

Not in Cotton: researching a ladderback chair possibly from Kent, Surrey or Sussex
Andrew Honey

Andrew Honey's research is focused on an ash ladder-backed, rush-seated armchair he bought in Oxford a few years ago. He had begun by looking at similar chairs in *The English Regional Chair* by Bernard Cotton (Antiques Collectors' Club, 1994), and although it seemed comparable to chairs from the North West, such as NW 324, made in the late 18th and early 19th century, there were marked differences. Andrew's chair, illustrated (Fig. 1), has underarm stretchers, and he found no chairs with this form included in *The English Regional Chair*. Chairs illustrated in *English Cottage Furniture* by F. G. Roe, 1941 and 1961, described as being from Kent, had similar stretchers. A comparable armchair with underarm stretchers was found in the Geffrye Museum, displayed in the restored almshouse, illustrated (Fig. 2). The museum

had acquired this chair at an Antiques Fair in 2002 but has no evidence to identify its provenance.

Andrew's next step was to take the chair to Bill Cotton, who was able to say this was a form he recognised as being possibly from the South East; Bill's view was that the form probably originated in the Low Countries. They appeared in paintings by Carlton Alfred Smith, and in photographs of cottage interiors published in *Old West Surrey* by Gertrude Jekyll. However, as Andrew pointed out, Carlton Smith's paintings often show similar features, and the same chair seems to be depicted in different interiors. Thus the paintings could not be relied upon as absolute evidence of provenance and indeed there was no certainty about the degree of authenticity of the photographed interiors shown by Jekyll.

Andrew said more research was needed before he could draw any firm conclusions, but there did seem to be a potential regional attribution to South East England, and a date range of late 18th to early 19th century.

David Dewing



Fig. 1 Andrew Honey's chair, ash with rush seat, late 18th century (Photograph David Dewing)



Fig. 2 Geffrye Museum, rush-seated armchair in the 1780's room of the restored almshouse (Photograph courtesy of the Geffrye Museum)