

Registered Charity Number 297488

Regional Furniture Society

Annual Report and Accounts
for the year ending
31st December 2024

TRUSTEES REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2024

The Trustees present their Report and Accounts for the year ending 31st December 2024.

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

David Fletcher, 78 Denmark Street, Bedford MK40 3TH

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 2024 were:

Chair	Liz Hancock
Secretary	Jeremy Rycroft (replaced by David Fletcher)
Treasurer	Keith Robinson (replaced by Andrew Noel)
Membership Secretary	Diana Halliwell (replaced by Sally MacLennan)
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 (replaced by Jeffrey S. Evans)

Council Officers	Louis Platman
	Catherine Grigg
	Rosalyn Sklar
	Robert Williams
	Simon Feingold
	Rachel Sycamore (co-opted)

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 2024, the Annual Conference, was held in Kent 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:

17 June – Stephen Jackson, Senior Curator, Furniture and Woodwork at National Museums of Scotland, gave a lecture on Zoom about his new book, *Scottish Furniture: 1500-1914*.

26 – 30 June – Annual Conference in Kent, based in Canterbury; visits were made to Great Dixter, Smallhythe Place, Restoration House in Rochester, St Dunstan's Church and St John's Hospital in Canterbury, Fordwich Town Hall, Penshurst Place and Stoneacre. Hans Piena gave a lecture on the application of forensic science to the identification of a pair of wooden stocks in the collections of the Rijksmuseum. The Christopher Gilbert Lecture on *The study of British regional furniture: how far have we come?* was given by David Dewing.

1 August – Visit to Leeds to see the exhibition ‘Part of the Furniture: The Library of John Bedford’ at The Treasures of the Brotherton Gallery at the University of Leeds, with an afternoon at Temple Newsam House, Leeds Museums and Galleries.

9 September – A reception was held at the Museum of the Home to celebrate the achievements of Bill and Gerry Cotton in laying the foundations of regional furniture history and to thank them for their donations of the chair collection and archive to the Museum.

14 – 24 October – Southern States of America Tour, with study visits including the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, Monticello, Colonial Williamsburg, properties in Edenton, Drayton Hall, houses in Charleston historic district, and a number of private collections.

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 has 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. A review of the Society’s media strategy has resulted in the decision to create a new post for a Social Media Editor, given its growing importance. There has been increased interest in the Society’s material on YouTube, particularly the lectures on Windsor chairs.

MANAGEMENT OF THE SOCIETY BY THE COUNCIL IN 2024

Grants & Bursaries

Wycombe Museum’s project to improve the condition and storage of the collection of regional chairs, for which a grant of £5,000 was approved, is progressing.

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. 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. £4,500 was received in 2024.

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, initially on physical records, is progressing.

Succession Management

As in previous years, new Council members have been identified to take the place of those retiring.

In 2024 the term of office of both the Treasurer and American Secretary was completed; two additional officers retired at the AGM in June. At the meeting, a new Secretary, Membership Secretary, American Secretary and a Member of Council were elected. A new Treasurer and a new member of Council were co-opted at the October Council meeting and will be confirmed by election at the 2025 AGM.

In 2025 the current Events Organiser will have completed his term of office, as will two Council members. Work is ongoing to recruit new members.

A new post for a Social Media Editor will be created, following a change to the Constitution.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held in person and on Zoom 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 in 2022 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. Webinars, available on YouTube, a series of chairs of the month, useful links to other websites, and the Society's Twitter and Instagram accounts are all 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 and 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 2024

The accounts for 2024 show a surplus of £4,358 (2023: a deficit of £1,266). This was a result of the Robert Parrott donation of £4,500. These figures exclude the unrealised investment gains.

A programme of RFS events, including visits and the Canterbury Conference, were held in 2024 producing a modest surplus of £684 which is added to the money used to fund the Society's charitable activities.

Grant and bursary spending totalled £2,627 which was payment of a proportion of the £5,000 grant to the Wycombe Museum from general funds which was approved in early 2024.

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 substantially 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 2024 the value of the Society's holdings increased by just over 5.5%. 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.

At 31 December 2024 the net worth of the Society, including reserves and unrealised gains on investments was £150,533 (2023: £142,642).

**INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES OF
THE REGIONAL FURNITURE SOCIETY
IN RESPECT OF THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2024**

This report on the accounts of the Regional Furniture Society (Registered Charity Number 297488) for the year ended 31 December 2024 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 2024

		Unrestricted Funds				
	Notes	General Fund	Designated Funds	Restricted Funds	Total 2024	Total 2023
		£	£	£	£	£
INCOMING RESOURCES						
Incoming resources from charitable activities						
Subscriptions		10,699			10,699	11,551
Publications	1	30			30	14
Visits	2	70			70	615
Lectures and conferences	2	13,485			13,485	23,190
Incoming resources from generated funds						
Donations, legacies and grants	3			4,500	4,500	0
Investment income and interest	4	3,109	414	490	4,013	3,377
Total incoming resources		27,393	414	4,990	32,797	38,747
RESOURCES EXPENDED						
Direct charitable expenditure						
Donations and grants	5	2,627			2,627	5,000
Bursaries	6	0			0	1,979
Publication of the Journal	7	3,111			3,111	2,832
Publication of the Newsletter	7	7,308			7,308	8,285
Visits	2	81			81	1,773
Lectures and conferences	2	12,790			12,790	19,129
Governance	8	1,300			1,300	327
Other resources expended	9	1,041			1,041	688
Total resources expended		28,259	0	0	28,259	40,013
Net incoming / (outgoing) resources before other recognised gains and losses		-866	414	4,990	4,538	-1,266
Other recognised gains and losses						
Gains (losses) on investments						
Realised						
Unrealised	4	2,928	425		3,353	9,971
Net movement in funds		2,062	839	4,990	7,891	8,705
Fund balances brought forward at 1 January 2024		118,213	15,253	9,176	142,642	133,937
Fund balances carried forward at 31 December 2024		120,275	16,092	14,166	150,533	142,642

Regional Furniture Society
Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31 December 2024

NOTES

1 Income from sales of the Journal, Newsletter and other RFS publications 30

2 Income and expenditure table for Visits, Lectures and Conferences

	Income	Expenditure	Surplus
Kent conference	13,485	12,790	695
Leeds event	70	81	-11
Totals	<u>13,555</u>	<u>12,871</u>	<u>684</u>

3 Robert Parrott donation 4,500

4 Investment income 3,269

CCLA deposit account interest 700

Lloyds current account interest 44

4,013

Deposit interest investment income received is split between general and designated funds in proportion to the 1 January 2024 holdings

5 Wycombe Museum grant 2,627

6 No bursaries were granted during the year 0

7 Cost of designing one and printing and mailing two editions of the Newsletter 7,308

Cost of printing and mailing one Journal during the year 3,111

10,419

8 The Society's governance costs are for travel and subsistence for meetings of the Council. 1,300

9 Public Liability Insurance 77

Website hosting, social media, other technology spending 963

1,041

Regional Furniture Society

Balance sheet as at 31 December 2024

	2024	2023
	£	£
Assets		
CCLA investments and deposits	120,275	118,213
CCLA investments designated by the Trustees: Dewdney Bequest	14,785	14,014
CCLA investments designated by the Trustees: Michael Legg Fund	1,308	1,239
Restricted Fund: Christopher Pickvance	9,505	9,176
Restricted Fund: Robert Parrott	4,661	0
	<u>150,533</u>	<u>142,642</u>
Less creditors		
Sundry creditors	0	0
	<u>150,533</u>	<u>142,642</u>
Reserves		
General reserves at 31 December 2023	118,213	109,635
Designated reserves at 31 December 2023	15,253	14,302
Restricted funds at 31 December 2023	9,176	10,000
Excess of income over expenditure	7,891	8,705
General reserves at 31 December 2024	120,275	118,213
Designated reserves at 31 December 2024	16,092	15,253
Restricted funds at 31 December 2024	14,166	9,176
	<u>150,533</u>	<u>142,642</u>

Balance sheet notes

	2024	2023
	£	£
Cash and investment balances at 31 December 2024		
Knightsbridge current account	6,032	14,059
Christchurch subscription account	652	2,270
PayPal account	1,035	2,553
CCLA COIF Charities Deposit Fund	18,991	3,290
CCLA COIF Charities Investment Fund Inc	88,303	86,352
CCLA COIF Charities Short Duration Bond Fund Inc	20,705	20,090
CCLA COIF Global Equity Fund Inc	14,816	14,028
	<u>150,533</u>	<u>142,642</u>