

CONFERENCE & AGM GLASGOW

The Conference, which took place over 4 days from 17th–20th July, included a detailed introduction by David Jones to the diverse furniture of the Lowlands within the context of Scottish industrial and commercial developments since the early 18th century.

Weaver's Cottage, Thursday 17th July 2003

Our visit to the Weaver's Cottage at Kilbarchan gave us a fascinating insight into cottage furniture within the textile worker's environment. The cottage was around 280 years old and originally owned by William Mekle. When the National Trust for Scotland acquired the cottage it was in a poor state but the Trust managed to preserve the roof. Inside it was set out to show a weaver's cottage typically producing cotton muslin in the urban area south west of Glasgow around Darvel.

In the living room there was a Darvel chair stamped John McMath dating from sometime after 1840. David Jones explained that these chairs were a form of Windsor, unique to the Irvine Valley, Ayrshire, with a comb back and characteristically sloped back spindles under the armrest. This room also contained a corner cupboard of a type very common in West Scotland and a three drawer lowland dresser.

The weaving room downstairs in the basement aroused a great deal of excitement and interest, and there was much discussion about the 200 year old four shaft loom. The room itself was small, with limited headroom, so the foot pedals of the loom were set down into a pit in the floor, and the 10 yard warp for the loom (with over 1100 threads) was prepared by winding it around warping pegs set into one of the cottage walls. Also in this room was a pirn winder used for filling bobbins full of weft to fit into the shuttles.

There were two interesting spinning wheels in the weaver's cottage. The larger one was a great wheel or as it is called in Scotland a 'muckle' wheel. This had a hoop rim over 37" diameter, and the spokes had unusual dumbbell style ends possibly to provide extra momentum during spinning, a design which may be of regional significance. An excellent visit.

Valerie Bryant

Ardgowan

Members were warmed by the welcome they received at Ardgowan from Lady Shaw-Stewart and by her enthusiasm for the history of the house and its contents. Together with Susan Stuart, she gave us a fascinating insight into the development of the house and the acquisition of its furnishings, much having been supplied by Gillows of Lancaster between 1801 and 1812. The present house, built for Sir John Shaw-Stewart between 1797 and 1801, is the only country house by the architect Hugh Cairncross. Ardgowan is very much a family home and as such it has been

altered over time; in 1831 by William Burn and also in the 1850s when it was enlarged and a chapel added. In 1904 Lorimer rebuilt part of the property to the 18th century plans; he is also responsible for the bow-fronted drawing room, plasterwork, some fireplaces and door furniture. These later alterations have had their impact on the plans which Gillow drew up for the furnishing of the new house in 1801 and in some cases the repositioning of furniture in the house can be traced in the inventories.

Susan explained that letters written to Sir John by Henry Whiteside, Gillows foreman, show how the firm sought to use their work at Eglington Castle to gain a commission at Ardgowan. She went on to show members some examples of Gillows work, (many of which are illustrated in David Jones' and Jacqueline Urquhart's paper in the 1998 Journal), linking them to evidence she has uncovered in the course of her research. Either side of the fireplace in the drawing room stand a pair of satinwood side tables with tapering legs, banded in contrasting timbers and outlined in ebony in the manner which Gillow said was necessary when using satinwood. Lady Shaw Stewart explained that the drawing room originally had other side tables and mirrors beside the windows but that these had been sold when the family was hit by double death duties at the end of the war. Most of the furniture was in storage at this time and unfortunately, the importance of individual pieces as part of a decorative scheme was not fully appreciated.

The library at Ardgowan used to be the entrance hall so the furniture is not in its original position. Susan explained that the plans for the original library are particularly important. Gillow was working in London at the time and they therefore represent the latest ideas from the capital. The room has something of a fitted look as the same design is carried through from one piece of furniture to the next, all lower doors in the room being cupboards with ovals and all upper doors having gothic lancet features.

Members were delighted by a metamorphic piece from the 1780s, a set of library steps within a Pembroke table, probably by Gillow, Susan thought, and certainly the sort of thing that they made at the time. Lady Shaw Stewart explained they are very good to use as the leaves of the table provide ample room for placing books thus avoiding the need to keep going up and down when accessing high shelves. Members also took the opportunity to examine the interior of the writing table pictured in the 1998 Journal. Susan explained that the lettering on the various compartments inside was achieved by a process known by Gillows as 'ingraving'. It appears that the individual letters were gouged out and then filled with some sort of blacking, maybe wax.

