

Bristol Cathedral, Bristol Central Library and the Georgian House

Saturday afternoon, 29 July

The Cathedral site was first used as an Augustinian abbey from 1140 and is noted for its Norman chapter house and medieval choir. The western towers (the main entrance) and nave were added in the 19th century, drawing to a close an intermittent building project lasting almost 900 years.

Access to the well-documented misericords was hindered at the time of the visit by the untimely presence of the choir for choral evensong! Fortunately we had access to the door at the head of the night stair, giving members the chance to mull over the recent assessment by Hugh Harrison who has dated this door to the 12th century. The counter-rebating, extending approximately 12in. along the door planks at both the top and bottom, has been suggested as a feature designed to prevent warping and one little used after the 12th century. The reverse has 17th century oak panelling and the lock plate suggests it is contemporary with this oak panelling.

A warm welcome awaited us from fine art librarian, Anthony Beeson, who has been instrumental in creating one of the finest public collections of art books outside London. Bristol boasts the second earliest public municipal library in England, opened in 1613 and rebuilt in the classical style around 1740. By 1900 this library had outgrown the building (today it houses a Cantonese

restaurant!) and the Central Library was built to a neo-tudor design by Charles Holden. The Bristol Room contains some of the 18th century oak bookcases from the former library and above the fireplace are the vigorous oak carvings attributed to Grinling Gibbons, although more than one RFS member expressed concern at this attribution. Three Windsor elbow chairs with dovetail back seats which appear in an 1820s engraving of the library, were examined and also the late 17th century chair reputedly used by Judge Jeffreys at the Bloody Assizes. Also of interest was the George III neo-classical mahogany rectangular serving table with a parquetry veneered top, fluted frieze and square tapered supports

Karin Walton was on hand to show us the Georgian

House, built in 1790 for John Pinney, a West India merchant and plantation owner. The chance to go behind the ropes was gratefully received and the Channon-type cabinet, recently re-attributed to Antrobus, was examined in detail as was the Georgian breakfront twin secretaire bookcase believed to be the work of a Bristol cabinet-maker.

We were allowed access to the attic store-room housing an early 19th century circular breakfast table by the Bristol cabinet-maker Robert James. Here we also saw a John & William Linnell gold and black japanned elbow chair in the Chinese taste from Badminton House. Sarah Medlam pointed out that it showed traces of the original red, blue and yellow beneath the black that can also be found on the V & A's example of the chair. As yet no one has dared to remove the black applied during the 19th century to reveal the original colours shown in the Linnell designs.

Staying with the black, we were treated to the sight of the pieces designed by Bristol-born E. W. Godwin, including an example of his iconic aesthetic sideboard. Totalling 12 pieces of furniture, the collection was the bequest of Miss Edith Craig, Godwin's daughter.

Toby Pinn