

AM Visit to Edam Museum, Friday 28th September 2001

At 10 am we met up again with Mr Schipper at the Edam Museum, a very distinctive former merchant's house built in 1530, beside one of the canals in the centre of the town.

As an important port on the Zuiderzee during the 16th and 17th centuries, Edam housed up to sixty ship-building yards, imported deals and hardwoods via the German and the Baltic ports, processed imported sawn lumber in the local sawmills, engaged in whaling off Newfoundland, ran twelve saltworks processing unrefined salt from the coast of Biscay and the West Indies and acted as a transshipment point for the export of W. Friesland cheese to Hamburg and Rouen.

Edam in many ways mirrored the success of the Dutch Republic during the 16th and 17th centuries but faltered in the 18th century when the port silted up.

The wealth of painted furniture in the Museum, from this early period, partly reflects the impact of diverse cultures and trading links via the ports in northern

Holland which produced vernacular traditions so different to those found in the British Isles.

Legislation aimed at prohibiting the import 'of large carved and other Dutch chests and trunks' in 1636 to north German towns emphasises the dynamics of the situation¹³. Although the furniture was very memorable, we were reminded in a very succinct way of the vulnerability and inventiveness of a population that intended to live below the sea level for the centuries to come. Devices with this intention in mind not only include trestle boards attachments or decorative supports to cabinets and chests (fig 10) but specially designed habitable space, such as the rare surviving example of a tiled cellar, that floats and moves with the fluctuations of the water table, within the lower part of the museum structure.

On the lower ground floor, connecting with cellar, was another example of an 18th century Leiden ladder back chair (fig 27) incorporating a pronounced rake to the back, very distinctive undercuts to the arms combined with a slight displacement of each arm relative to the back uprights. However its original turned front stretcher is missing and has been replaced with a strut. The primary timber appears to be of the Acer family with chamfered ladders and a scribe line along the lower edge of each ladder. A well preserved child's version of this chair can also be seen in the Friesian Museum in Leeuwarden.

On the ground floor we were able to examine a set of four red-painted, rush seated and pegged turners chairs (fig 28) bearing a considerable similarity to a painting by Adriaen van Ostade(n) titled 'The happy drinker' 1610-1685 (front cover) and a sketch (inside front cover) drawn by the clerk of the Amsterdam Notorial Archive in 1632¹⁴.

The upper floor of the Museum houses a one stage painted double door corner cupboard incorporating features which suggests that it was intended to sit directly on the floor or on the skirting board, an iron bound, cylindrical painted mariners trunk¹⁵ owned by Jacobus Jongtjits and dated 1706, another kast, a painted farmer's sleigh and an interesting round hat box made out of baleen.