In the dining room, members were treated to a delicious tea of home-baked shortbread and scones. It was laid out on a telescopic table which will seat twenty and a sideboard about which little is known but which appears to have arrived at the house around the time of the Lorimer

improvements. The dining chairs in the house include a long set of twenty-eight with two pairs of armchairs.

Among the furnishings upstairs, Susan showed us a very Edwardian-looking Gillow dressing table, which dates from the 1801/2 commission. It is beautifully fitted out for soap dishes and so on and is exactly the same pattern as one at Eglington Castle. In several rooms there were some charming pot cupboards with cane sides and several Winifred's pattern fancy chairs with cane seats. Susan pointed out the overmantle in one of the bedrooms which featured what she has termed Trafalgar Cornices, a device seen throughout the house on fixtures and furnishings, particularly chair backs and consisting of a frieze containing balls, possibly relating to cannon balls. Members were keen to examine an 1802 set of creamy beige painted Stewart pattern chairs with two complementary settees. Although the chair backs feature the original foliate design, Susan explained that the current beige colour has been painted over the original yellow ochre and gilding.

Many thanks again to Sir Houston and Lady Shaw Stewart for their generous hospitality and to Susan Stuart for her fascinating talk.

Jenny Cowking

The Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow

After a typically busy day we made a very hasty visit to the University of Glasgow's Hunterian Museum. Time only allowed for the briefest of introductions to the Museum, which had been founded by Dr. William Hunter in 1807 to house his vast natural science and fine art collections. Stephen Jackson was very keen for us to see two exhibits that have been the subject of articles by Celine Blair and David Jones in *REGIONAL FURNITURE*, 1991 (pp 86-92) and the 'The Blackstone Chair' which Stephen researched for *REGIONAL FURNITURE* in 1995 (pp 96-106). Both these articles are well worth looking at and provide illustrations of the furniture.

Very little documented Glasgow furniture is known, so to have the original furniture and its documentation still in situ at the Museum is of great value to researchers. The Glasgow firm of Cleland, Jack, Patterson and Co. was first commissioned by Hunter to provide furnishings for the Museum in 1809. The company supplied various styles of desks and tables, chairs and other furnishings over a period of several years. On display was a table with 'rising top' (book rest) and a 'Roman' chair. This tub chair was from a set of eight, which were invoiced at five pounds each. The design is very similar to a Gillows' 'Curricule' chair made for Tatton Park, Cheshire in 1811. The Director of Archive Services, Lesley Richmond had kindly brought out some of the original documents for us to see and was on hand to answer questions.

The second exhibit was the Blackstone chair used for over 200 years to add just a bit more tension to examinations in Classics. Each student sat on the chair before the examiners and answered questions until the

hourglass, set into a bay tree bough on top of the chair, ran out. Minutes from 1774, in the University's archive, record the decision to 'fit up the Black Stone in a proper manner.' Very detailed accounts list all the trades involved in manufacturing the chair. Every material is itemised, right down to the cost of the glue and nails. The chair is made of mahogany with a high back set with brass plaques recording the founders of the University. On the reverse, carved in deep relief, are armorials and flowing foliage. Although the chair is no longer used for its original purpose, students competing for the Cowan medal for Latin and Greek use it. Thanks to Stephen's research the importance of this chair has been recognised and it is now on permanent display in the Museum.

Alison Lee

Newhailes, Friday 18th July 2003

Newhailes was offered to the National Trust of Scotland in 1996. It is a family house that has evolved over 250 years but has been tampered with very little. For this reason the Trust has adopted a philosophy of restoring 'as little as possible, only as much as is necessary'; effectively turning the property into a conserved time capsule from the moment of their stewardship. Some of us may have felt that a little more restoration rather than conservation may have been appropriate in certain areas, but in following the current path at least it can be argued that the option for further work to be carried out later if it was felt necessary is available. It was certainly refreshing to see a Trust property that had not been completely overhauled and left looking sterile. Newhailes was built in 1686 by the architect James Smith and was to be for his own use. Unfortunately, in 1702 he became bankrupt and the house was sold to Lord Bellenden. However its more significant purchaser was Sir David Dalrymple in 1709, as it was his family who would turn the property into the place we see today. A library wing was soon added followed by another wing to the other side to balance the house. This enabled Sir James Dalrymple to open out the house with a big new dining room and to turn the house around so that it was now approached from a new south forecourt.

