

## AGM AND CONFERENCE, THE EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE AND HULL, JULY 2005

### The Harrison Clock Brocklesby Park and Aylesby Church. 14th July 2005

Members who were able to take advantage of the extra day arranged for the Thursday before the AGM weekend, were able to inspect the John and James Harrison wooden Turret clock of 1720 at Brocklesby Park. The park is situated south of the Humber near Immingham. Members drove to the small village of Habrough to meet on the church car park in glorious summer weather which was to stay with us for the whole weekend. After the usual friendly greetings we walked a short distance to the church hall to listen to a talk by the Harrison expert Andrew King. First, Polly welcomed members and gave us an outline of the day's itinerary. Andrew was then introduced to us by Michael. Andrew gave us a history of Brocklesby Park and its owners over the past 300 years. The park was one of the largest estates in England at one point in its history.

The talk was enhanced by slides of the estate and of the clock taken during its recent restoration.

The Harrison clock is normally housed in the stable block and the building has had many alterations over the years and is still not properly understood. However it was the clock we had come to see.

Fortunately, it was removed from the stables to the stone-masons workshop within the maintenance area of the estate. Andrew had established a workshop here with two lathes and tools of restoration. It was evident that he had spent many hours of work restoring the movement which is now in first class running condition. We were able to witness the clock running using the original weights. 95lbs on the going side and 119lbs on the strike side. The last time this clock was removed for maintenance was in 1953 and it will not be removed again for many years. We were very fortunate indeed. We viewed the clock in small groups. Members travelled two car loads at a time to keep the numbers in the workshop down. An excellent buffet lunch was provided in the church hall by Polly helped by members in the kitchen. Much appreciated Polly.

Members who have no knowledge of clocks could not fail to appreciate the significance of this clock. This is one of the most important clocks in the world and we were very lucky to be able to examine it out of the stables where access would not have been possible.

To explain this clock in detail is not possible here but briefly all the wheels (gears) are in oak, assembled to take advantage of the grain direction for strength. The oak for the teeth is inserted using glue and brass pins in small units with the grain running lengthways of the tooth and hand cut after assembly. The pivots or axle ends are in brass, originally running in boxwood but now in lignum-vitae. The brass work is sculpture itself, some still showing casting imperfections. The escapement was built as anchor but was converted by

the Harrison brothers to grasshopper escapement at a later date. This was their invention, a world first! The contact points of the escapement are boxwood onto a brass escape wheel. No lubricant is needed on this clock at all. It will run for years with no attention apart from winding! The original winding key was wood. All wheels and levers are positioned in the massive oak constructed plates, mortise and tenoned together; the plates then held in place with wooden screws.

It is all contained in a well constructed panelled case to keep the dirt out, with doors for access.

Our next visit of the day, to continue the Harrison theme, was to the nearby church of St. Lawrence, Aylesby, where James Harrison made the pews and pulpit. Michael explained the similarity of the panelled pews to the clock case. A very enjoyable day.

*W John Thornton.*

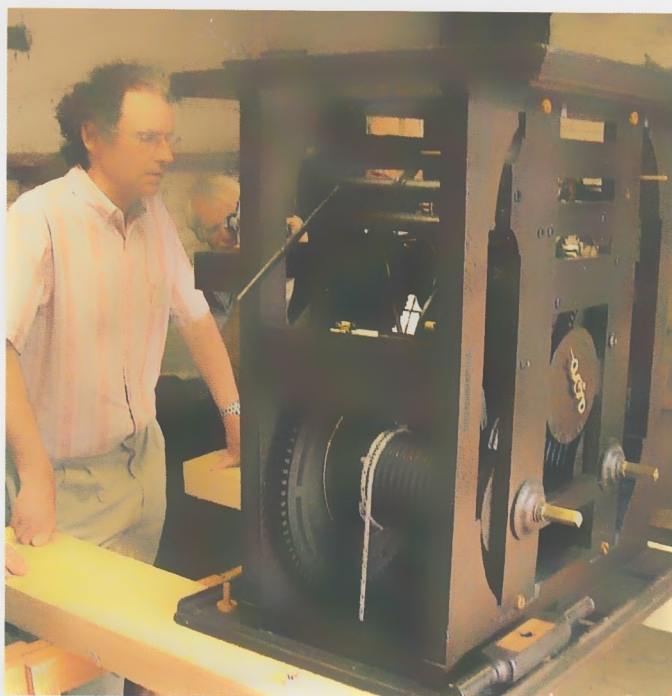


Fig. 14 This picture gives a good impression of the size of the Harrison clock movement. Note the two handed winding key lying under the strike side winding square and the setting dial which bears the Harrison signature. Andrew King looks justly proud of his restoration.

