

Registered Charity Number 297488

# Regional Furniture Society

Annual Report and Accounts  
for the year ending  
31st December 2023

## **TRUSTEES REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2023**

The Trustees present their Report and Accounts for the year ending 31st December 2023.

If you wish to obtain further information about any aspect of this Report or the Society in general, please write to the Honorary Secretary:

Jeremy Rycroft, Holwood House, Goosnargh, Preston PR3 2WD

### **SOCIETY OBJECTS**

The Regional Furniture Society has recorded its aims and objectives in the ‘Objects’ section of its Constitution. They require the Society to:

- advance the study of the history, design, production, distribution and use of regional furniture in the British Isles and areas under British influence, and of Continental and other overseas influences on British regional furniture; and to further public knowledge and appreciation of it.

To achieve this, the Society seeks to:

- encourage the conservation and preservation of examples of all such furniture and related archives both in museums and in other collections, and their current use as sources for study.
- encourage research in all aspects of regional furniture and promote the development of interest in regional furniture in relation to social and economic life and history and in the relationship between regional furniture design and architecture and other arts and crafts.
- publish material selected by its Editorial Board, organise exhibitions and meetings alone or in conjunction with other bodies, and record and store information in appropriate institutions.
- raise funds and invite and receive contributions from any person or persons whatsoever by way of subscription, donation or otherwise, provided that the Society shall not undertake any permanent trading activities in raising funds for its charitable objects.

### **TRUSTEES**

The trustees who served from 1 January 2023 were:

Chair	Liz Hancock
Secretary	Jeremy Rycroft
Treasurer	Keith Robinson
Membership Secretary	Diana Halliwell
Events Organiser	Jeremy Bate
Journal Editor	Stephen Jackson

Newsletter Editor	Linda Hall
Bursary Secretary	Nick Humphrey
Website Editor	Julian Parker
Book Sales	Gerry Coughlan
American Secretary	Daniel Ackermann

Council Officers	Louis Platman
	Catherine Grigg
	Rosalyn Sklar
	Robert Williams

## OVERVIEW OF MAIN ACTIVITIES

The Society was founded in 1984. Its membership of over 400 includes museum curators, furniture historians, furniture collectors, furniture makers, restorers, antique dealers, auctioneers and students.

The Society has a programme of events which have often been fully subscribed. These events provide the opportunity to visit properties and collections that are not open to the general public; residential events allow members to see a very wide range of furniture in one area, which would otherwise be difficult. Occasionally overseas visits are arranged.

The main event for 2023, the Annual Conference, was held in North Wales with numbers similar to the previous year. While interest in the annual conference remains high, it is apparent that costs of holding conferences (both in terms of travel and accommodation) is escalating. The financial arrangements for the Society have traditionally used the surplus on events to add to subscription income in funding the Society's well-regarded publications. Escalating costs may not allow this to happen in future to the same extent as in the past.

The Society's grants and bursaries are funded from investment income. Unfortunately, recent events have reduced investment returns so funding of awards at their current level may eat into reserves a little. This means that for the next year or more, both annual cash income and investment returns will need to be monitored carefully to make sure reserves do not decline too rapidly. An increase in subscriptions would be needed to maintain the value of subscription income, but this has to be balanced with the desire to retain membership levels.

A similar number of events were arranged as last year, with a welcome return to a North of England event:

21 April – Visit to Hammersmith Arts & Crafts houses; this covered William Morris's Kelmscott House and Emery Walker's house; the event was rounded off with a visit to the Victorian Fuller's Brewery.

5-9 July – Annual Conference in Bangor; visits were made to Plas Mawr, Gwydir Castle and Chapel, Saint Grwst, Llanrwst, a number of other impressive churches, Penrhyn Castle, Plas Newydd in Llangollen and a private regional furniture collection on Anglesey.

9 July – A visit to the Private Collection of John Parry.

3 August – Visit to Lancaster covering the new Gillows Gallery in the Judges Lodgings, the Castle and Priory and the redundant Church of St John the Baptist; attendees had a choice of various other smaller museums to see.

23 September – Visit to House of the Binns, West Lothian, with its fine collection of Scottish furniture, many of the pieces by the leading mid- and late-eighteenth century Edinburgh makers.

