

## Clarke Hall and Masonic Temple, Wakefield

Sunday AM 10th October 2004

Some 35 members of the group met, on a lovely sunny morning at Clarke Hall, a late 17th century gentleman farmer's house, which has been furnished with appropriate original and also reproduction furniture. The house, dating to 1680, was especially set up in the early 1970s by Peter Brears, as a working household to be used by schools as an educational resource for living history. The group was met by Paul Mackintosh, a very enthusiastic guide and teacher, in the costume of the period. Paul explained something of the history of the house and also how role-play sessions were carried out. Visiting children take on roles; making beds, making butter, writing with quill pens and weaving cloth! Some splendid reproduction earthenware pottery produced by John Hudson of Mirfield could be seen all around the house, including examples in the style of Thomas Toft.

Benjamin Clarke, steward for the Duke of Norfolk's lands around York and Ripon, had moved here and rebuilt a pre-existing Hall in 1680. Clarke himself died in 1688 and his wife Priscilla married a wool merchant from Wakefield a year later. Furnishings inside the house and activities reflect this social background.

The group was led by Peter Thornborrow and Michael Legg who commented on special pieces of furniture. A 'dole' cupboard (fig 12) in the Great Hall with turned baluster front and marquetry top would have been used for the storage of precious glasses. The particular design of hinges was noted.

A huge 14ft long table (Fig 13 and 14) with most unusual triangular based feet at each end had been returned from Oakwell Hall to its original home.

Comments were made on the two press cupboards, one dating to 1687 with Westmorland style carving of interlaced hearts. A replica clock had been made in Turkey. Unfortunately, no period inventories had been discovered for the house. It was significant that Mr Haldane, an antiquarian, had lived at Clarke Hall in about the 1920s and 30s. Wishing to turn the Hall into a medieval manor house he had faked a moat, a priest's hole and probably other features within the house.

The outstanding feature at Clarke Hall was the



Fig 12.

superb plaster ceiling in the dining parlour. It is one of only a few ceilings which are dated in the plasterwork, this one to 1680, and is almost certainly the work of Samuel Gombie who did another similar ceiling at New House Hall, near Huddersfield. The sweetcorn might suggest links with America. Other features in this room included a really good brass curfew and oak box with inlaid date.

The weaving room upstairs had some magnificent oak floorboards. The great bedchamber housed a large replica four poster bed and underneath was a replica truckle bed.

Clarke Hall provides an excellent opportunity for children to experience something of life as it was at the period. Mr Haldane has somewhat confused historical researches, in more recent times, and it was a great shame that no original inventories have been discovered. However Clarke Hall provided a stimulating visit for the group, giving much food for thought and discussion on the individual pieces.

An orderly procession of cars continued into Wakefield to visit the Masonic Temple. Freemasonry had been established in the city in 1766 with a warrant from Grand Lodge. The masons met originally in a public house, then the Rectory House was purchased and used in 1854. Having become too small for three lodges to meet, in the late 1870s it was decided to erect a new hall, which was opened in 1883. Quantities of furnishings had been built up over the years and were used in the new temple. For the most part there was no documentation for this



Fig 13. The Clarke Hall table



Fig 14. Detail of table

furniture, except for three splendid chairs by Wright and Elwick of Wakefield, fine furniture makers. The firm was in existence from 1748 - 1824 when they sold out. The chairs still in daily use in the dining room have been dated to 1876 and are in excellent condition. Another armchair from the Wakefield Chapter of Gregorians (not part of the Freemasonry movement) dated probably to c1790.

A tour of the upstairs Masonic Temple took place. Chairs in use for Senior and Junior Wardens were Derbyshire- and Yorkshire-style armchairs. The Master's wainscot-type chair provoked a lot of discussion. The carved half lozenge in the back with Prince of Wales feathers was an emblem for Wakefield. If the carving was contemporary with the chair, then this would authenticate the chair to the Wakefield region.

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