



The Glastonbury Chair. Chair in the Admiral Blake Museum, Bridgwater. *Photo Diana Halliwell*

## The Glastonbury Chair

Centred around Wells, this year's RFS conference brought into focus not only the 'original' folding chair now in the Bishop's Palace at Wells but many examples of the ubiquitous 'Glastonbury Chair' in almost every place we visited. The design is found so widely that it can hardly be considered regional but further study may be able to identify distinguishing characteristics. The few known early examples having been initially recorded as 'folding', 'monks' or 'abbots' chairs, the term 'Glastonbury chair' had become the common term for the chairs being produced in large numbers from about the 1840s onwards. This was to meet a demand precipitated by Warner's *History of Glastonbury Abbey and the Town of Glastonbury* published in 1826 and Henry Shaw's *Specimens of Antique Furniture* published

in 1836, the style being picked up in designs by Gillows and Pugin.

At the Admiral Blake Museum, Bridgwater, is an example of a 'Glastonbury Chair' featuring a secular carving of a castle in the romantic gothic style, and a trade label for C. H. Baker, Carver & Co. Bridgwater, who is advertising in *A Handbook of St Mary's Church* published in 1885 to make carved copies of the original chair from 'Glastonbury Abbey of c. 1100'. There are a number of these chairs in St Mary's Church, Bridgwater which can therefore perhaps be attributed to C. H. Baker. A chair in St Mary's Church, Bishops Lydeard, captures just some of the delightful variations encompassed by the Victorian interpretation of the Glastonbury chair found in local churches; plain, carved, painted, gilded and sometimes dated. A vehicle to commemorate donors and recipients but not makers.

Gabriel Olive's article 'The Glastonbury Chair' in *Regional Furniture*, 11X (1994) pp. 24–32, now available on the RFS website, provides thorough background to the antecedents of the chair and notes how rarely they are labelled. Victor Chinnery identifies a few known early examples of such chairs from the early sixteenth century onwards and dates the example in The Bishop's Palace, Wells to before 1539 (*Oak Furniture: the British Tradition* 1979 revised 2016, p. 179–183).

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