Although the Society has had some success in attracting younger members, taking time off during the week is perhaps more difficult nowadays for those working and they will of course be working to a greater age with little prospect of early retirement. This means that the average age of event attendees is increasing and can be expected to continue doing so. However, ways of sponsoring attendance have been extended to other relevant Conferences on regional furniture topics

The Society's publications, website and social media channels are used increasingly and appear to be the main focus of interest, and hence benefit, of membership for younger members. It is planned to have a review of the Society's media strategy, given its growing importance. There has been increased interest in the Society's material on YouTube, particularly the lectures on Windsor chairs. A new addition is Daniel Ackermann's November 2022 talk on the inland American South.

Adam Bowett's work on enhancing the Journal indexes will be incorporated when the website is upgraded, planned for next year.

## **MANAGEMENT OF THE SOCIETY BY THE COUNCIL IN 2022**

### **Grants & Bursaries**

After making a request for support in 2019, the Judges Lodgings Museum in Lancaster made a formal grant application in late 2020 for £5,000 towards a new Gillows Gallery within the museum. The Society approved the grant, conditional on full funding being achieved. The Museum has now managed to achieve its full target funding; it appears the Society's early grant helped trigger other awards. Payment of the award was negotiated in December 2022, and made late in 2023; the Gallery opened on 29 June 2023.

A grant to support the publication of a volume on 'Furniture & Furnishings in Medieval Europe' by Cécile Lagane was agreed in principle in 2021 but complementary funding from the French public sector has been delayed. The publication has now gone ahead and a copy of the book has been received and will go into the V & A National Art Library.

A bursary award of £1574 was approved for Aidan Harrison to support photography and Carbon-14 dating of the C16 Saffron Walden bed. Work on this old and virtually complete bed is expected to provide a unique source of information on beds of this period. It will be funded by using the Dewdney and Pickvance Bequests.

A proposal for the award of a Grant of £5,000 was received from Wycombe Museum for work on removing and cleaning a large collection of Regional Chairs currently held in unsatisfactory storage conditions. The proposal was only received in late 2023 but is expected to be approved. The chairs represent one of the main public collections of regional chairs known in the UK and would provide a rare opportunity for the Society to meet its first listed object of preserving appropriate furniture.

As mentioned above, the prime source of funds for grants is the investment income, i.e. the invested bequests received by the Society. The Council had already decided that grants may

exceed investment returns for outstanding applications thereby reducing investment capital, but previous levels of returns are not now expected, increasing the risk of depleting reserves. If markets remain disappointing, further bequests would provide the way to allow the Society to sustain its grant giving. The Society is therefore encouraging legacy giving and with an ageing membership, it hopes for more bequests. Over £10,000 was received in 2021. However, with the escalating costs of events and recently depressed investment returns creating financial uncertainty, the Council will not add to that financial uncertainty by assuming further legacies will be forthcoming. No major legacies were received in 2023.

## **Investment Management**

The Investment Committee has three members of whom two have business/accounting experience and one has significant investment experience. A simpler target rate of investment was set last year and remains in place. Attention continues to be given to investment returns, the anticipated cost inflation and the likelihood of bequests. No restrictions on grants or publication costs have been necessary in this financial year. 2024 may bring greater difficulties.

## **Archive Management**

A detailed Archive Retention plan was agreed in 2021; some paper records have now been transferred to the Museum of the Home and others are being reviewed for archiving there. It is intended that later documentation, typically from 2017, will be transferred electronically. A formal agreement with the Museum of the Home was agreed during 2022 and work under the recently appointed RFS archivist on initially physical records is progressing.

## **Succession Management**

As in previous years, new Council members have been identified to take the place of those retiring. The Council can still find able furniture specialists who are happy to make time to help guide the Society. The average age of Council members has again reduced slightly.

The Society decided it was prudent to identify a new President in advance of the serving one retiring. An approved change of the Society's Constitution will now allow this to happen before every Presidential handover.

In 2024 the term of office of our current Treasurer will be completed as will that of the American Secretary; two further officers have indicated they will retire at the 2024 AGM. Action is being taken now to try to find successors. Two new people have agreed to be co-opted to the Council from April 2024 and will be offered for election at the AGM. Finding someone with a furniture interest who is willing to act as an accountant has proved difficult so far.

## **Annual General Meeting**

The AGM was held in person at the annual conference. Time was allowed for general discussion after clearing formal business.

## **Council Meetings**

Both the April and October Council meetings were held in person and by Zoom.

