

INTRODUCTION

Regional Furniture Study Group



A collection of articles written by group members

With Regional Furniture by *Edward Darr*
"This Legitt from Loudon" by *Robert Orr*
"A Cabinet with Treen veneer" by *Richard Peart*
Military Furniture by *David Crockett*
The Salisbury Joiner's Company in the 17th Century by *Victor Chinnery*
Country Chairs by *Bill Crockett*

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INTRODUCTION

The articles included in this anthology are written by members of the Regional Furniture Study Group, and are intended as an illustration of both the range of interest and the quality of research being undertaken by its members. The group has recently been formed to provide a forum for those interested in the systematic study of the vernacular or "common" furniture which was produced on a localised basis for the population at large in Britain during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, whether this furniture was made for the home, or for places of work, entertainment, or for institutions. This field of studies offers the exciting possibility of extending the field of furniture history to include objects made for such diverse places as kitchens, shops, prisons, barracks, ships, factories, public houses, and so on, as well as for the home. Since cultural life tended to differ from area to area, such studies can best be undertaken on a local or regional basis, and thus emphasise the rich differences which often exist in local furniture traditions, whose origins and individual designs have become obscured over time, as a result of dispersal or neglect.

Within this field of furniture studies, the possibilities for "field" research are considerable, and form an important area of study. Such research might, for example, take the form of compiling and publishing records of furniture owned by householders as shown in probate inventories; analysing trade publications and census reports for the location and biographical detail of local craftsmen; measuring and recording provenanced furniture, utilising methods of data collection which may lead to the de-coding of anonymous objects; relating furniture to regional architectural styles, and the

context in which furniture was used.

The relatively unexplored possibility exists, too, for recording "furniture" and the particular use for which it was made in the wide variety of work situations, as well as in institutional or recreational settings. Discovering the sites of early workshops, including evidence of the tools and devices used by identified craftsmen which remains in many parts of Britain, would increase the material evidence of early furniture makers which has largely been lost to us. What remains is constantly under threat of destruction or dispersal.

Closely allied with this form of empirical research is the recording of the oral histories which can be given by elderly craftsmen, relatives of craftsmen, antiques dealers, and others who recall the practices and conditions in which furniture was made, sold and used. Such evidence is still to be obtained, and often provides "texture" of inestimable value, often beyond the specific concerns of the particular craft under discussion.

Studies concerned with developing theoretical perspectives in these areas may, too, attempt to explore the wide range of issues which influenced craft practices, including, for example, a concern with radicalism/conservatism in craft traditions, and the influence which dominant designs, emanating from changes in fashion and competitive commercial forces, played in the distinctions and proliferation of design variants.

This area may include investigation of the highly controlled training and subsequent employment and payment structures of apprentices and journeymen, as well as for established cabinet makers and turners.

Other studies in these areas invite

analysis related to the changing concept of furniture over time, and will contribute to an understanding of the manner in which a developing sense of self awareness for the population at large changed between the 17th and 19th centuries, for the majority of the population. Alterations in furniture design reflected a re-definition of, for example, household ergonomics, expansion of work situations, transport and a changing sense of the needs, both physical and aesthetic, of the working population. Consequently, historical studies of "everyday" furniture propose insights of an intimate and radical social nature; providing cultural information beyond the immediate study of "furniture" alone.

This field of study, although developed in some other countries, has remained relatively unexplored in Britain. The result of this neglect is that much of our common heritage has been dispersed without records of regional origin and use being made. Through its research, this newly formed group is attempting to alter this, and to demonstrate that there is a wealth of important and fascinating research work to be undertaken for all who are interested, in virtually every locality of Britain. The aim is for members to participate actively in discovering new information about the rich social and historical life which is reflected within our furniture history.

Dr. B.D. Cotton. February '85.

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