

# St Anthony's Hall Quilt Museum and The Black Swan

Friday afternoon, 16 July

The Quilt Museum became appropriately housed in St Anthony's Hall in 2008, by courtesy of York Civic Trust and York Conservation Trust. A unique quirk of history has united a modern guild with an ancient guildhall. Built on

the site of an older chapel, the stone walls at ground floor level formerly enclosed two sides of the original hospital and its chapel, and helped support the timber-framed hall above.

Some larger religious guilds provided three things: a chapel where prayers for members could be read, a hospital for care of the sick, and help for the poor. Trade guilds continued this tradition. In Elizabethan times parishes were required to provide employment for the able poor and in 1567 it was decided to fit out the hall as a workhouse for 'webbing and weaving to avoid loitering and idleness of vagabonds and poor folk'. The hall was set out with £100-worth of looms for weaving, a hogshead of whale oil, shears and other necessary materials, as well as food for those who were engaged in spinning, carding or weaving. St Anthony's provided a home for the Bluecoat school from 1705 until 1946.

In 1665 a timber and plaster superstructure was replaced with brick apart from the oak posts supporting the main roof trusses in the hall. The great hall is 28ft by 81ft with side aisles 15ft wide. The side aisles have shallow bell-shaped roof timbers with plaster between.

Two early 17th century oak guild tables remain: one is the Skinners' and the other, as the incised text on one edge says, 'This Donat at the Charges of the Joiners, Carpenters and Masons 1608'. The group discussed the mysterious origins of four highly carved pine benches of about 1720/30, some with backs sporting sturdy cherubs tangled among foliage. Their origin is believed to be the Assembly Rooms. A debate centred on whether there were the skills in York to accomplish the work or whether they were made abroad, perhaps in the Low Countries. It was agreed that while the style of Grinling Gibbons' work might not have arisen without a residence in Holland, the tradition of woodcarving must have been well established in York for him to return home and his work to flourish. There was no reason to suggest that local craftsmen could not have made and decorated the benches. More research will be necessary.

An image of the Assembly Hall in the costume display at Fairfax House shows plain benches placed along both walls in front of the double row of pillars when panniers were fashionable dress. It is possible that they could have been replaced, as fashions changed, by these more ebullient ones, or that they were placed in another prominent position in the building.

## The Black Swan

The outside of a complex building swathed in scaffolding and net was a challenge to interpret. Photographs from 1900 on the entrance walls show a down-at-heel plastered exterior with the mere hint of an underlying building of real age. At some point when the building was recognised to be of historic interest the oak beams were exposed on

the outside. It sits in isolation opposite the Quilt Museum, the only remaining historic buildings in the neighbourhood apart from the parish church of St Cuthbert and Peasholme House (1752). Others in a once run-down area have been demolished.

The plaque outside the public house describes it as the home of former Lord Mayor of York, William Bowes in 1443. This, according to Ian Pattison and Peter Brears, belies the structural evidence. A previous dwelling may have occupied the site. A building date of 1545 chimes well with his grandson, Lord Mayor of London and Treasurer of the Royal Mint in the time of Queen Elizabeth: 16th century and later, seemed to them reasonable for the surviving structure as a whole.

The salon upstairs and all but one ground floor ceilings are plastered in tune with the later 17th century. The former kitchen, with a wide inglenook fireplace, is the only room to retain its timber ceiling joists unplastered. The cornices are carefully placed round what is surmised to be the earlier underlying structural beams. The painted and almost indistinguishable frieze above the fireplace tied in with the panelling and Delft tiles and later fire basket in Dutch style. The walls of the salon consist of fielded timber panels decorated in trompe-l'oeil fashion with alternately oval and rectangular elements to give a three-dimensional look. The building timbers and painted panels have darkened with age, with plasterwork and fielded panels suffering the same fate with the addition of nicotine. Peter Brears, familiar with Oakwell Hall, said the treatment of panelling there is much lighter though substantially the same. In both cases a rare, perhaps unique, survival of this technique.

Ian Pattison's notes and *A Brief History of the Hall* with text by Janet Rae were excellent sources. Peter Brears and Ian Pattison are especially thanked for their contribution to the unravelling of dates and styles of both these buildings.

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