

# Two Lectures

Friday evening, 16 July

Peter Brown, *The Mansion House, York*

Peter Brears, *Some Aspects of Below Stairs Furniture*

As we digested an excellent dinner at the Monkbar Hotel the two Peters gave us a splendid double-act. Both were brief and left us wishing for more. Peter Brown, director of York Civic Trust, gave us a foretaste of what we were to see the following morning at York Mansion House, which was designed as a repository of civic archives and as a town residence for the lord mayor, work starting in 1725, apparently merging two designs from Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*. He told us of an extensive suite of carved oak furniture supplied by John Taylor dating from the 1870s.

York Civic Trust acquired the property in the 1990s, at which time the interior was in poor condition. The decision was made to restore the house to the mid-Victorian era, incorporating surviving earlier furniture such as a splendid long-case clock by Henry Hindley of York, a contemporary of Harrison. Ackermann designs were used as a basis for the window curtains. The climax of the house is the state room, occupying the full width of the first floor and rising through two storeys. This had 17 layers of green paint, and layer number three was chosen as the basis for the room's redecoration. The mayor's chain of office from 1602 was still in use for ceremonial occasions but the trust persuaded the civic authorities to accept a substitute for future use. The lecture left us looking forward to our visit the following morning.

Peter Brears, former director of Leeds City Museums and a previous curator at the York Castle Museum, talked about two types of kitchen furniture for food preparation: the table and the dresser, concentrating on those provided for large houses. In early examples of both, the work-surface was typically very thick - between three and five inches - and was normally covered with a cloth except when the surface was used for kneading dough. He showed us specimens of freestanding tables on trestles from the Tudor period, and an example from Rockingham Castle of c.1560 in which the trestles were set into the ground.

Dressers started as wall-based tables and then developed pot-boards below and shelves above. During the 18th century plate-racks acquired characteristic stepped ends, widening as they went up, as at Uppark (1747-50) and Powys (1751). The woodwork became more elaborate with quadrant ends to the work-surface and shaped aprons to the drawer frames (1a Royal Crescent, Bath, 1760s and Ormesby Hall, c.1770). There was a return to plainer styles in the late 18th and early 19th centuries before the arrival of an 'Elizabethan' phase towards the mid-19th century. Architect-designed kitchens followed, typified by Clements, Jeakes & Co's work at Harewood House and Lanhydrock. Thomas Robertson of Alnwick made kitchen furniture to Salvin's designs. Those items made for Alnwick Castle, having been dispersed, sometimes turn up in private houses. Philip Webb heralded the vogue for white-painted dressers, as at Standen.

Finally we saw a slide of Lutyens's beautiful round beechwood kitchen table at Castle Drogo (1927), perhaps the acme of kitchen furniture design before the decline into chipboard and MDF. What Peter Brears did not show us were his own beautifully executed scale drawings of kitchen furniture, reminiscent of architectural drawings of the early 20th century, and it is to be hoped that he will eventually publish these.