## **COMMUNICATIONS WITH SOCIETY MEMBERS AND THE PUBLIC**

In a specialist society of this type a number of levels of communication are necessary:

Firstly, publication of the results of major or minor pieces of research in the regional furniture field is essential.

Secondly it is important to keep members abreast of Society events and developments and general Society news.

Thirdly it is important to share information about regional furniture and the Society with the wider public.

The Society uses three media to achieve this:

The annual Journal, *Regional Furniture*, publishes major research and is distributed to members. The Journal articles are also made available to the general public on the Society's website with a three-year time lag.

The bi-annual Newsletter publishes visit reports, short reports by members and regional museum curators on items of regional furniture and book reviews. It also provides the membership with Society news. Visit reports have an important role in allowing those unable to attend an event to share in the information and insights gained during visits. A decision was taken this year to make past articles of the Newsletter available on the Society's website with the same three-year delay that applies to the Journal. Certain potentially confidential information will not be included.

The Website provides information to members and the wider public on the Society's activities and importantly provides an introductory guide to regional furniture for the general public. An innovation last year was to make webinars available on YouTube. A new series of chairs of the month has been introduced and many useful links to other websites given. The Society also has Twitter and Instagram accounts which are popular. These media channels now form an excellent starting point for anyone interested in exploring the world of regional furniture and are particularly attractive to younger members.

In terms of involvement of the membership in decision making, the AGM allows the Council's plans, policies and reports to be discussed and voted on by the membership and for Council members to be elected democratically.

## **CONSTITUTION AS GOVERNING DOCUMENT**

The Society is governed by its Constitution which was approved by the Charity Commission at its inception and has been revised periodically – significantly in 2017 and most recently in 2022 with some minor administrative changes. This latest version was approved by the

Charity Commission and is available on the Society website. In addition, the Society follows Charity Commission guidance on appointment, clearance and briefing of trustees, reporting of serious events, risk management including governance matters, and also on data protection, all of which are discussed by Trustees, with appropriate policies and procedures adopted at Council meetings.

The Society is an unincorporated association governed by its Council which consists of officers and members who are trustees. The Honorary President, Vice-Presidents may attend Council meetings but are not trustees. Potential new trustees are identified by Council members, who may consult or receive proposals from members. Where there is a vacancy during the year, the Council may co-opt the new Council member/Trustee to fill the vacancy, and this would then have to be confirmed by election at the AGM. Alternatively, the Council (or Society members) can nominate a member for election at the AGM. All trustees are subject to annual election at the AGM with limits on how long they can serve.

## **REVIEW OF CHARITABLE PURPOSE AND PUBLIC BENEFIT**

The prime aim of the Regional Furniture Society, as indicated above, is to promote the preservation and conservation of regional furniture, to promote research on regional furniture and to publish information relating to these subjects and arrange for important information to be archived. As an educational charity, pursuing those objects is the Society's main way of providing public benefit.

### **Research**

The Society encourages research by:

- a) offering bursaries to those carrying out research on specific areas of regional furniture, directed particularly to younger researchers;
- b) providing members who carry out their own research with a forum for encouraging and discussing results among peers, through its events and publications;
- c) holding a Research in Progress day in most years where the latest developments in regional furniture research nationally or internationally are presented and debated.
- d) running a programme of events which allow members to become familiar with collections of furniture and their regional differences, including some which are not open to the general public;
- e) Offering grants of up to £5,000 to facilitate more major projects, including archiving important regional furniture research, carrying out more major investigations than would be possible through bursaries, and supporting publication of significant books covering aspects of regional furniture.

### **Publications**

These are a major activity for the Society. As mentioned above, the Journal is published once a year and allows major pieces of research to be presented. Many articles cover recent developments or discoveries. By publishing the Journal to members and then putting Journal

articles on the website with a three-year delay, members retain a significant benefit of membership but the wider public also has access to the Society's research. Articles are by members, non-members and by curators of particular collections. This is particularly useful as it can draw attention to important items of furniture that may not be well-known or well-researched and also to problems or issues with them and their conservation. It helps set an agenda for the Society.

The Newsletter has shorter articles and visit reports, both important for those who are less expert in the field of regional furniture and are trying to increase their expertise. It is hoped that the Newsletter may encourage them to do more to support the Society's objects, particularly research. The less formal style encourages wider debate about topics that are less well understood. It was expanded and reformatted in late 2019. As from 2022 it has been decided to make the Newsletter available in the same way as the Journal and with the same time delay.

