

## VISIT TO TEMPLE NEWSAM

Saturday 9th October 2004

The first of the morning sessions was taken by Emma Kirk, curator of the textile collection at Temple Newsam.

The museum houses two important textile collections, the Ginsburg collection and the Roger Warner collection which consists primarily of brocades, 18th century chintz and embroideries. Using examples from these collections together with items of upholstered furniture, Emma Kirk gave members a fascinating insight into the development and use of textiles from the 16th century to the end of the 19th century. Together with technical advances in textile manufacture, the social and political influences on the use of textiles were also highlighted and pointers were given as to the identification of certain fabrics. Much emphasis was placed on the examination of the reverse side, where weaving techniques and clues as to the original colour of threads can often be found.

The earliest fabric on view was a two coloured silk with tight, stylised floral motifs dating from the 16th century. Like most silks of this time it was Italian, Italy having led production in Europe until around 1700. 17th and early 18th century examples highlighted the development of the motifs and the way in which changes in the use of the materials in furnishings led to changes in the patterns and the scale of designs. The importance of looking at fabrics from this era in the context of overall design schemes was stressed, as

design motifs were carried through from one element to another and might be seen on furniture, carving or plasterwork. Links with other textiles were also shown such as designs from the 1730s consisting of naturalistic blooms, looking much like contemporary embroidery and a design from the 1720s in which a lace motif was reproduced on a silk pattern.

Many examples dated from the 18th century and told a great deal, not only about the textiles themselves, but of the politics of the time and the influence of foreign trade. It was explained that the English silk industry was still quite novel until about 1750 and expansion within the industry may be linked to the restrictive laws against imported Indian chintzes between 1720 and 1740. Emma explained the complex and labour intensive processes involved in the manufacture of early cottons and the move from hand-painted techniques to block and roller printing and showed examples of fabrics where more than one technique has been used to create the finished design. She also emphasised the way in which developments in the dyeing process had an impact on colours of fabrics and highlighted the renewal of interest in natural dyes and block printing techniques seen in the early textiles produced by William Morris. Each point was illustrated using the museum's extensive collection which provides a wonderful resource for textile and furniture historians alike.

Following the talk, members were able to examine the use of fabrics on some of the furniture in the collection. Of note was a late 17th century backstool covered in



turkeywork (fig. 11) made from knotted wools on linen and still having its original woollen fringing. Typically, the black fibres had broken down due to mordants used in the dye. Also of interest were examples of the re-use of dress materials for furnishing. Members were shown the pair of Hallett chairs which have been



Fig 11 17th century turkey-work chair

the subject of a restoration programme involving the use of textiles from the period. The museum is fortunate enough to have detailed documentary evidence for this restoration as Hallett was very specific when writing out his bills and a small piece of damask fabric had been found woven into a rats nest under the floorboards! The chairs are basically upholstered in one colour, a rich red, but incorporate different fabrics, including the use of a scarf rather like an antimacassar, but stitched on. Emma explained that it can appear that fabrics of different colours were used in these upholstery schemes because each fabric will react differently with the dyes used at the time.

The afternoon session, taken by Dr. Adam Bowett and Ian Fraser, furniture conservator at Temple Newsam, continued the theme of dyestuffs but this time the focus was their use in marquetry. The collection houses the Chippendale desk supplied to Harewood House in the early 1770s which, Adam Bowett explained, would have been designed to complement the Adam interiors of the house, especially in regard to the colour scheme for the marquetry. Current research has come out of a desire to give people an idea of the impact of the original colouring and, together with Jack Metcalf, one of the country's leading marqueteers who runs the Leeds Marquetry Group, Ian and Adam have been working

on achieving accurate reproductions of the coloured marquetry panels on the Harewood desk. It is particularly interesting that despite the complex design of the original panel motifs, they are executed entirely in holly dyed to imitate more exotic veneers.

This would have had both practical and financial advantages at the time and Adam illustrated the shift from the use of self-coloured imported timbers in the 17th century to dyed native holly in the latter half of the 18th century. Holly is especially suited to the purpose by virtue of its pale white, natural colour which gives clarity to the colours of the dyed veneers. The first reproduction panels, seen by many on the BBC programme on Chippendale screened in 2004, were on display and since filming, much further work has been done on the type of dyes and colours used in the originals.

Ian and Adam illustrated the methods which can be used to dye the veneers by way of a practical demonstration. They used cochineal as the dyestuff in two examples but one test used tin chloride as the mordant and alum was the mordant in the other. The mordant helps to fix the dye but also helps to alter the colour. We were able to see that even using the one dyestuff, it would have been possible for a range of colours to be obtained by tweaking the quantities used and by changing the mordant. There was some discussion about manuals available to 18th century furniture makers on the use of dyes. These would presumably have been used for the basic recipes which would have been adjusted as desired. One important consequence of colouring veneers in this way is that the dye goes right through the veneer thus facilitating scraping of the surface of the marquetry prior to finishing. Ian and Adam showed members numerous samples of colours obtained using these methods and different dyestuffs. Adam did point out that gas chromatography would provide a more scientific way in which to establish the precise nature of the dyes used in Chippendale's work but this trial and error approach does seem to give some excellent results and is presumably not dissimilar to the way in which the craftsmen of Chippendale's day would have worked; it certainly made for a most fascinating session.

Members were then free to explore the galleries and the fabulous furniture collection. Many spent a considerable time examining the Harewood desk in detail. It was especially interesting to see the difference between the quality of workmanship shown in the marquetry frieze and that of the panels which are superior and believed to be by a different hand. We were also treated to a close examination of the drawer construction which, while being typical of the period, shows a level of workmanship breathtaking in its accuracy and a feature of Chippendale's work.

Many thanks are due to Emma Kirk and Ian Fraser of Temple Newsam and to Dr Adam Bowett for their hospitality and providing us with such a full, informative and stimulating morning.

*Jenny Cowking*