

## RFS TIMBER TRADE

The historic importation, transportation and sale of furniture timber are topics about which comparatively little is known. And yet, these are topics fundamental to any understanding of furniture making, whether regional or metropolitan. Imported oak wainscots and deal boards have been staples of the furniture making trade since the Norman conquest, and their impact on furniture making can be seen in every region of Britain. In the 18th century over half the tonnage of Britain's merchant fleet was employed in transporting timber. From the second quarter of the 18th century exotic woods, mahogany in particular, dominated cabinet making in London and provincial towns, but at the same time many of our 40+ species of indigenous timber remained in common and constant use. How many of these do we even recognise today?

A number of RFS members have been working on various aspects of the supply and use of timber to British furniture makers, and we now feel that the time is right to launch a major research project into the timber trade. The project has two principal aims. The first is simply to discover, record and assemble data on all aspects of the trade and utilisation of timber. This will be the foundation of an archive of primary source material of unrivalled importance. The second is to map out, port by port, region by region, workshop by workshop, the development of the trade in timber over time. In doing so we will be creating a unique study, vital to the further understanding of the history of furniture making in Britain.

To launch this project we will need plenty of help from RFS members, to locate source material, carry out research, to organise and assimilate data. We intend to hold a one day induction course in 1994, when

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volunteers will be given an introduction to the timber trade, including lectures by a number of furniture scholars, and a full briefing on the aim and methods of the project. If you would like to join the project, or help in any way, don't hesitate, but contact us now. Please address your enquiries, in the first instance, to the Secretary, Adam Bowett. The address and telephone number can be found inside the back cover of this newsletter.

*Adam Bowett*