



Private Visits in County Durham

18 June

In the morning we were warmly welcomed at a very special house, owned by two of our members who were former curators at Beamish Open Air Museum. The house is an amazing on-going conservation project where the best of the old has been maintained and the latest technology has been incorporated - not least to fend off the weather. This family home provides a perfect setting for a varied and continually growing collection of artifacts from north east England. After coffee and an introductory talk we split into three groups, led by the owners and Peter Brears, to tour the house.

We started upstairs in what had at one stage been two bedrooms and a small bathroom - now a beamed open space for entertaining and collecting, with an enormous ornate carved wood and stone fireplace at one end, and a gallery at the other. Here in particular we studied eight 17th century joined oak armchairs, all from the same workshop, which Peter Brears has drawn in Tobias Jellinek's recent book, *Early British Chairs and Seats* (pp179-181). Three are shown below. The main common features are the three lunettes, sometimes with a tree of life, and the two ears acting as finials on the chair cresting. Where the back joins the seat is a gap, another unique feature, referred to by the owner as the 'letterbox slot.'

Bought locally and on line, one had been in the porter's lodge at Durham Castle and another example is in Ripon Cathedral chapter house. We considered these design features, seen in around 30 existing examples. There was also a court cupboard from the same workshop.

After completing our tour of the house it was time to move on, but not before a delicious lunch. On behalf of us all, Adam Bowett thanked our hosts for a fascinating visit.

Daphne and Mike Todd