

Treasurer's House and St William's College

Friday morning, 16 July

Secluded behind a high garden wall at the back of the Minster stands the Treasurer's House, mainly of early 17th century date and so called because this was the site of the medieval mansion used by the treasurers of York Minster up to the Reformation. The present house had fallen into decline by the late 19th century, when it was acquired by Frank Green, who extensively restored and remodelled it between 1897 and 1900 and furnished it with his collection of antiques. We were 'introduced' to the late Mr Green by the present house manager, Roger Carr-Whitworth; he (Green) was clearly a man of strong opinions, who left the house to the National Trust with strict instructions that none of the furniture should be moved an inch out of place, as denoted by marks on the floor, threatening to haunt the house for ever more if anyone should not follow his will! In fact the house was only recently rearranged according to Green's intentions and it stands now much as he would have left it in 1930. We hope he rests in peace, although from his portraits he appears to have been a severe and less than contented being.

Green's most ambitious intervention in the house was to create a double-height 'medieval' hall where none had stood before, and this was furnished with two oak refectory tables, one with a date of 1686 and a Yorkshire provenance, some oak armchairs, walnut cane chairs and a pair of upholstered walnut armchairs. Beyond the hall there is a very well-executed staircase which is original to the house and probably dates to around 1700. As we proceeded round the house, guided most expertly by Roger Carr-Whitworth and Adam Bowett, it was clear that Green's acquisitions had not always been quite what he might have expected; but this is nevertheless a fascinating collection of the 17th and 18th centuries which very much reflects the antique trade and the state of furniture history scholarship of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The house is essentially a series of period rooms created by Green, with no attempt to link them to any real history of the house or its actual occupants. It was used by Edward VII and Queen Alexandra in 1900, so some of the rooms are named after them, adding to the somewhat confusing 'history'. One wonders slightly what impression the average visitor comes away with. There was certainly much to interest us and we are grateful for being given such ready access by the Trust to examine the furniture closely.

St William's College

The college was built in 1465 adjacent to the Minster as accommodation for chantry priests. Their duties involved frequent daily visits to the Minster so they needed somewhere close by to sleep, eat and pray, and for these functions they were given a small room each and a communal refectory hall and chapel. All was arranged on two floors around an open courtyard, and after a chequered history since the Reformation the building survives today, restored and altered to some extent by Frank Green in the early 20th century, as a space for various meetings and receptions associated with the Minster. We were interested to examine a large refectory table in 'the chamber', a room created at one end of the hall in the 17th century, and across the courtyard there was a peculiar 'painted chamber' display, representing the living conditions of a chantry priest in the medieval period, with some dubious-looking pieces of furniture but rather wonderful painted panelling with trailing plants and flowers, of possibly 16th century date. At some point in the history of the college the chapel seems to have disappeared, or perhaps we missed it, but evidently York has quite a few to spare.