### The Ferens Art Gallery, Hull Friday morning 15th July

The conference was officially convened at the Ferens Art Gallery on Friday morning. The Gallery was built in 1927 in a severe classical manner that made the bank of England look quite welcoming in comparison. Our guide and companion for the day was Arthur Credland, keeper of Maritime History at the Hull Maritime Museum and author of the highly recommended '*Artists and Craftsmen of Hull and East Yorkshire*'.

We began with an unplanned look around the John Ward gallery containing works by Ward (1798-1849)

who lived in Hull and was one of England's finest early 19th century marine artists. His 1837 Hull from the Humber (The buoy yacht Zephyr) is a highly accurate and detailed view of Hull's Georgian waterfront. Gallery 10 was the official starting point of the weekend and provided a chronological journey through Hull's history from the Charter of 1299 to the 20th century.

Hull developed as the result of its location, as ports invariably do. In the 14th century, trade flourished with exports of wool and cloth and imports of wine. As the town developed economically, its political pinnacle was reached in 1642 when Governor Sir John Hotham refused Charles I entry to Hull. After 5 hours of discussion at Beverley Gate, the King left, proclaiming Hotham a traitor, and act of defiance considered to be the beginning of Charles's downfall. By the 18th century, the medieval walls had become too small for the expanding city as this period of wealth and prosperity created a need for more and more buildings.

*Toby Pinn*

### **The Maritime Museum, Hull – Friday morning**

After a brief look around Ferens Art Gallery with its wonderfully diverse collection, we adjourned to the Maritime Museum for an excellent lecture by Arthur Credland on the furniture makers of Hull.

This wonderful 19th century classical building, made for Hull Dock Company by Christopher Wray, made maximum use of the space available. It is triangular in shape with a central rotunda and a cupola at each corner. From the courtroom with its scagliola columns and gilded Corinthian capitals, coffered ceiling and figured Baltic pine doors, our host gave us an insight into Hull's growth into the place it is and the various factors that affected its prosperity. Any thoughts that the city might have been an out-of-touch backwater in furniture terms were quickly dispelled. Hull had the advantage of large quantities of timber coming into the port from Europe as well as mahogany from Jamaica, Cuba and Honduras.

Reynoldson, Farrer, Elwick and his partner Richard Wright all subscribed to Chippendale's Director of 1754. Hull was a Georgian city with vast wealth from the commerce and trade created through the port, and the inhabitants demanded the latest fashion in architecture, furniture and décor. Though some might patronise the top London cabinet makers, local craftsmen were much employed and were eager to show that they could also create furniture of the highest standards. Thomas Wilkinson Wallis's work on the Chinese room at Burton Constable is a great example of how a provincial craftsmen could be influenced by the latest fad, to produce works of the most exotic nature. The firm of Richardson was to become one of the largest manufacturers in Britain by the 1860s, providing a complete décor service. Their customary printed labels with linked date are a valuable source of information, further proving how fashionable the great and good of Hull could be.

Our tour of the museum gave a great insight into how Hull developed over the last 400 years. The many models of ships on view are evidence that Hull's port was fundamental to its existence. Apart from trade with the Continent, ship building provided work for the local craftsmen and furniture makers and we also saw exhibits showing the importance of inshore fishing and whaling. The museum has an outstanding collection of scrimshaw and an unusual garden seat made from whale vertebrae and other bones. Other notable exhibits include a superb ship's figurehead in the form of a Newfoundland dog and a long-case clock by James Berry of Pontefract whose case is believed to have come from Louth in Lincolnshire and had an unusual inlaid motif to the door and a moving panel above the clock face.

*Simon Clarke*

### **Four visits in Hull – Friday afternoon**

The present **Holy Trinity Church** in the Market place, some 700 years old, is the third church on the site and can lay claim to being the largest parish church in England (by area). This was the chance to look at some furniture and, apart from the well-documented seven Robert Thompson 'Mouseman' pieces, the main talking point was the Georgian communion table and backboard that had been catalogued as 'typically early 18th century, bought in 1770 for £4-4-0'.

