

Dr Johnson's House

17 November

A few members gathered at Dr Johnson's house in Gough Square where our guide, Elizabeth Emerson, introduced us to the lifestyle of Dr Johnson during his residence there between 1748 and 59, while compiling his *Dictionary of the English Language*. The atmospheric character of this early 18th century building can be attributed to the survival of original panelling, various discreet built-in cupboards incorporating a cellarette and powder closet, impressive room dividers on the first floor, and furniture that belonged to or was used by Dr. Johnson in his lifetime, together with numerous prints, portraits,

paintings, books and documents.

The original household furniture includes an 18th century dumb waiter and remnants of the gothic revival bookcase gifted by his close friend Elizabeth Carter. Although no longer surviving, a long writing desk, similar to those in the counting houses, was apparently used in the garret by Dr Johnson's assistants who worked standing up, to prepare entries for the *Dictionary*.

An early 18th century leather upholstered Portuguese armchair also survives in the garret. This was used by Dr. Johnson during his frequent visits to Henry Thrale's brewery in Southwark. However, another chair (Fig 1) on the first floor landing, originating from the Old Cock Tavern, remains a design mystery despite being known as Dr Johnson's dining chair. Members' comments would be welcome.

Since the rescue of the house in 1911 involving extensive but careful restoration, originally instigated by Cecil Harmsworth, a number of rush-seated 19th century spindle-back and ladder-back chairs made in north west England have been imported into the house to accommodate visitors.

John Boram



Fig 1 Dr Johnson's dining chair from the Old Cock Tavern