

Furniture Surgery

Seating furniture, varied and curious, was brought for comparison and enlightenment from RFS members.

Gerry Coughlan brought a high-backed low oak chair of joined construction, dating from *c.* 1700, with



High-backed chair, oak, *c.* 1700



Two green Windsor dolls' chairs and a North West rush-seated doll's chair *c.* 1848

panelled-back, arched top with incised scrolls, the seat a panelled box with an oak drawer, on neat short rounded feet. A quality piece with crisp carving, fine mouldings and chamfered angles, this was perhaps a nursing chair or was made for an individual?

John Boram's doll's chair, the frame 11 in (28 cm) high, appears to be a miniature version of the nineteenth-century North West rush-seated spindle-back chair, with cabriole legs and original finish. The purpose of such chairs was suggested by the chairs in the V&A collection made 1690–1700 for the Lord and Lady



Rush-seated ladder-back with distinctive Dutch features, except for the turned stretchers, *c.* 1780–1820



left to right Armchair inscribed W H 1755 has a long association with Lincolnshire; armchair with no provenance but note similar ladder and underarm supports, which points to them being made in the same region if not in the same workshop, c. 1750s; side chair which may have spent all its life in Spilsby, Lincs. The cabriole legs are a defining feature of these early Lincolnshire chairs. It was probably produced at the end of the 1700s and has its original rushing.

Clapham dolls. However, John's primary interest is in Gillow's eighteenth-century references to the manufacture of different types of doll's furniture (see pp. 9–10 in this *Newsletter*) and the many previous assumptions/questions as to the purpose of such furniture in terms of apprentice pieces or travellers' samples. The type-written note attached to the underside of what appears to be the original rush was probably not produced until the twentieth century, based on family hearsay. It reads: 'Made for Mary Wilshaw (nee Heywood) by one of her father's workmen at his timber yard in Blackburn Lancs, circa 1848'. This may refer to a chair-maker called Heywood recorded at 27 London Road, Liverpool, in 1807 (Beard and Gilbert (eds), *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers*, 1986) and/or chair-makers of this name working in Blackburn in 1858 and 1864 (Cotton, *The English Regional Chair*, 1991).

Peter Stone brought two 'Windsor' dolls' chairs about 12–13 in (30.5–33 cm) high, with vestiges of their original green finish, and a chair, perhaps mahogany, which he described as 'farmhouse', the front being embellished with carving on top and side members. A study of the back by Keith Pinn declared its origins as early eighteenth century, with later additions including a crest rail. Although Peter's brander-back chair with a flat seat is common in Scotland, Jeremy Rycroft owns one with a provenance to Yorkshire. Design influences clearly spread across borders and further comments would be welcome.

Hans Piena's presentation on rush-seated chairs from Holland chimed with William Sergeant's Lincolnshire rush-seated chairs, where similarities and differences could be seen. Import of chairs into Boston from Holland point to their influence on Lincolnshire chairs. William showed a chair which he thought was made in Holland. It had Hans in a quandary as there were features that he associated with his home country as well



Rush-seated ladder-back armchair, Dutch, c. 1800 with added inlay c. 1900.

as features that he had not seen before. Design features which were typically Dutch included the finely turned finials at the top of the back posts along with distinctive turned bun feet. The plain back stretchers and the shaped top ladder were quite familiar to him. He also pointed out that the method of allowing the top of the front legs to finish above the rushing bars was the norm, whereas the Lincolnshire method was completely the opposite. Where he could not find any similarity with chairs from the Low Countries was in the turned decoration to the front, middle and lower side stretchers. None of the ladder-back chairs in the collection of the Netherlands Open Air Museum, have this feature.

During the period 1780–1820 such chairs were for the middle class whereas workers used stools or benches. In Holland and the UK, chairs of the simpler type moved down the social scale as fashions changed.

William Sergeant brought three rush-seated ladder-back Lincolnshire chairs, Kit Lawrie's chair inscribed W H 1755 on the back splat and two with a long association with the county and all with features emblematic of Lincolnshire tradition, demonstrating

local stylistic developments. He also showed a chair from Holland to which Hans Piena gave a date of 1800, with inlay added *c.* 1880–1920, from the time when the Duveen Brothers were trading in Hull. Born in Meppel in the Netherlands, Joseph Duveen was well placed to bring cargoes of furniture to the UK, with return trips delivering coal to Holland. Designs were based on or added to eighteenth-century furniture with floral inlays set into the arms and back splats. Fashionable examples exported to England before the first world war are held by the V&A.

Jeremy Bate's oval topped pine stool with a shaped hand hole was raised by adding unusual stumpy feet to make a useful desk stool with a sloping top.

With warm appreciation to John Boram for organising the event, providing editorial assistance and images, Jeremy Rycroft for supplying photographs, William Sergeant for his text and images, to Sarah Medlam, Keith Pinn and all members who contributed to the discussion.

Crissie White