

## Sunday 5 July Furniture Surgery

After a quick and efficiently dealt-with AGM where the Society expressed its considerable thanks, tinged with more than a little regret, to Polly Legg who, after 20 years, was retiring from Events Organiser, we moved on to a staple of the RFS Conference, the Furniture Surgery organised by John Boram.

Roderick Butler presented two 6-plank coffers and a panelled one, pointing out the regional indicators. One plank coffer, owned by Polly Legg, had shaped ogee brackets set beneath the front board and this single feature, it was thought, was indicative of a West Country origin. The front of the other plank coffer had a splendid shallow, carved design of two lunettes containing stylised tulips, the date 1698 carved in the top of the lid. The panelled coffer had a distinctive shaped apron (Fig. 13), which Roderick thought was strongly indicative of West Country origin; it also had the hasp cut through the edge of the lid that may also be similarly indicative. The coffer had six punched marks; two either side of the lock hasp on the lid and one each on the middle vertical moulded stiles. These may have been a maker's mark. An unusual aspect was that threads of a dark fabric could be seen poking out between the

joints indicating that the coffer must have originally lined out with fabric.

Next, John Boram brought two rush-seated chairs with most unusual bentwood arms (Fig. 14). One had an extraordinary back design consisting of crossed arrows; a design that was somewhat reminiscent of a Gillow design; it also had a rather excessively curved front rail below the seat. The other chair had a more conventional stick back but with a sharply bowed top-rail; the arms of this chair were also quite distinct in that they flattened out in the section where the arm curved downwards, and were bent into almost a semi-circle before going straight down to slot through the seat rail and into the top of the stretcher below.

It was necessary to flatten out the wood in order to create such an exaggerated curve. John wondered if these attributes indicated that they were West Country, as the bent wood was strongly reminiscent of the continuous arms on the chairs from Yealmpton but that the design influences implied a more metropolitan origin, such as Bristol (see Gabriel Olive Farm and *Cottage Furniture in the West Country*, RFS 2002, p. 79).

Then John and Margaret Stabler produced a mahogany upholstered single chair with painted decoration. The chair, with three separate vertical feathers for the back, was very close to a design by Hepplewhite. The consensus



Fig. 13 West Country panelled coffer

Fig. 14 (right) Two chairs from John Boram and Christopher Claxton Stevens' cheese coaster



Fig. 15 (below right) Mike Copperwheat's mystery object

eventually was that the chair was c. 1900, made as a direct copy of Hepplewhite, but the upholstery, with the coiled springs and white damask covering was a give-away to its date.

Christopher Claxton Stevens showed a 'neat and plain' mahogany cheese coaster set on small brass casters (Fig. 14). However, it had a very faint label glued to the bottom which stated that it came from 'R. Rossiter, Cabinet Maker, Upholsterer And (Paper) Hanger, Auctioneer and Appraiser, Fore Street, South Moulton' (Devon).

Peter Owen brought a beautifully made scale model of a complex, hidden joint that fixed three legs at a central crossing. It was made by Peter as part of the process of making a full-size table and he wondered if any members had seen anything similar.

Bob Parrott then showed an unusual low-back, yew-wood Windsor chair raised on cabriole legs with an H-stretcher. Beneath the elm seat were the tantalising remains of a label – sadly a faded outline and four fixing nails. It bore the indicators of not only Thames Valley but also the Slough area.

Noël Riley talked about a strange X-framed chair made from substantial oak scantlings. The upholstered seat was set quite low and the back rail had two *Japonisme* rosettes the initials AR and the date 1876. Part of a large set, it was extremely uncomfortable. Judging from the design the idea was put forward that perhaps it was derived from a prieu-dieu. The initials were those of Noël's grandfather, Athelstan Riley, who lived in Kensington and was closely involved in the Church of England's High Church Oxford Movement. It has been suggested that T. G. Jackson designed them but it is not known who made the chairs.



Peter Stone asked the members for help or advice as to what should be done with a c. 1882 screen by Basil Champneys (1842–1935) from St Editha's Church, Tamworth, Staffordshire. Church fittings always exercise the imagination of those charged with looking after them, especially when churches are re-ordered, or even made redundant.

Melven Glander also brought along a piece of church furniture. In this case it was a severely plain single chair that he had rescued from a disused and redundant convent in East Anglia. He wondered if it would have been of local manufacture.

Mike Copperwheat showed us a mystery object (Fig. 15) A tall mahogany box, about 18 in. high and some 4 in. by 6 in., the box is divided into three sections. At the bottom a vertical slide with a shaped cresting lifts to reveal six 'pigeon holes' about 3 in. high, while above that is a plain open space with a flat shelf, again about 3 in. high. Above that is a tall open space while the top has a large hole cut into it and with a shaped rail – matching the lifting slide below. So what was it for? One idea that had some traction was that it was a candlestick stand where the hole was cut so that it would not be burnt. It is possible that a mirror was missing from the back.

Our thanks to John Boram for organising the session and, of course, our thanks to all those who brought pieces, some from quite a long way away.

*Treve Rosoman*