It was from here that we entered the building via the double flight of steps that were added to access the new hall. The first sign of the Trust's minimal intervention was now evident with the half rotten banister rail to the stairs being treated rather than being replaced. From here one also notices the difference in the windows on the different floors. The top floors and the wings retain their Georgian 12-pane sashes while the first floor had had these replaced in the 19th century by the more modern bevelled plate glass panes in cast iron frames. The importance of Newhailes is not just that it has retained so much of its original fixtures and fittings from the 18th century but that we can see how it has evolved through the 19th century.

The Dalrymples bought the best that money could buy and worked with some of the best craftsmen of the day as was soon evident on our tour. Three of the four principle chimney pieces were bought from Henry Cheere in 1739-40 followed by statues from John Cheere. William Strachan supplied the carving and Thomas Claydon was responsible for plasterwork in the 1740s which complements the rare, surviving Chinese wallpaper and silk damask wall hangings. The principle bedroom of the 1686 house was extended by a single bay linked by two pairs of Ionic columns, transforming this into a dining room with an unusual panelling scheme designed to house a set of family portraits by Sir John Medina, Smibert, James Norie and Sir James Ramsay. Their frames incorporate popular design features of the day with the Greek key design prominent as well as the recurring shell motif, applied using real shells. Collecting shells at this time was at the height of fashion and, as we could see through various aspects of the house, the Dalrymples could not be accused of not keeping up with the times. The Vestibule housed a wonderful set of 8 lobby stools by Nix of London who is also believed to be the maker of a superb pair of gilt pier glasses of Apollo and Diana in the Winter Sitting Room. The Library with its higher ceilings, towering bookcases and massive chimney pieces by Cheere was obviously built to impress and certainly even with its emptied bookshelves did not fail to do this. We were told that the books, now with the National Library of Scotland, were only rivalled by those of Sir Walter Scott and that Dr Johnson described the room as 'the most learned room in Europe.' Hopefully the Trust will succeed in one day returning the books to their shelves. Amongst the other notable pieces of furniture was a library table by Sam Smith of London and a pair of mahogany tables, believed to be by Trotter and made to hold Chinese plates. Added to this was a good array of 18th century dining and library chairs. From this splendour we were to see the equally fascinating other side of the house as we left via the servants' areas and finally through the servants' tunnel.

Newhailes was certainly one of the highlights of the conference.

Simon Clarke

The Burrell Collection – Saturday 19th July 2003

Liz Hancock had persuaded the Furniture Conservator and her two assistants to come in especially on Saturday morning to show us fifteen pieces which Liz had chosen out of the collection for commentary by Victor Chinnery, David Jones and Christopher Claxton Stevens. Liz herself gave a cleverly condensed biography of the remarkable William Burrell with slides of significant items from the 9,000 or so objects in his collection. Access to enormous wealth fed his jackdaw passion for collecting beautiful objects of all kinds, 130 tapestries mostly from the 15th and 16th centuries, 700 panels of early stained glass and a large castle to keep them in, which took 16 years of work before he could move into it. Within a few years of moving into the castle it was full, but Burrell did not stop collecting, lending the objects he acquired to various museums. He went on collecting to within a year of his death. Depending on your point of view, he is either an awful warning, or an inspirational example, of the way an obsession can take over your life.

Victor then gave a virtuoso performance in appraising for us a dozen or so pieces, most of which he had not seen before, pointing out features which suggested to him that the piece was original or that it had been 'improved' at a later date, occasionally disputing the attribution given to a piece in Burrell's Purchase Books.

Among the pieces he discussed was a Hutch, in the Purchase Book described as a 'Gothic Carved Cupboard'. The last time he had seen this piece was 30 years ago, when it was in store in the old Glasgow Tram sheds. It is an example of a popular 'post-dissolution gothic' style derived from architecture, made by carpenters with boards and nails, rather than by joiners with jointed frames. There are 15 such cupboards in Haddon Hall alone, and fakes are widespread. The carved panels on this piece he felt were genuine, with a pattern of nails round the back of each pierced panel which would have held a haircloth patch. The carving was of a higher quality than the construction. Date perhaps before 1539, but with a later base which looked older – actually too old! The top he felt was not original, added perhaps in the 1920s. An original top would be more likely to have been thinner, trench fitted, and with no chamfer. Hinges not original, signs

of the original ones being evident in the boards, and the turn buckle was later too. Originally the hutch would probably have been 8 inches or so higher than it now stood. The asymmetrical carving in the roundels was common in late mediaeval work, while the double-headed eagle was a feature in the armorial heraldry of several related families, but was not sufficiently specific to help in giving this piece a provenance.

