

Gordon Russell Museum, Broadway

17 October

We ended the day with a late afternoon visit to the recently opened Gordon Russell Museum in the firm's original, and newly restored, workshops in Broadway. The history of the firm encapsulates the history of furniture making in England in the 20th century, from the family's purchase of the Lygon Arms in Broadway in 1904 and the consequent

repair of antique furniture to furnish the hotel, which led in turn to the sale of antiques. Following service in the first world war, Gordon Russell wished to design and make articles of lasting value; these were based both on his interest in the principles of the arts and crafts movement and his recognition of the possibilities of the use of machinery in furniture manufacturing. The firm's response to the economic depression of the 1930s was to produce radio cabinets for the Murphy Radio Company and during the Second World War the firm was involved, as was much of the British furniture industry, in aircraft production. Following the return to furniture production after the war, the firm gave revitalised support to leading designers. We were most fortunate that Ray Leigh and Trevor Chinn led our visit. Ray Leigh, an architect, joined the firm in 1967 as director of design, later becoming managing director and then chairman; Trevor Chinn had joined in 1938 and had become chief designer. They outlined the history of the firm and of the museum, showing us the many items of furniture, metalwork, glass and archival drawings in the collection, and answered our many questions. They both deserve our thanks for a memorable visit.

The collection contains interesting examples of chairs in the Clisset/ Gimson tradition, including the rush seated armchairs used by Gordon Russell in the dining room, office and study of his home at Kingcombe, near Chipping Campden. These are thought to have been acquired by Gordon Russell soon after the building of Kingcombe in



Two rush-seated chairs from Bolton School, now in the Gordon Russell Museum, Broadway

1925-6, and to have been made either by Edward Gardiner or in the Russell workshops by Ron Pepper. Two examples of chairs from the Russell workshops have recently come into the collection from Bolton School; these illustrate the extensive commissions the firm received from schools and universities, the first being the refurbishment of the library at King's College, Aberdeen in 1926. Bolton School, endowed by Robert Lever in 1644 but already in existence by 1516, was re-endowed by William Hesketh Lever (later 1st Viscount Leverhulme) in 1913. The First World War delayed the building of the new premises Lord Leverhulme had planned; these were under construction in 1924 but not finished in their entirety until 1965. However the school must have begun to occupy the premises by 1929, when Gordon Russell supplied 1700 chairs, 450 desks, tables and bookcases for the senior library and the high table in the dining hall.

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