

# Castle Museum

Thursday afternoon, 15 July

Michelle Petyt, assistant curator of social history at the Castle Museum, and an RFS member, gave us an interesting introduction to the museum and its history. The building was originally a debtors' prison built in 1705.

The museum was established in 1938 to house the folk art collection of Dr. John L. Kirk (d.1940), who became the museum's first curator. Its most innovative features were the period rooms and a cobbled street in which artefacts were displayed in their context. Dr Kirk purchased period shop fronts from York and other towns, artefacts, and vernacular and fashionable furniture from antique dealers and Yorkshire farmhouses; many of these items were eventually incorporated into the period room settings and the collections. Unfortunately for the furniture historian today, Dr. Kirk did not keep records of the origins or provenance of these pieces, so valuable information has been lost. Michelle encouraged members to share their knowledge in order to help her identify possible places of manufacture.

The museum houses a fine collection of British and European spinning wheels which have been expertly catalogued by Valerie and David Bryant, and we were privileged to examine a small selection of mainly York wheels with the help of Valerie's commentary. During the 18th century spinning became not only a commercial industry but also a genteel occupation for Georgian ladies, and spinning wheel manufacturers including makers such as John Planta, John Jameson, the Doughty family and John and Charles Hardy made fine wheels for Yorkshire ladies. They could, for example, try their hand at flax spinning on a 'speeded flax' mark two or mark three machine by the ingenious Joseph Doughty (1795-1861). Most of the spinning wheels on display had makers' labels or impressed names on them. One delicately turned mahogany boudoir wheel circa 1780-1800, had a trade label for John Jameson of York pasted in the drawer. Val gave us a description of the technical developments as well as where to look for makers' impressed marks; in some cases, the name of the owner (occasionally the owner and the maker) might appear.

In addition to the spinning wheels, Michelle Petyt had arranged a display of bills and other material relating to Yorkshire joiners and cabinet makers including John Hardcastle of Borough Bridge, J.R. Broadley, furniture broker, York, Thomas Walls, cabinet maker, upholsterer and undertaker of York; a trade label for Joseph Hall of Hull was of especial interest since it illustrated examples of furniture.

Michelle then led a tour of the period rooms. The Victorian parlour, set up in 1938, featured fashionable furniture made about 1870. The vernacular furniture in

the moorland cottage was discussed, and a late 18th century nursing chair was thought by some members to be probably made in the east midlands. In the 17th century dining room several dated pieces were noted and possible origins of manufacture were discussed. The carved oak buffet cupboard inscribed EB 1698 from Dr Kirk's house was generally thought to originate from the Lake District area; and the cradle dated 1697, collected in the Leeds area was also discussed. A scrutoire on a cluster column base, dating from the third quarter of the 17th century, was of special interest. It had cedar-lined drawers with moulded edges, black centres and ebony knobs. The Georgian room incorporated painted pine panelling from a house in Davy Gate, York, and we noted a harpsichord by Thomas Haxby of York which has been restored to working order. A longcase clock by Thomas Tompion and George Graham was also admired by members. A windsor chair of the type made in the vale of York, similar to examples illustrated by Adam Bowett in *Regional Furniture* volume XVIII (2004) was on display in the open hearth gallery, and another Yorkshire windsor, probably from the Scarborough area, was on display in the barn gallery.

Michelle Petyt, and Valerie and David Bryant, gave us a most enjoyable, informative and stimulating afternoon at the Castle Museum - a fitting introduction to our York conference.

*Susan Stuart*