

Visit to The Charles Brooking Collection, Cranleigh, Surrey, 5 June 2004.

This afternoon visit presented a contrast with our morning visit to the 17th century furnishing and fittings in the Abbot Hospital/Hospice in Guildford. At Cranleigh we found ourselves engrossed in the 20th century exhibits of the Charles Brooking Collection of carpentry, fittings and related salvaged building materials.

Charles told us how at the age of 15 he was 'hooked' on collecting demolition discards. He certainly was ahead of his time. Preservation for the benefit of those who came after is fashionable nowadays, but who would in the 1930s, for instance, have considered a complete mullion/sash window a collectors' item?

Since 2003 a large part of the Brooking Collection has been housed at the University of Greenwich's 18th century riverside campus, centred on the Wren-designed Old Royal Naval College, Park Row, Greenwich. Our visit was centred on part of the collection situated in Cranleigh, Surrey.

Founded in the 1960s, The Brooking Collection is probably one of the most important architectural collections in the UK, containing components of Britain's well known buildings: doors from Buckingham Palace and 10 Downing Street, windows of St Paul's Cathedral and the old Putney police station, a door lock from the house where the Duke of Wellington's mistress lived, art nouveau- and art deco-style stained glass skylights above the front doors (from the days of high ceilings), spiral staircases, but also a display board with early 20th c. melamine door handles, early central heating radiators, rainwater ducting and castings.

Perhaps the major 2003 acquisition in the Collection is an amazing treasure trove of Wembley Stadium architectural memorabilia, including:

- two 15x16 ft. players' doors from the Royal Tunnel, through which teams were driven into the stadium;
- one of the lion's head masks from above the windows of the East tower;
- several elaborate doors from the retiring room below the Royal box (fig. 5);
- the window from which George VI and his Queen Consort watched the 1948 Olympic Games.

Charles aims to have the Collection viewed as portraying the history of English window and door furniture and fittings, attached to the School of Architecture and Construction for consultation by architects, conservation officers, students and people restoring their own period properties. Very cleverly – and most revealing – the window/frame units on display are cross-cut to more

manageable size, thus illustrating details of design and carpentry of days gone by. It makes one wonder in amazement at the amount of time and material involved in production, a feat no longer feasible in this day and age. And once again one realises what we 'oldies' accept as normal practice is quite unknown to the current younger generation.

For good historic reasons it is essential to record provenance & description and here Charles scores full marks, such as for example:

'Internal vestibule door with stylised Arts and Crafts ironmongery, designed by W.D. Caroe, from St. Michael's Church, Edmonton, London, 1900-1903. Acquired during conversion work, 1988'.

Viewing the Brooking Collection exhibits is like a journey down memory lane: I suddenly recalled the childhood mystery of the fascinating 'secrets' hidden in the vertical cavity of the sash window: the cables, pulleys and weights, all neatly hidden behind a small hinged cover panel.

A clear message was learnt during the day: Reflect, before consigning building restoration discards. One man's discard is another man's bounty.

Willem Irik

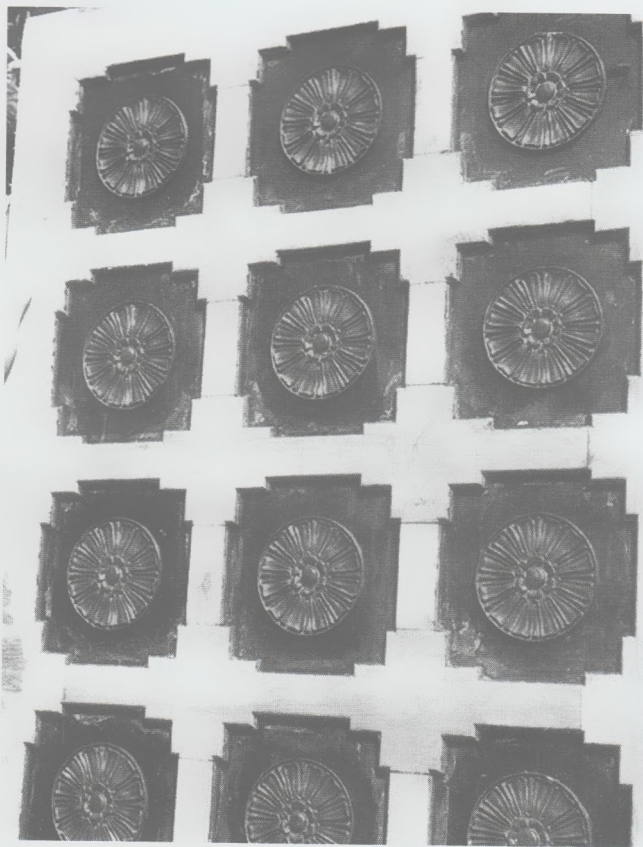


Fig. 5 Door from Royal retiring room to Queen's powder room.

The somewhat chinoiserie style lacquer decoration and neo-classical rosettes were also part of Maxwell Ayrton's decorative scheme for the room designed 1922-23 and constructed by Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd.

The decoration was covered over c.1948 when the room was re-decorated in a moderne style, probably for the 1948 Olympic Games. It received another layer of plywood in 1989 when the room was again re-decorated.

The decoration was uncovered by Charles Brooking during the removal of the doors in September 2002, an operation undertaken with the help and sponsorship of Clement Windows Group of Haslemere, Surrey.

Acquired by kind permission of Wembley National Stadium Limited and Multiplex Constructions (UK) Limited, builders of the new stadium.