





Cover illustration: 'The Departure to London' by Edward Bird, R.A. (1772--1819).

Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1815.

Edward Bird was born in Wolverhampton in 1772 and at the age of thirteen was apprenticed as a japanning artist and decorator to the local firm of Jones and Taylor. He moved to Bristol in the 1790s where he eventually established himself as a painter.

The essential elements of furniture which the artist considered appropriate to the circumstances of a middle income family in the early 19th century is worth reflecting upon. Whether this scene is intended to illustrate the living room of a Bristol household of this period can only be conjecture but there is little doubt that the furniture comprises English, possibly Welsh and Dutch vernacular furniture.

A canopied straw chair, similar to that illustrated on the front cover, once belonged to the Physician Edward Jenner (1749–1823) who spent most of his life in the Gloucestershire village of Berkeley (ref: C. Gilbert, 'English Vernacular Furniture' 1991, Yale University Press). Richard Bebb has noted the distribution of such lipwork chairs as far west as Pembrokeshire. However regional origins in terms of place of manufacture still remains uncertain.

The ladderback chair in front of the butter churn with extended finials or knobs appears to be an import from the Low Countries.

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