

Malleny House

Malleny House, outside Edinburgh, was a perfect setting for the group's lunch on Friday, by kind permission of David Learmont, former Curator of the National Trust for Scotland. The house, built c.1635 by Sir James Murray of Kilbaberton, incorporates the remains of a Royal hunting lodge with a wing of 1823. It is now owned by the NTS, which also manages the three acre walled garden. The house formed a superb backdrop for David Learmont's fine collection of furniture.

Most notable for this Scottish based AGM, was a collection of driftwood furniture from the Northern Isles. The distinctive character of this Scottish island furniture was certainly felt by the group as they sat



Fig 3. Shetland chair

furniture fitted well alongside more genteel types which resulted in an eclectic mix of furniture throughout the house, a feature common to the Scottish home. It was within such a context that one could examine similar types found in both Scotland and England; for example, the winged armchair of the North of England and the hooded armchair of Shetland (fig. 3), which highlights the importance of understanding the social context within which such furniture was produced.

Unfortunately, one and a half hours was not enough time for the visit and I am sure David will receive requests for further visits from individual members.

Caroline Hirst

The National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh

The members were split into two groups for a lightning tour of the Renaissance Gallery, Museum of Scotland, under the fleet-footed guidance of Stephen Jackson, curator of Scottish and European Furniture; and Hugh Ceape, curator, Scottish Modern Collections. We noted an elaborately painted ceiling circa 1617, from Rossend Castle, Burntisland, Fife, similar to those we saw at Newark, and characteristic of Scottish Renaissance buildings. Next, a bookcase made from parts of a box bed reputedly from Threave Castle, the 15th century stronghold of the Black Douglases, was examined. It was allegedly made up from timbers procured in Kirkcudbright in 1830 by the antiquarian Joseph Train, who furnished Sir Walter Scott with much of his relic collection. The use of an idiosyncratic punch to decorate some of the figures, which was also used on three other carved pieces from the same area (Dumfriesshire), suggests that they were all from the same workshop. We learnt to recognise features associated with Scottish caquetteuse chairs, and saw an example circa 1570, possibly the oldest surviving

accompanied by an almost lifelike party of chairs in the dining room. The most well-known was the boarded armchair designed to keep out draughts in the traditional homes of the islanders and the most memorable was an armchair with a simple incised scroll cresting rail and banister back. A cradle with an unusual boarded hood was also examined and discussed as a type from the Northern Isles. Vernacular



Fig 4 Scottish caquetteuse chair made for Sir William Douglas of Glenbervie, Angus in 1665

Scottish chair of this type, thought to have belonged to Arabella, Countess of Mar. We were shown several dated pieces such as a pulpit dated 1598 from Parton, Dumfriesshire; a painted screen 1629; a carved chair 1665 (fig. 4), and a bed decorated with the arms of the Traill family of Fife dated 1641. The chair made in 1665 in the late debased caquetteuse style had the family genealogy, some fictitious, of Sir William (d.1692) 2nd Baronet of

Glenbervie (Angus) and Dame Ann Douglas carved on the back. It was also interesting to see the preaching tent from Carnock, Fife, made about 1790 which was featured in an article by David Jones in REGIONAL FURNITURE VIII, 1994. Another piece dated 1858, was a pine pew (with a simulated painted grain) which turned into a communion table. Another unusual piece was Buchanan's 'polyterpic table' on reeded legs; its title loosely translated means for 'multiple enjoyment'. It was essentially a games table with an additional mechanism to view scenes.

Susan Stuart

Granton Centre

At the National Museums of Scotland's Granton Centre, we examined highland vernacular chairs and other furniture with Stephen Jackson; and visited the conservation workshop. The Museum of Scotland's Furniture Conservator Sarah Gerrish showed us a Boulle cabinet on stand from Newhailes, the base of which was badly twisted, and some of the Boulle-work was missing or had lifted. Discussions took place about the pros and cons of restoration, versus containment or consolidation. A pair of large oriental Momoyama lacquered tea chests inlaid with mother of pearl were also on display for us to examine. The chests were lined with original printed paper, and were fitted with semi-circular oriental brass lifting handles.

