



Regional Furniture

The Journal of the
Regional Furniture Society



Volume xxvi for the year 2012



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Published in 2012

ISSN 0953-0800

Text set throughout in Monotype Sabon

Produced in the United Kingdom by Oblong Creative Ltd, Wetherby, West Yorkshire

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Editorial

This issue of *Regional Furniture* is a miscellany, but with a distinct emphasis on early furniture and on multidisciplinary research. It begins with a remarkable find, a panelled Scottish chest with possible royal connections. The author, Aidan Harrison, is not an academic but a farmer. He is also self-evidently a scholar, and it is wonderful to know that RFS members like Aidan are willing to put in the thought, the time and the effort to transform their interest into meaningful research.

Nicholas Riall's article on the Cothele cupboard front focusses the light of forensic enquiry on a puzzling object which has been the subject of casual interest and debate for many years. Only recently has that interest become academically credible, with Richard Bebb's discussion of the cupboard in *Welsh Furniture* (2007). Since then a great deal of work has been done, including a complete dismantling and full dendrochronological analysis. Despite this, the cupboard remains an enigma; Nicholas's analysis is both detailed and persuasive but, he acknowledges, not definitive. Alternative explanations will undoubtedly emerge, and Richard Bebb has been working independently on new research which may throw a different light on the matter. We hope he will publish his revised and updated account of the cupboard in due course. Genuine debate backed by serious scholarship is surprisingly rare in our field, in which particular subjects are so often dominated by the views of a single published authority.

The dendrochronology on the Cotehele cupboard front was carried out by Daniel Miles, who has co-authored with Martin Bridge the study of medieval doors presented in this issue. Some may argue that doors are not furniture, but they are made with the same materials and tools as moveable furniture, and often by the same people. The information presented in the article tends to reinforce the findings of their previous enquiry into early medieval chests, concerning the sources of timber available to craftsmen in the late Middle Ages. It also adds considerably to our knowledge of wood-working techniques, because these can now be firmly dated by dendrochronology.

The domed chests studied by Chris Pickvance have been a subject of interest among furniture historians as far back as Fred Roe in 1902. Chris's work draws together the strands of previous scholarship and presents it in a methodical study, augmented once again by dendrochronological analysis. While it is now fairly certain that these chests were imported from northern Europe, the questions of exactly where they were made, and for what purpose, remain. We are not even sure what they were called. A striking feature of the chests is their ironwork; in some cases they are completely armoured, with several locks. This poses an entirely different set of questions. Were the chests made and sold with ironwork applied, or was it commissioned after purchase? Is the ironwork Continental or English? What bearing does the type or style of lock have on the date or provenance of the chest? Even in the seemingly trivial matter of nails there is much to learn.

Finally, John Boram throws further light on a much neglected aspect of English chair-making, that of painted or 'fancy' chairs. These chairs must have been made in their tens of thousands and, despite their light construction, they survive in considerable numbers. He addresses two principal questions — that of 'original' finishes, and that



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of regionality. It is becoming clear that even in the case of these ubiquitous chairs, which at first glance are not even remotely vernacular, expressions of regional identity are still to be found.

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