

## THE CHRISTOPHER GILBERT MEMORIAL LECTURE Saturday 9th October 2004

### Seeling and Ceilings: the Rose family workshop in 17th century Sheffield by David Bostwick

This fascinating lecture, which was illustrated with a wealth of slides of examples of the work discussed, set out to demonstrate the link between the making of a ceiled room and the panelling, carving, decorated mantelpiece, moulded plaster ceiling, and the furniture made to go in such a room.

In the 16th century, a ceiled room (that is a room lined out with wooden panelling, with a decorated plaster ceiling) was the fashionable thing to have in your home if you were an aristocrat or prosperous person. In the area around Sheffield, South Yorkshire and North East Derbyshire, there is a mass of evidence which David Bostwick has been able to bring together to demonstrate how specialist joiners were central to the production, not just of the panelling and carving of such ceiled rooms, but also in the production of the ceilings.

In the making of decorated plaster ceilings with complicated patterns of ribs and motifs, the skills of the woodworker or joiner were central to its production. The raised decoration was made in moulds as separate pieces which were then applied to the ceiling. The moulds were made either of wood with the raised decoration carved in relief, or were made in beeswax and glue that had been peeled off a carved wooden pattern. Thus a ceiling could be made up from a series of discrete units, used in a variety of different ways, from a set of carved wooden patterns. This was the work of joiners working with plaster. The skills had come from making various sorts of fretwork (ie carving).

The 16th century records in York of tradesmen elected as Freemen of the City record 'tilers' and 'bricklayers', but not 'plasterers' – as everyone could plaster. The specialists in ceilings were known as 'fretters'. However, later in the 17th century, there are a number of references to craftsmen described as 'joiner and plasterer'.

David Bostwick traced a number of examples of how a particular decorative motif first appeared in a printed book either as a pattern for architectural use, or as a woodcut design within the text, which then made its appearance in a variety of other forms. For instance, a motif first appearing in a book printed in Antwerp turns up in embroidery done for Bess of Hardwick at Chatsworth (now in Hardwick Hall); but it also turns up in Sheffield Manor Turret House ceiling, and at a slightly later date in the carved mantle piece and ceiling in Carbrook Hall in Sheffield. In another related case, a motif turns up in Sheffield in the Bishop's House, in Haddon Hall in Derbyshire and in Northumberland and Somerset. The pre-formed carved moulds were carried by packhorse between houses and lands where there were links in ownership. The supposition is that the same joiner was used in each place.

Dr Bostwick also showed how particular motifs were very local, appearing in different sorts of work in a

variety of different houses in the Sheffield area: in ceilings and friezes, panelling, mantelpieces, and also on chests and on backstools. One of these motifs was a flower, possibly a rose, which would have had obvious Tudor and Yorkshire connotations – but might also have been used as a rebus trademark by the Rose family of Greenhill in Sheffield. Several generations of Roses are recorded in wills as rich gentlemen joiners and plasterers, ending with third generation Joseph Rose who worked for Robert Adam as joiner and plasterer at Wentworth Castle – thus linking the regional decorative plastering traditions of the 16th and 17th centuries to those of 18th century classicism

*Jill Robson*