Stephen Jackson showed us a collection of highland chairs including a Caithness chair branded on its pine seat 'JK' (fig. 5); it was of 'Sutherland' construction made from naturally bent timber, with four legs tenoned into the seat rail. A three legged stool allegedly taken by an emigrant to Australia and recently



Fig 5 Chair from Achlipster, Caithness. Made of birch with pine seat, 19th century

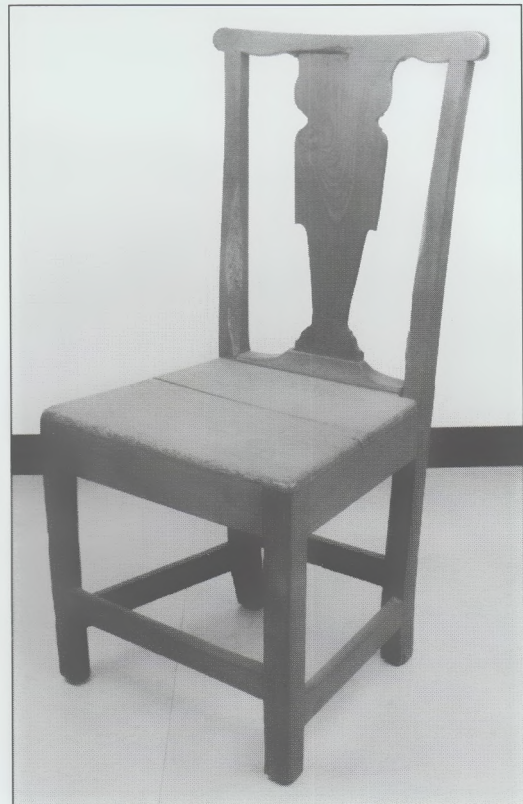


Fig 6 Laburnum chair, probably from Perthshire or Angus and probably early 19th century

repatriated by a descendent was discussed. Opinions varied about its timber – bog-oak, pine, eucalyptus? Also why a Scotsman would take it half way round the world? Amongst other chairs were some made in Scots Laburnum (*cytisus alpirus*) (fig. 6), a wood sometimes used as a substitute for mahogany. Some trees had a



Fig 7 Cradle from Weydale, Caithness, pine, late 18th or early 19th century

girth as wide as ten feet and were forty feet high. A cradle on rockers (fig. 7) with a kurfed hood (a Scottish and Irish feature), sharply canted sides, jointed not nailed was discussed. It was decided that the knobs along the sides were used for tying the child in; or to prevent cats settling on the cradle. Apparently in the sixteenth century it was thought that 'children should

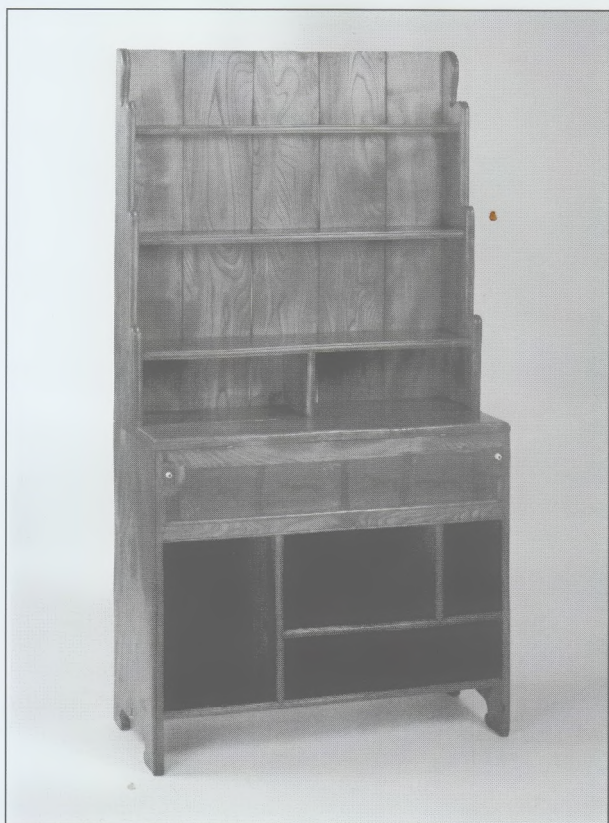


Fig. 8 Elm bureau-bookcase made by Lorimer

be taped in' and not allowed to sleep with mothers in case they were inadvertently smothered. An elm bureau-bookcase (fig. 8) from the east coast of Scotland by Lorimer was also discussed, as was a chair from Fife with a 'Lanarkshire leg', its back with two horizontal stay rails separated by three tiny balls; this pattern has English fashionable furniture associations which can be traced back to the early 19th century, the balls possibly representing cannon balls? Our thanks are due to Hugh Cheape, Stephen Jackson, and Sarah Gerrish for giving us a most stimulating and instructive afternoon.

Susan Stuart