The Society's website helps to raise public awareness of the complexity and regionality of vernacular furniture, thus helping the Society to achieve its objects. Website activity has continued to increase. The Society is developing an increasing presence on social media – Instagram and Twitter – which has allowed various examples of different regional furniture types to be shown and described. The Society runs a service, via its website, responding to queries from members of the public about regional furniture, which has the same aims of encouraging wider interest in regional furniture. Hypertext indexing of all Journal and Newsletter articles available on the website is well advanced and will enable members of the Society and the public to explore particular research interests far more easily. With new items like Chair of the Month and a wide range of links to other furniture organisation and museum websites, the website is a natural 'route in' for any-one wishing to study regional furniture.



## **REGIONAL FURNITURE SOCIETY TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023**

The accounts for 2023 show a small deficit of £1,276 (2022: a surplus of £3,279). This was a result of greater than anticipated spending on charitable grants and bursaries and was funded from cash balances which remained healthy at £22,165. This figure excludes the value of the Reserves and the unrealised investment gains.

A full programme of RFS events, including visits and the North Wales Conference, was held in 2023 producing a modest surplus of £2,900 which is added to the money used to fund the Society's charitable activities.

Grant and bursary spending totalled £6,979 of which £5,405 was payment of one grant and one bursary from general funds both being approved in 2021. The balance of £1,574 was for a bursary both approved and paid in 2023. This was partly funded from the Dewdney Fund (£750) and the Pickvance Fund (£824). At the beginning of 2024 a grant of £5,000 was approved by the Council.

The Society's other charitable activities include publication of the Journal and Newsletter and the maintenance and updating of the website and presence on social media. The cost of these activities together with that of governance and administration of the Society has been wholly met from membership subscriptions, event surpluses and a proportion of investment income. Throughout the year cash on deposit and at the bank remained at a level sufficient to meet normal expenditure for a period of not less than three months.

The Reserve Funds, including those on deposit, continued to be managed by CCLA Investment Management Limited with their performance being monitored by the Society's Investment Committee which reports annually to the trustees. In 2022 markets had their worst year since 2008 and the value of the reserve funds fell by 12%. 2023 was a better year and the value of the Society's holdings increased by just over 9%. The RFS invests for the long term and the funding of its charitable activities is based on an annualised total return of 4.5% over a five year period. The annualised return for the five years ended 31 December 2023 was 9.7%.

At 31 December 2023 the net worth of the Society, including reserves and unrealised gains on investments was £142,642 (2022: £133,979).

**INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF  
THE REGIONAL FURNITURE SOCIETY  
IN RESPECT OF THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023**

This report on the accounts of the Regional Furniture Society (Registered Charity Number 297488) for the year ended 31 December 2023 which comprise the Trustees' Report, Treasurer's Report, the Statement of Financial Activities, and the Balance Sheet, is in respect of an examination carried out in accordance with section 43 of the Charities Act 1993 (the Act).

**Respective responsibilities of the trustees and the examiner.**

The trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts and consider that an audit is not required for this year (under section 43(2) of the Act) and that an independent examination is required.

It is my responsibility to examine the accounts (under section 43(2) of the Act), follow the procedures laid down in the General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners (under section 43(7)9b of the Act), and state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

**Basis of independent examiner's report**

My examination was carried out in accordance with General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the trust and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosure in the accounts and seeking explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the accounts.

**Independent examiner's report**

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

- 1 Which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:
  - (a) to keep accounting records in accordance with section 41 of the Act
  - (b) to prepare accounts which accord with those accounting records and to comply with the accounting requirements of the Act.

