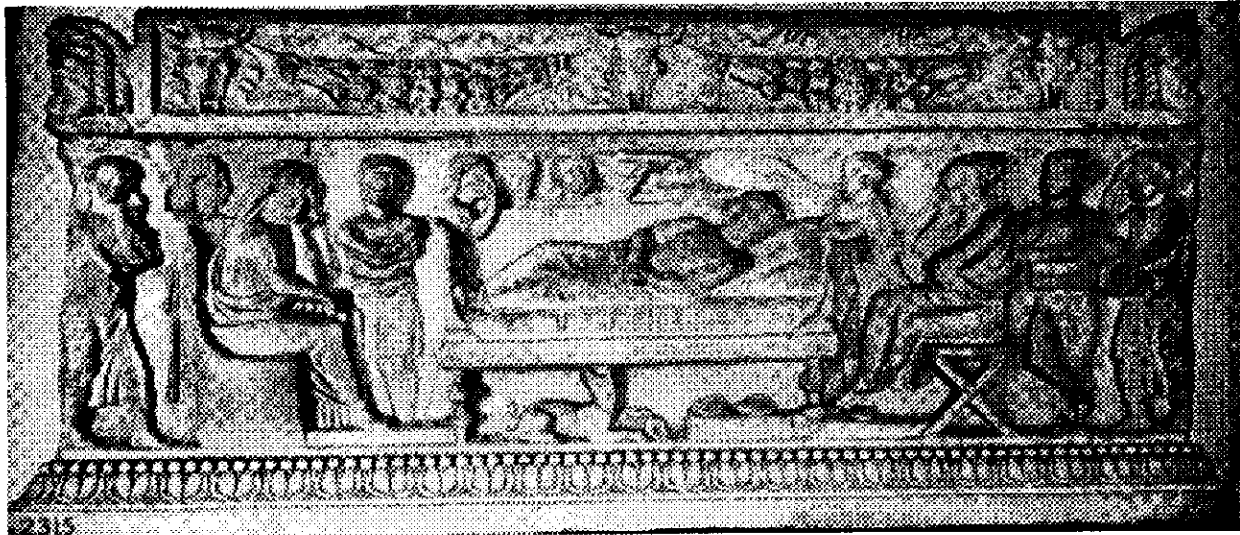


# The Folding Camp Stools of Roman Britain



By Matthew Power  
*Arlof, Count of Aradmor*

Rooting through my files recently, I discovered a single photocopied page which included a photograph (by E.J. Seltman) showing a folding Roman camp chair. I went back to the library, but couldn't find the original source. I do know it's in a chapter, either from a book or journal, titled "Archaeology in the British Isles" on page 178.

Anyhow, what intrigued me about this chair was its purported history. According to the author, it was found with a Roman general's standard near the site of Queen Boadicea's revolt and battle with Petilius's IXth Legion. The author theorizes that one of the victorious Britons "buried his plunder, expecting to recover it a quiet time, but never returned."

Whether or not the personal history is accurate, the chair is certainly period and dates to about

the 3rd Century. Similar chairs have been found in burials at Bartlow (Essex) and Holborough (Kent). This may have been the original form of the curule, described as chair shaped "like the letter X, {which} was so called because it could be folded and carried easily in the curules or chariots"

The Holborough folding stool had a split bar where the knees would rest. Liversidge (see ref.) made the following observations:

*It had a leather seat and the pivot hinges of the framework were covered with bronze caps. Scientific examination showed that the stool was probably burnt on the funeral pyre with its owner, and thin threads of bronze and traces of vegetable matter suggest that it had a seat cushion stuffed with chaff and decorated with bronze ribbon.*

Liversidge continues:

*... in wealthy homes, these stools were often accompanied by bronze tripods with three or four folding legs, decorated in various ways and supported by claw feet or hooves.*

**Roman Sarcophagus**  
(British Museum)  
Source: Liversidge, Joan. *Furniture in Roman Britain*, (London: Alec Tiranti Ltd, 1955).

The tables would then be used to hold the funeral meal, or to support a tray or large bowl.

## The Reconstruction

Like its 20th Century successors, the beauty of this camp stool is in its easy portability and simple design. While I have yet to finish my prototype, I have worked out most of the construction details. If you have smithing skills, you may want to disregard my plans and make up your own.

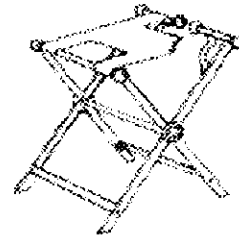
Use 1/8" x 1" flat stock to make the the legs and lower crosspieces. If you have no access to a welder you can assemble most of the frame with simple iron rivets and drawer hardware as shown. The crosspieces will be made from 3/4"

threaded pipe, and the whole thing (except for the ornaments) should then be painted black, and fitted with a gold-fringed cushion.

