

ANNUAL CONFERENCE & AGM, HALIFAX, WEST YORKSHIRE

12th to 14th July 2002

Oakwell Hall, am Friday 12th July 2002



Fig. 4:126

Friday morning of the AGM weekend started at Oakwell Hall, Gomersall, with a talk by Peter Thornborrow on the buildings and furniture we were to see in the next three days. Peter explained how his love of buildings led him to change career and eventually become County Buildings Officer. Throughout the three days he gave us the benefit of his extensive local knowledge. The fact that he had organised the AGM in Halifax was no

accident, he explained. The woollen industry in the 16th century had made the Halifax area a particularly rich one within West Yorkshire. The local tenant farmers were allowed to buy the freehold of their land and this encouraged their entrepreneurialism. The consequent wealth was reflected in the buildings and furniture we saw over the three days. Peter explained that in the early 17th century Halifax parish was one of the richest livings in the country.

In terms of furniture Peter identified the lozenge with triple-lobed decoration at each point and criss-cross 'nail head' shading in each lobe (Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, fig. 4.126) as the 'Halifax lozenge'. Other suggested local patterns were the elongated 'ear' ending in a small 'ear-ring' scroll on a crested armchair (fig. 4.116), and the lozenge with vigorous pennants issuing from its four points (fig. 4.130). He also drew attention to the Yorkshire tradition of three-tier press cupboards about which he wrote in *Regional Furniture*, 1997.

Oakwell Hall was the first of a number of stone-built 16th and 17th century houses which we were to visit. The house dated from 1583 and included a later added open hall, a feature which remained popular in West Yorkshire gentry house into the seventeenth century. The hall had an impressive screen incorporating Doric

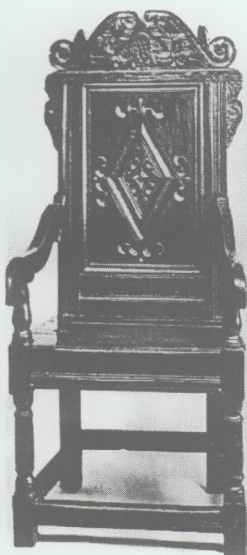


Fig. 4:130

columns made out of single oak trunks, and the walls of the Great Parlour were painted in trompe l'oeil imitating late 17th century walnut panelling.

The most impressive furniture at Oakwell Hall to my mind were the beds. A bed from the first half of the sixteenth century belonging to the V & A (and possibly from Crackenthorpe Hall, Cumbria) contained a seven panel headboard decorated with flowers and birds on which the carving ended lower than on seventeenth century beds when the custom was to have higher bedding and pillows. The tester rails carried dragons and the posts and headboard rails had a broad zig-zag pattern in which each triangle was filled with three stylised leaves reminiscent of those on 'Northamptonshire' boarded coffers (Chinnery, fig. 3.364). The headboard carried the message 'Dread God, Love God, Praise God' and initials 'H.F.' in black mastic.

A second bed from the late 16th century, which Victor Chinnery suggested was London-made, had a 'Nonesuch' inlay and 'marblewood' (compressed wood shavings) headboard and fluted posts. A third and later bed, from Gilling Castle, had heavy carving, coarse inlaid panels, caryatids, and lozenges with pennants. Victor Chinnery suggested that the continuing popularity of inlay in Yorkshire in the later 17th century may derive from the migration of London-based craftsmen who expanded into the Yorkshire market where this old fashioned tradition was still in demand.

At the other extreme but with its own appeal was a well-patinated oak close stool, made of plain rectangular outward sloping panels one of which was a door, and with a sliding top: an eminently practical design.

By contrast to the 2001 AGM, held in Birmingham, the Halifax location meant we were in the heart of a well-researched area from the furniture point of view. Yet paradoxically it was this depth of research that allowed Peter Thornborrow to emphasise the distinctive traditions within Yorkshire rooted in specific local social and economic structures. On the question of the decorative patterns attributed by Peter to the Halifax area, some members felt that lozenges with pennants could also be found in other parts of the country and could not be 'claimed' as exclusively West Yorkshire though it is this particular treatment that is distinctive of the 'fluttering' Halifax pennants. Such discussions suggest why regional furniture studies can only succeed as a co-operative, national and international enterprise.

Chris Pickavance

Bolling Hall, pm Friday 12th July 2002

Bolling Hall dates back to the Norman Conquest. An impressive U-shaped building, it is constructed of stone blockwork with quoins, but like many others has undergone changes over the years. Our guide Peter clearly has an intimate knowledge of the house, and drew our attention especially to the tower at the west end with its corner projection, and the impressive windows across the middle, dating from the 1720s and



Fig. 2 Peel House

1780s, the latter by John Carr who redesigned the east wing. More recently the house was let to various tenants which included handloom weavers in the 19th century.

