

Peter Stone who is coordinating the RFS Church Treasures initiative, has written a notice for publication in the autumn edition of the NADFAS Church Recorders' *News and Views* magazine. The notice is reproduced in a slightly edited form below to keep RFS members informed of the advice which the Society is prepared to offer in order to assist the recording of fixed woodwork, fittings and furniture in churches.

In view of the potential scale of this activity, Peter Stone would like to hear from any member who is willing to assist in such work within their local area. A copy of 'Guidelines for RFS members acting as furniture advisors to Churches' is available free of charge. Please write or telephone Peter Stone 01543 472247.

## CHURCH FURNITURE, WOODWORK FIXTURES AND FITTINGS.

The RFS is seeking to establish links with the NADFAS Church Recording Organisation in order to assist Church Recorders in their work with respect to the furniture and woodwork found in churches.

What follows is an explanation of the aims and objectives of the Society which was established in 1984 with a view to advancing the study of the history, design, production, distribution and use of regional furniture in the British Isles and to further public knowledge and appreciation.

The Society's president is Victor Chinnery, author of '*Oak Furniture The British Tradition*'. The chairman is David Dewing, Director of the Geffrye Museum. The Society publishes regular newsletters and an annual journal. The current membership is 620, and is well spread around the country. New members are always welcome!

The reason for this article is to help Church Recorders working in the woodwork field to become more aware and appreciative of the significance of pieces they may discover when recording. I will briefly mention two examples of what can be found and what can happen.

Firstly, this case initiated the RFS involvement in the field – A Suffolk Church without Faculty approval (remember the article on Faculty Jurisdiction in the Autumn 2001 CR Journal) disposed of a cupboard for a few hundred pounds, to a local dealer, shortly afterwards at Christies it was sold to Huntington Antiques Ltd. a specialist in oak furniture, for about £8500. The proprietor held it for some 18 months after he learnt more about the provenance and was prepared to return it to the church but funding never materialised. It is now understood to be in private hands. The cupboard had been constructed from the rood screen of the church in about 1540 and even some of the screen painted decoration was found on the inside. (fig 1) Therefore you will appreciate it is essential to inspect very carefully all items of furniture inside and out, and even underneath if possible! Unfortunately many churches do not realise the importance of the

custodianship within their charge.

The second more recent example was reported in the Times newspaper article of 21 March 2003, and probably elsewhere, headed 'Churchgoers sat on £200,000 masterpieces.' The mahogany two seater benches were almost certainly made by Chippendale for the dissolute connoisseur William Beckford's 21st birthday, he then disposed of them when times were tight! They have now, at auction, been sold for £276,000. The PCC of St. Andrew's Church, Trent, Dorset, was given faculty approval by the DAC to dispose of them and has been instructed to establish a Trust Fund to be used for the upkeep of the church.

In an ideal world the RFS would like to see furniture and fittings retained in the cathedrals and churches for all to appreciate, with an indication of the item's provenance, and we would recommend that this line should be taken whenever possible. Adequate insurance and the security of moveable items is essential and their importance recognised.

To establish a greater awareness and understanding by Church Recorders, the RFS wishes to offer its members' services to advise and if necessary to assist. The recent Study Day on Woodwork in Sutton Coldfield, lead by Mr. Gerald Cole (an RFS member) can without doubt further the appreciation, recognition and recording of woodwork and furniture and so ensure more thorough reports on this fascinating subject.

It is therefore proposed for any recording team wishing to call upon the assistance of the RFS that their co-ordinator, through their area representative, contacts me in writing, and I will endeavour to put the team in touch with a RFS volunteer. Area representatives will have my address.

Finally if any Church Recorder would like to join the RFS please write to the Membership Secretary: c/o W. A. Pinn and Son, 124, Swan Street, Sible Hedingham, Essex CO9 3HP.

*Peter Stone*



Fig. 1