The table was high rococo, with plenty of rockwork and scrolls, supported by two cabriole legs terminating in hairy paw feet; it may well have been made by members of the Fletcher family. The thick black surface patination made deciphering the timber a difficult task, but the consensus was that the table was mahogany and the back panel oak, and that they were probably the work of different hands. The base was of finer quality than the back panel and more mid than early 18th century in style, possibly looking a bit out of date by 1770. While the back panel had religious iconography (flagons, chalice and communion plate) the base did not. Michael Legg pointed out that the construction of the table suggested it had been put together by a carver rather than a joiner.

The brick-built 15th century **St Mary's Church**, Lowgate, has a serious damp problem but is something of a sanctuary as you enter off a busy street. A much modified Elizabethan refectory table with cup and cover legs, formerly the altar table but now in the choir vestry, was given the full RFS once-over before Keith Pinn noted an inlaid date for 1584 on the frieze. The interior panelling of the priest's vestry is Elizabethan and was originally in 62 High Street before being recycled here in 1928.

**Wilberforce House** is the only surviving complete example from a number of 17th century brick-built merchant's houses that once stood in the High Street. The birthplace of William Wilberforce, grandfather of the abolitionist, the house bears witness to changes in fashion under its various owners. The oak panelled rooms on the 1st floor interested the delegates, but the

furniture of the dining room created the most debate. An innocuous three-legged joined stool with triangular top aroused much speculation as to the alterations it might have undergone.

A child's wainscot highchair in the adjoining bedroom did not want for admirers, while in one of the Georgian rooms the mahogany bow-front secretaire bookcase made by Hull cabinetmaker Mordecai Kitching in 1828 was a good example of a fully documented local piece, proudly bearing a brass presentation plaque: it was a gift to the cabinet-maker's daughter on her marriage. The house contains many room settings up to the Victorian era as well as collections of silver, ceramics, costume and clocks and, as is often the case, justified more time than was available.

The **Old White Harte**, 25 Silver Street, is not a watering-hole that one would stumble on by accident. Tucked away down a winding alley, this late 17th century brick building became an inn around 1774. It still retains its 17th century oak staircase leading to a panelled room with an impressive chimneypiece incorporating arched recess panels with parquetry floor tiles creating a sense of perspective; these are repeated in the door panels leading off the staircase. The thick layer of paint and varnish built up over years, while hiding much of the definition of the carving, may at least be some protection against the nicotine and vomit of the establishment's patrons. More than one RFS member was torn between studying the staircase and the opportunity to sample a local beverage on a warm afternoon.

*Toby Pinn*

### **Burton Constable: lecture (Friday evening) and visit (Saturday morning) 16th July 2005**

There can be few lecturers who could speak to a group satiated from a day's exploration of Hull followed by a good dinner and still electrify them with a tour de force of historical, cultural and anecdotal off-the-cuff knowledge delivered with wit, style, speed and panache. Ivan Hall is such a man.

His thoughtfully orchestrated talk underlined various key themes: the importance of the very full surviving archive, which underpins any understanding of Burton Constable; the family's strong sense of history and lineage, which underlies the retention and playing up of the Elizabethan exterior while the interior reflects metropolitan fashions; the family's Roman Catholicism, which influenced the patronage of Catholic craftsmen or craftsmen sympathetic to the Old Faith and, above all, the long and important tenure of William Constable (1721-91) whose three European tours brought three distinct and developing strands to the house. In particular Mr Hall threw light on the notable provincial craftsmen employed, and on the metropolitan commissions. Thus we were well prepared for our visit.

On Saturday morning David Connell welcomed us on behalf of the Burton Constable Foundation (1992)

which owns and runs the property. We were allowed both time and access to view the interior in close detail.

Among the regional delights was the sophisticated work of Edward Elwick of Wakefield (fl. 1771-87) who supplied the state bed of 1773 and who fitted out the state rooms on the first floor, later altered. Jeremiah Hargrave of Hull (1726-86) provided doorcases for the Dining Room as well as a fine pair of mahogany side tables, pedestals for sculpture and two sarcophagus wine coolers. He also made three doorcases for the Great Drawing Room as well as a pair of giltwood girandoles. For the Great Hall he made the four Doric-columned table frames to support scagliola table tops by Domenico Bartoli.

