Right: an English oak Glastonbury chair of c.1600. Tobias Jellinek is aware of only 13 genuine early examples of this distinctive form that was very widely imitated in the 19th century. Eight of the originals are illustrated in his book.

Book Reviews

Early English Chairs and Seats, 1500-1700 by Tobias Jellinek, Antique Collectors' Club. ISBN13: 9781851495818 ISBN 1851495819 500 colour illus. 328 pages, £50 hardback.

AFTER nearly 50 years as a dealer, Tobias Jellinek makes no apology for having written what he describes as "a practical book" about early English chairs, stools and other seating rather than a furniture history book.

This experience-led approach is outlined in the introduction: "When asked by a would-be collector in around 1915 how he could learn about 'old furniture', one furniture expert gave the simple answer, "Buy some". It is a trifle more complicated than that but, without some degree of commitment, I believe it is hard to learn about early furniture."

He has personally handled most of the pieces he illustrates and helped to form many of the collections from which they are drawn. The result is a catalogue of chairs grouped according to type (enclosed armchairs, armchairs with single back panel, etc) which he is confident are genuine examples of their kind.

This is a useful service. Early oak suffered grievously at the hands of fakers, fantasists and embellishers in the earlier, less scrupulous days of antiques dealing and his section on the activities of the Wardour Street craftsmen in the 18th and 19th centuries will be salutary reading for the untutored oak collector.

His guide to dating early oak analyses the importance of patina, wear, restoration and worm damage under the general assumption that "old things look old" and that anything that looks too good to be true probably is.

Old oak, with its uniform dark patina, is notoriously difficult to photograph. Despite the fact that almost every piece was photographed specially for this publication, there are many instances where surface detail has been lost in the printing and more enlargements of key features mentioned in the descriptions would have been a welcome addition.

Mark Bridge

FOLLOWING on from his magnum opus on the Welsh dresser, Carmarthenshire dealer Richard Bebb has turned his attention to the history of another quintessentially Welsh form, the ceremonial bardic chairs traditionally awarded to the winning poets at an Eisteddfod.

In collaboration with Sioned Williams of St Fagan's museum he has charted the history of these chairs from their medieval origins, through their heyday in Victorian times, right up to the 21st century.

The Bardic Chair/ Y Gadair Farddol, with bilingual text by Richard Bebb and Dr Sioned Williams, published by Saer Books (ISBN 978-0-9553773-3-4, 250 illus, 240 pages, hardback) is available to *ATG* readers at £25 (delivery free). Order online at www.welshfurniture.com or telephone 01554 890328.

Above: National Eisteddfod chair, Birkenhead, 1878.

fetched £[illegible] refined pair in the same wood with hoop backs and pierced splats attributed to early 19th century Nottinghamshire, commanded £1700, and a single late 18th century West country version in ash, elm and oak with a double vase splat made £1500.

Earlier on, a nice set of four George III chairs in ash and elm with solid vase splats and a West Country (Bristol) attribution made a lower estimate £6000 while a set of six early 19th century Thames Valley yew examples with the refinement of triple Prince of Wales splats realised £10,000.

Rectangular tables appeared more popular than gatelegs this time around whether they were early – an Elizabethan walnut and oak draw leaf extending to 7ft 11in (2.4m) which got away at a lower estimate £8000 – or more humble such as the French six-leg pine farmhouse table with a massive 13ft 8in (4.2m) long bleached plank top set on three square supports with angled cross stretchers – at £3000.

Interestingly, a small group of Continental cupboards drew some encouraging demand, notably a well coloured 7ft 3in (2.2m) high French cherry armoire, not usually the easiest category to sell, which realised a treble estimate £4500.

Textiles

The small selection of textiles and embroideries included in the sale ranged from panels of 18th century English silk brocades to 18th and 19th century samplers, French printed toile coverlets and a few tapestries. Again demand was selective and failures included an early, 17th century English beadwork casket. It

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Left: amongst the works of art in the Masters and Makers sale, Christie's made a feature of a small, 20-lot group of pewter. Two-thirds changed hands, most on lower or below estimates. This was an exception, an 8⅞in (21cm) diameter wrigglework plate of c.1740 stamped London which doubled estimate to take £1900. The decoration of a stag is possibly by the same hand as that on a plate by William Bartlett of London that sold for £2700 as part of the Barkin Collection at Bonhams Chester in May this year.

Right: if pewter prices at CSK were a little lacklustre, bidders took much more of a shine to a dozen lots of 19th century copper kitchen utensils offered later on. Sets of saucepans, decorative jelly mounds, preserving pans and various other elements from a typical Victorian batterie de cuisine were all readily snapped up. Several made well over estimate, like this ban marie dish fitted with a near set of 11 graduated pans, many bearing the mark of the well known makers Benham and Froud, that went for £3500.