This was an object lesson in appraisal. It leaves no room to describe the other pieces we looked at, other than the briefest of comments on some of them. A boarded stool, buttressed ends and spire-like profile, pitsawn boards planed only where necessary, very original, thought Victor, about 1580. 'Gaming Table Henry VIII' according to the Purchase Book, a problem piece, said Victor, with poor quality carving on the legs, much altered, though made of old timber, the side door now opening downwards, though a photograph of 1965 shows it opening the other way. Remnants of '13th century' joint stools, more likely later 17th century, a 'poor purchase' was the expert's verdict. A fine yew armchair with seat (perhaps later) of pearwood or cherry, Somerset pattern deep top rail and applied arch in the back, very crisp carving well preserved by the hardness of the wood, about 1640. Several more interesting chairs, including a Scottish 'Crown' chair of 1695 with decorative features linking it stylistically to Salisbury, perhaps because the Bishop of Aberdeen later became Bishop of Salisbury. Finally, a stupendously vulgar Bobbin Chair, attributed to Geo Shillabear of South Molton, Devon, of 1685.

David Jones demonstrated a Cutty Stool, with its flat seat supported, not by the traditional piece of curved hedgerow timber, but by three slabs of wood. The encircling top, or arm rail is held in place by bridle joints in eight upright turned sticks. A low and very narrow seat, definitely designed for the smaller bottom, though not necessarily that of a child, conjectured David. It is typical of a tradition common up to the end of the 19th century in the West Coast of Scotland and in the Shetlands – a tradition, incidentally, which may have influenced Charles Rennie Mackintosh in the design of armchairs for the tearooms.

Finally Christopher Claxton Stevens showed a very handsome mahogany 'Hogarth' armchair, made, he felt, for the more sophisticated country house, with elegant cabriole front legs and serpentine arms springing out of an extremely wide seat, intended for display in a big entrance hall, rather than a dining chair which would have been upholstered. Delicately turned sticks and the vase pattern centre splat suggested a date of about 1740.

What was left of our time at the Museum was taken up with a very agreeable lunch and a free-range wander through the galleries, many of us expressing frustration at the very limited access to the Hutton Rooms, in which very fascinating objects could only be viewed in dim light from 40 feet away. I felt that the balance between conservation and access was not quite

right here but nevertheless, many thanks to all concerned for a most worthwhile visit overall.

Nick Abbott

Pollock House

After a short walk from the Burrell Museum, we arrived at the new entrance of Pollock House. We were welcomed by Robert Ferguson, property manager. He hoped that we would enjoy our visit and believed our tour would provide us with an interesting contrast to the collection now housed in a building on the site of the old Pheasantry.

Gifted to the people of Glasgow in 1966, it is now managed by the National Trust for Scotland. The present building is essentially the one completed in 1752 by the second Baronet, Sir John Maxwell. The family has lived in the area since at least 1269. Despite contacting William Adam in 1737, this house was probably the work of a Glasgow architect. Little had been changed in the early 19th century, but Robert Rowand Anderson of Edinburgh was commissioned to alter the house in order to both house some of the 9th Baronet's Spanish art collection and to modernise for Edwardian country house living.

The entrance hall, with its fine mahogany stair rail was finished in 1890 and contains furniture attributed to Whytock & Reid of Edinburgh in the Chippendale style. These include a mahogany glass topped octagonal table (with a map showing a 50 mile radius around the house) and several Chippendale style dining chairs. Two Scottish bureaux also grace this area but are from the National Trust's collections and are probably early 19th century in date. Both of these closely match descriptions in the price books. The Glasgow Book of 1806 describes a bureau "...3ft 6in long, gables 3ft 3in high, with four long drawers, common base and brackets all solid. Inside of fold 8 small drawers, nine letter holes and a prospect door and the front edge of partitions double beaded £2-1s-9d."