have not been met

- 2 To which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

David Kingsmill FCA  
Hidcote Boyce Gloucestershire GL55 6LX

Regional Furniture Society

**Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 December 2023**

	Notes	Unrestricted Funds			Total 2023	Total 2022
		General	Designated	Restricted		
		Fund	Funds	Funds		
		£	£	£	£	£
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES</b>						
<i>Incoming resources from charitable activities</i>						
Subscriptions		11,551			11,551	9,590
Publications	1	14			14	58
Visits	2	615			615	1,842
Lectures and conferences	2	23,190			23,190	24,975
<i>Incoming resources from generated funds</i>						
Donations, legacies and grants	3	0		0	0	558
Investment income and interest	4	2,966	411	0	3,377	3,294
<b>Total incoming resources</b>		<b>38,337</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>38,747</b>	<b>40,317</b>
<b>RESOURCES EXPENDED</b>						
<i>Direct charitable expenditure</i>						
Donations and grants	5	5,000	0	0	5,000	0
Bursaries	6	405	750	824	1,979	0
Publication of the Journal	7	2,832			2,832	6,080
Publication of the Newsletter	7	8,285			8,285	7,877
Visits	2	1,773			1,773	1,343
Lectures and conferences	2	19,129			19,129	21,290
<b>Governance</b>	8	327			327	0
Other resources expended	9	698			698	447
<b>Net incoming (outgoing) resources before transfers between funds</b>		<b>38,449</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>824</b>	<b>40,023</b>	<b>37,037</b>
<b>Net incoming / (outgoing) resources before other recognised gains and losses</b>		<b>-113</b>	<b>-339</b>	<b>-824</b>	<b>-1,276</b>	<b>3,279</b>
<b>Other recognised gains and losses</b>						
Gains (losses) on investments						
Realised						
Unrealised	4	8,680	1,291	0	9,971	-14,988
<b>Net movement in funds</b>		<b>8,567</b>	<b>951</b>	<b>-824</b>	<b>8,695</b>	<b>-11,709</b>
Fund balances brought forward at 1 January 2023		107,905	16,043	10,000	133,947	145,688
Fund balances carried forward at 31 December 2023		<b>116,472</b>	<b>16,994</b>	<b>9,176</b>	<b>142,642</b>	<b>133,979</b>

**NOTES**

1 Income from sales of the Journal, Newsletter and other RFS publications 14

2 Income and expenditure table for Visits, Lectures and Conferences

	<i>Income</i>	<i>Expenditure</i>	<i>Surplus</i>
<i>Hammersmith event</i>	215	350	(135)
<i>Lancaster event</i>	240	230	10
<i>North Wales Conference 2023</i>	23,190	19,129	4,061
<i>Kent Conference 2024</i>	0	821	(821)
<i>Binns event</i>	160	372	(212)
<i>Totals</i>	23,805	20,902	2,903

3 No donations, legacies or grants were received during the year 0

4 Investment income		3,173	
CCLA deposit account interest		114	
Lloyds current account interest		90	3,377

Deposit interest received is split between general and designated funds in proportion to the 1 January 2022 holdings

General Funds	96,197	87.06%
Dewdney Bequest (designated)	13,195	11.94%
Michael Legg Fund (designated)	1,107	1.00%

5 No grants were made during the year but one grant approved in 2021 was paid from general funds 5,000

6 One bursary approved in 2021 was paid from general funds and another approved and paid in 2023 was paid partly from the Dewdney fund and partly from the Pickvance restricted fund. 1,979

7 Cost of designing three editions of the Newsletter and printing and mailing two of them	8,285	
Typesetting the Journal	2,832	11,118

8 The Society's governance costs are for travel and subsistence for meetings of the Council. 76

9 Public Liability Insurance	83	
Website hosting, social media, other technology spending	614	698

## Balance sheet as at 31 December 2023

	Notes	2023	2022
Assets			
Cash		£116,472	£109,645
Cash designated by the Trustees: Dewdney Bequest		£15,755	£13,195
Cash designated by the Trustees: Michael Legg Fund		£1,239	£1,107
Restricted Fund: Christopher Pickvance		£9,176	£10,000
		<u>£142,642</u>	<u>£133,947</u>
Less creditors			
Sundry creditors		£0	£0
		<u>£142,642</u>	<u>£133,947</u>
Reserves			
General reserves at 31 December 2022		£108,363	£119,911
Designated reserves at 31 December 2022		£15,585	£15,777
Restricted funds at 31 December 2022		£10,000	£10,000
Excess of income over expenditure		£8,695	-£11,741
General reserves at 31 December 2023		£116,472	£108,363
Designated reserves at 31 December 2023		£16,994	£15,585
Restricted funds at 31 December 2023		£9,176	£10,000
		<u>£142,642</u>	<u>£133,947</u>

## Balance sheet notes

	£ 2023	£ 2022
<b>Cash and investment balances at 31 December 2023</b>		
Knightsbridge current account	14,058	6,878
Christchurch subscription account	2,270	11,780
PayPal account	2,553	1,670
CCLA deposit account	3,290	3,152
CCLA investment account	86,352	79,085
CCLA fixed interest account	20,090	19,084
CCLA global equity account	14,028	12,331
	<u>142,642</u>	<u>133,979</u>