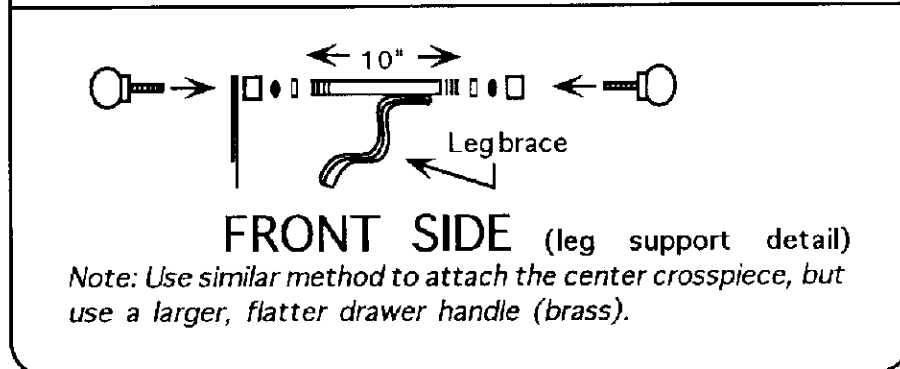
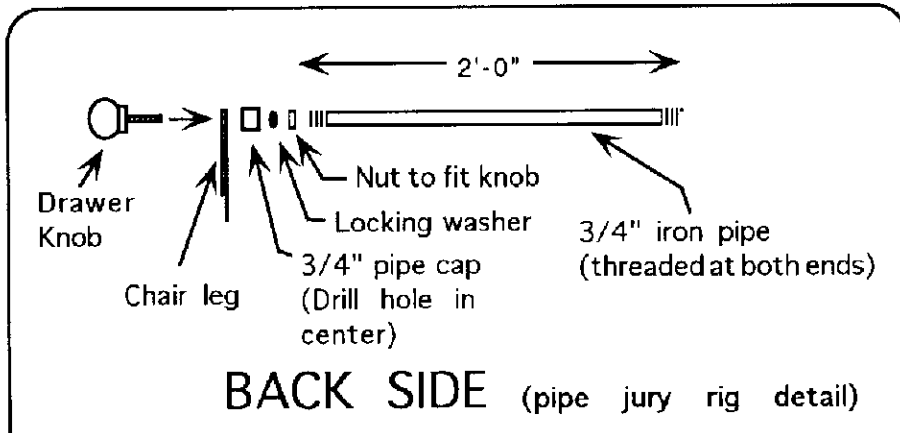
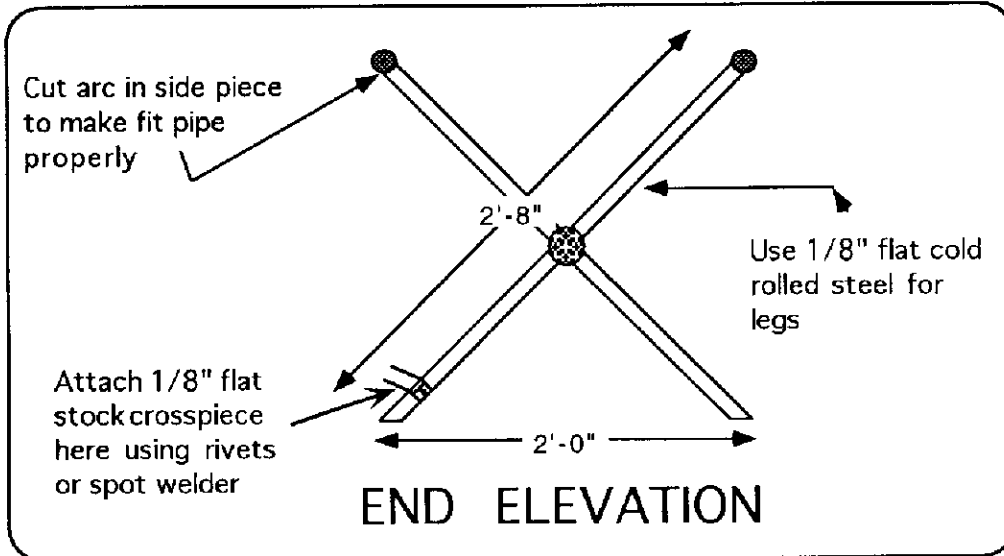
Liversidge, Joan. *Furniture in Roman Britain*, (London: Alec Tiranti Ltd., 1955)

Liversidge, Joan. *Britain in the Roman Empire*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968.), pp. 152-153.

Ward, James. *Historic Ornament*, (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1917), pp. 247-248.



Reconstruction of the Holborough stool, of simple iron with plain bronze fittings. (after Liversidge)



Ruins of a folding chair from the Bartlow Hills, Roman Britain

Source: Liversidge, Joan. *Furniture in Roman Britain*, (London: Alec Tiranti Ltd, 1955).