The corridor, which was once the old entrance hall and garden lobby, contains some of the original elm banister rail, circa 1750 and an important astronomical clock by John Craig of Glasgow dated 1764 in a fine mahogany case. An interesting later 17th century continental games table, possibly Spanish or Portuguese, is veneered in burr elm, finished to be 'mulberry wood'. This wild pattern of contrasting yellow wood and black grain fill is very reminiscent of tortoise-shell veneers, as used in Boulle work and mentioned in *The Painters and Varnishers Pocket Manual* 1804. It even gives recipes for different coloured versions whereby the colour is dependent on dyes, mirroring the different tortoise-shell colours produced by different coloured backing foils. There is also a later 17th century Portuguese black rosewood table on turned legs with stretchers and a similar style cabinet on stand, a Whytock & Reid neo-classical tea-table with carved rams' heads and an oak table in the

Arts and Crafts Chippendale style by Lorimer circa 1900.

The silver corridor contains a typically Scottish pair of chairs in the Chippendale style, circa 1770, made of Wych Elm (*ulmus glabra* not *ulmus procera*). The slight proportions contrast the exuberant extension of the ears of the top bow. These ears are carved with shaped flutes or reeds and the top bow is balanced with a carved fan to the centre. This later feature is rather similar to the Liverpool fan back chair design, illustrated in the Gillow records. The seat rails also have brackets formed by cut-outs from the solid, rather than the more common applied type used in England. Another piece of common Scottish form in the morning room is a mahogany cellaret on stand. This has the square tapering legs to the base and interesting flower inlay to the top. Its small proportions and neatness being features found in the price books. "No. 1 Square Cellaret, 1ft 4in long, 1ft 1in wide to hold six bottles and two decanters, on a frame with plain tapered legs, lap dovetailed or veneered, 12s 6d.' 'Corner stringing 6d". "If only one at a time, extra 8d". Edinburgh Price Book 1805.

The drawing room of the eighteenth century became the music room when remodelled and an organ was fitted. Pier tables on the window wall and the two pairs of pier glasses are probably original to the house. The fireplace retains its original Jamaican mahogany chimney surrounds circa 1745. Two more eared Chippendale style chairs are also here.

The business room which still has most of its original stucco work (probably by the Clayton family who carried out work at Blair Castle and maybe nearby Hamilton Palace) has similarly retained its fireplace and chimney surround. This room has two mahogany folding wall brackets either side of the hearth and an Edinburgh rosewood bookcase, circa 1820.

The present drawing room was the original dining room and much original stucco work still remains. This had not only been dressed according to a surviving eighteenth century record, with china cups and saucers, air twist glasses, punch bowls and such, but the structure had been painted in the prescribed manner.

The high lobby has a fine mahogany secretaire book cabinet, circa 1810 by William Trotter. Its somewhat squat proportions and the Gothic style cornice with Green key pattern all match descriptions in the 1811 Edinburgh Price Book. Despite losing its original handles, this is still a fine piece. It is worth noting the use of through tenons on the lower and upper doors. Firms such as Gillow of Lancaster rarely joined their doors in this manner on such high style furniture, but in New England this less refined joint was more common.

The Kier Bedroom (Lady Maxwell's room) contains a very fine mahogany veneered chest on chest with two short drawers above six long drawers with corner fluted pilasters to both halves, blind fretwork and a carved and dentil form top moulding. The fine choice of veneers, double book matched from the bottom to the top including the drawer rails enhance the whole.

The handles still show traces of the original gilt varnish.

The servants' quarters now house the tea-room and shop but still contain many items of interest.

The 'Still room' includes a Yorkshire Windsor Chair, some Glasgow armless Windsors with Roman spindles and a typical 19th century birch/pine and mahogany drawer fronted lowland dresser with side tray supports and the traditional stage top incorporating a row of drawers. The room in which we had afternoon tea had a mahogany veneered Glasgow pattern sideboard circa 1810 with a stage top and ebony stringing throughout. The Edinburgh price book sideboards are usually 12" shorter with one being 6ft compared to the other being 7ft.

An excursion into the Bothy revealed a Glasgow patterned chair with solid seat and the back stay rail with the vestigial tablet form shape. The usual chest or kist in the corner and a fitted pine robe which was tall and thin as commonly found. A mahogany armed dining chair of typical Regency style (inspired by T Hope) was interesting for not having a stay rail and may be attributed to the designer/architect Playfair.

A fascinating house and an excellent collection of objects and paintings to enjoy. All I can say is many thanks to those who organised this excellent Conference and this most fascinating visit.

Simon J. Feingold