

Cottages in villages in the Middle Ages were squat and dark, dwarfed by the church, the castle and the manor house. Without chimneys, smoke from the fire had to find its way out through the partially opened doors or through small window apertures which were closed in cold weather with pieces of cloth or wooden shutters.

Usually the interior would be divided into two rooms, one for sleeping and the other for eating. Pigs and poultry would wander about on the straw floors in both. When required, a flickering rush-light would provide some light.

Furniture was rare, other than a few stools, a trestle table, a bench, a chest for the Sunday clothes and frames for the bags of straw on which the occupants slept. Cooking pots, dishes, a washing tub and a home made broom were the usual chattels.

Few of the cottages were of stone and most were built on wooden frames, the walls being made of rows of sticks between which long twigs were intertwined, creating a lattice work. Over these frames layers of mud or mud-straw mixtures would be plastered on and left to dry. Roofs were usually thatched with straw, or reeds or occasionally wooden shingles.

For considerable contrast, a late 18th century description of a Yorkshire doctor's home follows:

'As you entered the kitchen there was on the right one of those open chimneys which afford more comfort on a winter's evening than the finest register stove; in front of the chimney stood a wooden bee-hive chair, and on each side was a long oak seat with a back to it, the seats serving as chests in which the oaten bread was kept. They were of the darkest brown and well polished by constant use. On the back of each were the same initials as those over the door, with the date 1610.

The great oak Table, and the chest in the best kitchen which held the house linen, bore the same date.

The chimney was well hung with bacon, the rack which covered half the ceiling bore equal marks of plenty; mutton hams were suspended from other parts which the turf fire, though

Home Sweete Home



Oak Gothic style cupboard, c.1500, which originally would have been painted with sacred and heraldic subjects. The front is composed of six panels, two of which form doors, perforated with openings of Gothic tracery cut in the solid for purposes of ventilation, as food, candles, wine and many edibles were kept in such cupboards

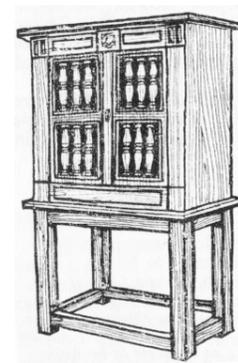
perpetual as that of the Magi, or of the Vestal Virgins, did not overpower.

A few pewter dishes were ranged above the trenchers, opposite the door, on a conspicuous shelf. The other treasures of the best kitchen, halfway from the floor, and touching the ceiling. They consisted of a

silver saucepan, a silver goblet and four Apostle spoons.

Here also King Charles's Golden Rules were pasted against the wall, and a large print of Daniel in the Lion's Den.

Six black chairs were arranged against the wall, where they were seldom disturbed from their array. They had been purchased by Daniel the grandfather, upon his marriage, and were the most costly purchase that had ever been made in the family; for the goblet was a legacy.' (Excerpt from Christopher Hibbert, *The English - A Social History*)



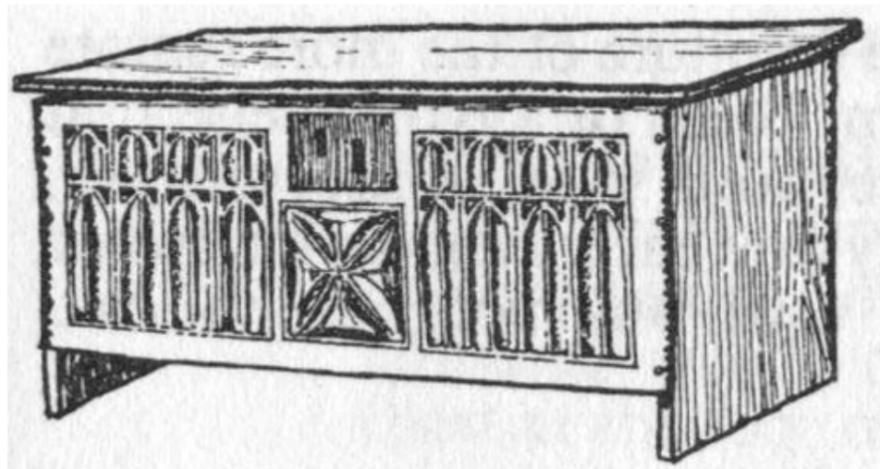
A food cupboard from the late 16th/early 17th century with panels of turned spindles forming grille doors. There were endless variations on this idea of a cupboard on a stand, the two most popular being the buffet or court cupboard and the hall cupboard

Modest homes, like those of the well-to-do, were more adequately furnished than in times gone by. The most cherished pieces were oak tables, chests and settles which had been passed down in the family from generation to generation. Such pieces would have been thrown out of the better homes long ago. With the increasing popularity of collecting, a lot of middle class houses contained large numbers of attractive ornaments.