Following on from Ivan Hall's lecture, much interest was focussed on the set of dining room chairs which Mr Hall identified as those supplied by John Lowry (fl. 1740-93) in 1768. However, the chairs were clearly later in construction and style and appeared to retain their original black horsehair seats which did not correspond with the 14 chairs supplied with 'blue Spanish leather' seats specified in Lowry's 1768 bill.

More firmly attributed were the writhing carved trophy above the Great Hall fireplace by the Fisher workshop of York (1767) and the 13 elm and mahogany bookcases in the Long Gallery, made by the estate joiner, Thomas Higham, in the 1740s. Also probably made in the estate workshop was the very fine oak and mahogany cabinet for fossils in the adjoining Cabinet of Curiosities. Much work of a fancy nature was supplied in the second half of the 19th century by Richardson of Hull.

Metropolitan work was represented at the highest level by the Yorkshire-born Thomas Chippendale. This included a large pair of giltwood pier glasses and tables, and an extensive set of seat furniture for the Great Drawing Room (1778).

The tour ended with the amazing Chinese Room, dating from the 1830s. It contained, among other exotic delights, a bizarre dragon chair designed by Marianne Clifford-Constable and carved in 1841 by Thomas Wilkinson Wallis of Hull (1821-1903).

No one who had visited the house in the 1980s or early 1990s could help being struck by the huge and uplifting achievement of the Burton Constable Foundation in preserving and displaying this complex and fascinating house.

*Christopher Hartley*

### **Burton Agnes Hall - Saturday afternoon**

The Great Hall of this early 17th century house revealed a treasury of carvings in its screen and chimney piece. Constructed in wood, stone and alabaster and set off by delicately painted ceiling plasterwork, they were much admired. The furniture received a more mixed reception. The long oak table, while impressive at first sight, proved upon closer inspection to have had a chequered career; likewise the Nonesuch chest in the inner hall, its altered base now

with a long drawer and bun feet. The early Georgian side table on the other hand, with its deep breakfront frieze and heavy lappets on cabriole legs was considered a fine example.

The adjacent Red Drawing Room boasts a magnificent carved wood chimney piece with a gruesome 'Dance of Death' centre panel. Its unusual wall panelling gave rise to much discussion and speculation: while all acknowledged the fine quality of the timber, there were reservations as to the quality of the paintwork, some even suggesting that parts were reminiscent of a fairground. We progressed through the Chinese Room with its contents reflected in a fine early Georgian gilded pier glass, to the Garden Gallery with its 18th century panelling and furniture to match. The mahogany bureau had unusual features, namely, pierced backplates on its brass carrying handles, and inset quarter columns to the inner sides of the chamfered blind fret legs. This latter feature was also found in the green marble-topped side table in the adjoining Dining Room.

From here we ascended the early 17th-century oak staircase of continuous newel type, the newels linked by a series of arches rising up the well and also unusual in its early reverse turned balusters. Some alterations to the carved boarding were noted.

There was much animated discussion in the Queen's State Bedroom. Taking centre stage here, as far as members were concerned, was a pair of early 17th-century oak armchairs featuring an early use of ladders in the back. It was generally felt that the scrolled top rail, though similar to the front stretcher, was of inferior quality and therefore a replacement. How gratifying to find our suspicions confirmed by an early picture of the bedroom showing the chairs with plain ladder top rails! Perhaps it was felt they needed 'improving' to tie in with the other high-quality chairs nearby, like the set of carved and painted beech chairs in the King's State Bedroom, unusual in their square cut back posts and open knees.

The Long Gallery on the top floor provided some light relief. Here, under the vaulted ceiling restored by Francis Johnson in the 20th century, were four pieces of contemporary furniture by John Makepeace. The gallery seat comprises a series of circular stools linked by brightly painted curving stretchers reflecting the ceiling pattern overhead. Afterwards, over tea, we admired the south and west elevations of this lovely old house, its red brick and yellow stone set against the clear blue sky of a perfect summer's afternoon, and some of us strayed into the magnificent walled garden.

*Gerard Coughlan*

#### **Address by Peter Follansbee - Saturday evening**

Peter Follansbee, our American Secretary, works as a joiner at Plimoth Plantation, Massachusetts, and is clearly a very experienced talker: 'I can talk for up to seven hours a day', he warned us. It soon became apparent that our American contacts are in good hands.