The entrance to Bolling Hall is via the base of the west tower which connects to the kitchen. This leads towards the 'housebody' a term used in the West Riding during the 16th and 17th centuries for the most important room. The fine oak table in The Great Hall has carving on the frieze which only extends to the front and sides, suggesting it was probably made to stand against a wall. There was also discussion about the stools or benches which could be lifted and stored sideways over the lower stretchers of the table.

By contrast, the other rooms primarily contain furniture from the latter half of the 18th century. Of particular note, in one of the bedrooms, is a couch bed made for Harewood House by Thomas Chippendale in 1769.

There followed an interesting discussion with the Museum staff as to what should constitute a collection of National importance, particularly with regard to provenance, relevance, quality of artifacts, extent of restoration and diversity.

David Bryant

Friday Evening

After dinner on Friday evening Peter Thornborrow gave a brief introduction to the local area, mentioning geological and geographical factors influencing the built environment, together with details about how the wool trade in this area was organised and worked outside the usual restrictions applied by guilds in other areas.

In the county of West Yorkshire there is a limestone belt running down the east side of the county and here, with the softer water, the best farms and breweries are to be found. In the centre of the county there are coal measures and to the west side higher land overlaid with mill stone grit measures. Halifax, being to the west of the county, is very close to the start of the higher land where the landscape is characterised by plenty of surface stone in the upland areas and very steeply sided wooded valleys. Such materials were used in the buildings of the area: some early, timber-framed buildings being encased in grit stone as prosperity increased.

Halifax was a manufacturing, dyeing and trading centre of the wool cloth trade and in the context of our studies was particularly prosperous during the late 16th century through to the end of the 17th century.

During this period, it seems that in the Halifax and Hebden Bridge area, many farms were between 12-20 acres and many families combined self sufficiency in farming with wool cloth manufacture for extra income.

The highly distinctive and decorative detailing of numerous surviving farmhouses and churches in the locality, together with the evidence of vigorous carved decoration in stone and wood, the lavish use of wood for fixtures and fittings and locally made furniture, provide useful indicators of the prosperity which the farmers, tradesmen and merchants enjoyed; numerous slides illustrating specific local motifs and details repeated in wood and stone prepared us for what we were to see the following day and effectively communicated the context in which such work had flourished.

Peter's excellent knowledge of the wealth of this area's heritage allowed us to be rapidly introduced to some of the best surviving examples of houses and local furniture he had located.

T.L. Phelps

Saturday 13th July

Saturday proved an unusual day for the Society in view of the number of small gentry and yeoman houses we were privileged to visit; a reflection of the wealth in the Halifax area, the extent to which its architecture and furniture had survived, the level of local knowledge and the connections of Peter Thornborrow.

Our visits included Peel House, Kershaw House, Bank House, Heptonstall Grammar School Museum, St. Thomas at Heptonstall, St. Peter at Sowerby, Lower Old Hall and Lane Head.

There were occasional examples, such as at Lower Old Hall, where the wood carver and stone mason had deployed similar iconography in their use of the lozenge motifs; an interesting conjunction of material cultures!



Fig. 3

From a built-in 16th century painted dais canopy integral to a plank and stud screen at Bank House, to further examples of 17th century oak armchairs with a carved lozenge and trailing pennants, a darkly patinated double sloping school desk, a detached cresting rail of a 17th century chair (fig. 3) which had been replanted on the top of an 18th century school settle at the Old Grammar School Museum, Heptonstall and a discarded altar table

with a multiplicity of fluted column legs at Sowerby, ensured that we could never be complacent about what to expect next. In this respect it was noteworthy that the detached cresting rail was almost identical to the cresting rail on a 17th century chair purchased in 1959 by Shibden Hall Museum from Coley Hall, Lightcliffe, Halifax. (Oak Furniture from Yorkshire Churches catalogue. Temple Newsam House, 1971, see page 26).

A long oak 17th century table, now kept in the housebody of Peel House, could be identified in an early engraving of an interior in Mytholmroyde, a few miles distant.

At the church of St. Thomas, Heptonstall we were able to examine three 17th century oak armchairs which provided a further perspective on the variations to be found in chairs attributable to workshops in this part of the West Yorkshire. Although there was similarity in the basic configuration and profiles of these chairs, with their winged cresting rails and distinctive ear pieces, it was interesting to note the disparate treatment of the centre panels of each chair. One panel comprised a diminutive central lozenge surrounded by a series of heavily-hatched trilobes and lightly incised fleurs-de-lis, the second example incorporated an inlaid floral design and a third, a carved display of flowers in a vase.