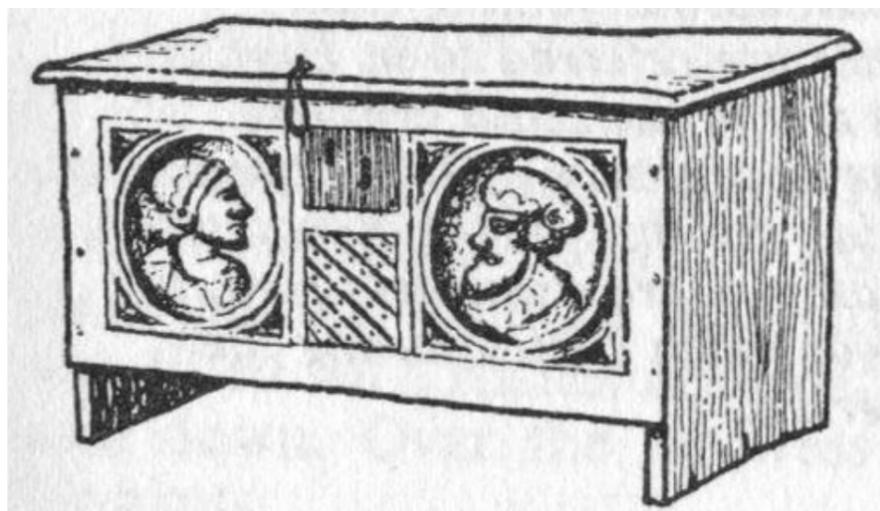
Small houses of artisans commonly displayed several pictures and looking glasses as well as curtains, chests of drawers, tables and beds complete with bolsters and full linen such as we use today. A 1744 inventory of a weaver included such items as well as numerous kitchen utensils, some of copper, candlesticks and bellows, glass dishes, pewter measures, smoothing irons, four teapots, 16 cups and saucers, 16 plates, two silver spoons, two chamber pots and a bird cage!

Conservation of pieces of such antiquity is done with great reverence and respect for the early craftsmen, and the inherent value of each item. Very little of the furniture from the 16th century exists or is available to collectors. However enthusiasts need not miss out. Reproduction of these early pieces using traditional, authentic cabinet-making techniques is possible, and affordable ■

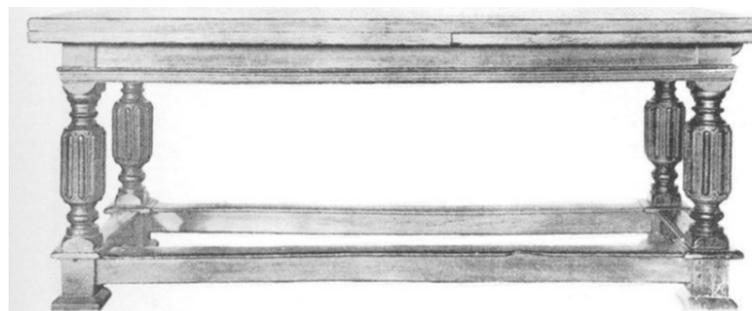
GARY OLSSON
GN Olsson
07 3888 1549



Sixteenth century Gothic-style six board chest showing low relief carving. In times of trouble, a chest was needed to quickly store and transport the valuables such as banners and other wall hangings, silverware and gold, and blankets



Another six-board chest, displaying the Italian style medallion head carved decoration. Barons returning to England from wars on the Continent brought new Italian Renaissance ideas with them. Popularity of this style increased throughout England during the later part of the 16th century



Oak Draw-Table (1560) with classic French-inspired mouldings and legs, with T-shaped cross-section foot rail. When not in use for meals these were often covered with a fine Persian rug. The superseded trestle tables were relegated to the servants' quarters

G. N. Olsson

Mastercraftsmen ~ Furniture Makers

Authentic
Antique Restorations and Reproductions
Investments
Custom Manufacture of Corporate Executive Furniture
Heirlooms
Classic Fine Furniture

Queries &
Appointments
07 3888 1549

393 Narangba Rd, Brisbane
Fax: 07 3888 5330
Email: gnolsson@workin4u.com.au
www.workin4u.com.au/gnolsson