Helped by slides of early New England furniture and some of his own historical facsimiles, he explained his longstanding involvement with the Plimoth museum project.

Some of his slides showed dated furniture from precise places; others were of early 'post-landing' pieces. Departure from English practice seems to have happened almost at once. The settlers were tooled up and ready to go, and had a sawmill in operation in the Plimoth area within three years. Case furniture had more mouldings and sometimes less simple forms as time progressed, and the softwood content increased. We were surprised by the last sequence of slides, of increasingly unusual pieces of furniture: were these serious items at the time of manufacture, or did they represent ways of using spare parts such as bulbous columns?

With the speaker's peculiarly American delivery and sense of humour, this lecture made great after-dinner entertainment, as well as being highly informative. Come back, Peter, and talk to us again.

*Phil Holland*

#### **Beverley and the East Riding (lecture - Saturday evening) and four visits (Sunday)**

David and Susan Neave of Beverley, well-known local historians, are currently working on the volume of the *Victoria County History* for the East Riding, and were our guides for four visits to buildings in Beverley on Sunday. David's talk on Saturday evening was an introduction for these, and gave us a short background history of Beverley and its county.

The talk, illustrated with slides, covered the topography of historical East Riding (larger than the present administrative area) and included the influence of York, economics, communications, trades and administration, as well as architecture. David explained the special position of Beverley Minster in the diocese of York, equal to Ripon and Southwell but not destined to become a cathedral although large and splendid enough.

Only one internal timbered wall survives from the **15th-century Guildhall** in Beverley. The building was altered, notably in 1762 and 1827, and extended with a new front in 1832-33. The imposing Council Chamber has rococo plasterwork by Giuseppe Cortese, and columns by Hawksmoor, formerly in Beverley Minster.

The documented furniture includes oak armchairs with upholstered seats, in the Chippendale style, made by William Thompson of Beverley (1764); there are others with gothic backs and some with exceptionally wide seats.

The Magistrates' Room upstairs has an important collection of 17th-century civic furniture, including benches of Baltic pine and oak and a large table with six inset desk lids with locks. The earliest bench, dated 1604, has three divisions including a central higher seat for a Recorder or Mayor. Richard Jameson of Beverley supplied a set of mahogany chairs in 1824.

Those with rooms in the Beverley Arms facing **St Mary's Church** will long remember the view. Pevsner and Betjeman rated it highly among parish churches.

A merchants' church, built with money from the craft guilds, its complex development spanned the centuries.

The tower collapsed in 1520 and fund-raising groups adopted the pillars in the reconstruction. Their names are still there: 'The good wives of Beverley' or 'The Minstrels' are examples. The wooden ceilings of nave and choir have carved bosses; there are about 600 in the whole church. Over the choir, the decoration may be unique: 40 images of kings, restored in 1937 to include George VI.

The 15th-century misericords may be from Ripon; the restored choir screen incorporates older fragments of carving. The famous carved stone rabbit of c. 1325 was the inspiration for the White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*. There is a recent door (a war memorial) by Thompson of Kilburn.

Huge and magnificent, with nearly 70 clergy before the Reformation, **Beverley Minster** is now simply a parish church with a vicar. The tower fell down in 1213 and 200 years of reconstruction followed. The furniture of interest included long oak benches with cabriole legs, some with panelled backs, c. 1720, and a stone Saxon 'bishop's throne' of simple form.

The west door, heavily carved with figures on the inside, and the font cover, are both by William Thornton (1717-31). The choir stalls and canopy by the Ripon Carvers are similar to Manchester's. The 68 carved misericords (the largest number anywhere) were finished in 1520. The choir screen, designed by Scott, was carved by James Elwell of Beverley in 1878-80, who later became Mayor of Beverley: local men were still being used for major work at this late date.

The close proximity of the Dominican **Beverley Friary** to the Minster is coincidental. Having survived recent threats to demolish it, the much-repaired chalk and brick building is now a youth hostel and open to the public. Several rooms on two floors include wall paintings dating from the pre-Reformation period to the 19th century. One, with blackbirds, probably dates from after the Dissolution, symbolising the Creyke family living there; the *Tree of Life* may be an old one, and the faded chrysanthemums and fruit cannot be before the 16th century (the date for the wall); the larger of these may be 19th century copies.

*Phil Holland*