Nearing the end of our day's visits we arrived at Lower Old Hall, the former residence (1620) of George Taylor, a dyer. The juxtaposition of an elaborately carved overmantel displaying the coat of arms of the dyers' guild in proximity to panels displaying the coat of arms of the Bishop of Canterbury and those of the Earl of Derby may fall again into another category of tantalising riddles from the West Riding. *J. M.B.*

Furniture Surgery Saturday Evening

Victor Chinnery and Dr Bernard Cotton chaired the furniture surgery. A few examples of the furniture discussed have been included in the following notes.

The oak backstool (fig. 4) with a shallow carved lozenge, relatively slight proportions and flat detailing



Fig. 4

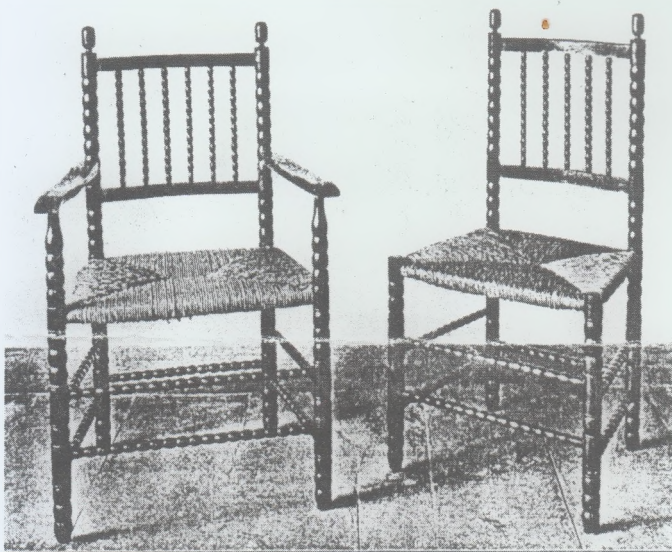


Fig. 5

to the mouldings was attributed to the Cheshire area 1680-1720. It is perhaps worth comparing the carving on this backstool to the bolder and more vigorous treatment of the Halifax chairs we had examined earlier in the day.

A rush seated rocking chair, fig. 5, was attributed to the Preston workshop of John Robinson 1816-1848 in view of the similarity to a recently discovered named stamped chair, by this maker, shown in Newsletter 34.

THE DANEWAY



No. 10. £3 13 6.

Total Height 38 in. Width 21½ in.
Depth 16 in. Height of seat 17½ in.

No. 10A. £2 13 6.

Total Height 38 in. Width 18
Depth 15 in. Height of seat 17½

Fig. 6

Dr Cotton also referred to their superficial similarity to the chairs made during the early 20th century by the workshop of Edward Gardiner. Numbers 10 and 10a 'The Daneway' chairs from Gardiner's catalogue of 1928 are illustrated in fig. 6.

Shibden Hall pm Sunday 14th July 2002

Our final visit was to Shibden Hall, a half-timbered yeoman's house, begun in 1420 and partly stone encased. Of considerable interest was a carved oak high settle, made to commemorate the marriage of Robert Waterhouse and Jane Waterton. We huddled in a dark passage with eyes failing to adjust until a torch lit the profusion of birds, a winged head, trees and the distinctive Halifax lozenge. Michael Legg was heard to exclaim "it's the best there is!" It has provenance and the final private owner, a millionaire carpet baron, presented it to the town of its origin.

The Lister family owned Shibden from 1612 and the housebody/hall was remodelled by Ann Lister in the early 19th century. It was fascinating to see the extremes of the Gothic revival – actually boxing in original roof trusses with false adzed/planed wood.

A genuine 1580s architectural feature in the hall was the 24 lights window, with stone ogee mouldings, which were the most expensive to make and of which only a handful of this size exist. However, they contain some fine rare early secular stained glass, each decorated pane representing birds, stylized beasts, recognizable species of fish and the initials of Jane Waterton, a member of the family which formerly lived in Walton Hall, Wakefield.

Amongst the many items of 17th century furniture in the room, the withdrawing table mentioned in the 1677 Lister inventory was of particular interest. It was of oak, carved in the Elizabethan style, the top having mitred cleats. It has been the subject of research by David Bostock, given a date of 1611 and attributed to Thomas Gunby, a plasterer who would have joined as well as carved. It gave another insight into the crossover of skills between the disciplines of builders/decorators and furniture makers.

A number of other interesting pieces of furniture were to be found throughout the Hall. The dining room included a child's high chair, c1650, with a floral inlay panel, carved cresting and ears, together with a replacement foot rail. The oak-joined tester bed in the main bedroom not only incorporated the familiar Halifax lozenge and balustraded carving (reminiscent of fixed woodwork to be found in a number of Halifax churches) but was recorded as being in situ within the Hall in an early 20th century photograph. Further rooms yielded up examples of 18th century furniture and two early carqueteuse chairs dated 1579 which unfortunately had been stripped dry. Our many thanks to Calderdale District Council for the opportunity to examine the furniture in Shibden Hall

Eric Morton.