

David Learmont

19 June 1935 – 21 July 2009

David was born in Hovingham, Yorkshire, where his Scottish father was a general practitioner. His mother's family came from Shetland. He was brought up with 'good furniture', and childhood trips to local sales with his mother often ended up with an oak chest of drawers tied on the back of the car and a longcase clock sticking out of the sunshine roof. Educated at Sedburgh in Cumbria and then at the hotel school in Lausanne, Switzerland, David spent some years teaching French in schools in the south east of England.

In 1970 he joined the staff of the National Trust for Scotland and was soon appointed the trust's first full-time curator. He was responsible for the presentations of the interiors of all the trust's properties from the great Adam interiors of Culzean Castle to humble vernacular properties such as Hugh Miller's birthplace in Cromarty. All his work was characterised by a sense of welcome, freshness, charm and impeccable old-fashioned housekeeping: David would roll up his sleeves and black lead grates.

His most significant contribution to the country-house world was the presentation of 'below stairs' rooms. He used his own culinary skills and professional knowledge of traditional practices to set up a series of historic house kitchens as fully equipped working places with everything in position and ready for use. Notable are those at Brodick, Brodie and Culzean castles and the House of Dun.

David was a founder member of the Furniture History Society and the Regional Furniture Society; the interests of the RFS coincided with his love of oak and country furniture, especially from northern England. David remained a Yorkshireman at heart. He enjoyed sharing his wide knowledge and was a great encourager of the young. He formed an impressive collection of his own which he cherished with loving care.

David's warmth, his sense of humour and the welcome with which he greeted his many colleagues and friends will be greatly missed. He is survived by his wife and their two sons.

David Learmont was naturally drawn to vernacular furniture, a love which his mother had fostered in him when on the Shetland Isles, from whence many items ofcroft-house furniture were collected. David inherited much of this furniture, and added to it over the years. He was inordinately fond of his collection and took every opportunity that he could to share it with others. Most recently he loaned several excellent examples of boarded chairs from Shetland as well as a seaman's chest, which took their place among loans from museums and other private lenders for the exhibition to launch the publication of *Scottish Vernacular Furniture*.

This deep affection which David had for vernacular furniture might have remained a purely private interest, had it not been for his post as curator of the National Trust

for Scotland. In this role, David collected many items of 'common' furniture which he found homes for in the settings of National Trust houses. Many of these pieces represent key items of Scottish furniture and often form the only pieces of their type on view in public collections. Among them are a regional settle from Aberdeenshire with a folding table in its centre, now at Crathes Castle and a panelled chair of an influential type at Kellie Castle. At the Weaver's House at Kilbarchan, many items reflect David's taste, and include hanging shelves with an integral horn spoon holder; a lowland design of armchair with a folding arm table flap and upholstered with a leather cover; and a wonderfully chip-carved box.

These are just a small sample of David's purchases on behalf of the Scottish National Trust. They naturally represent the material culture of working people, and are part of a balance that David promoted in parallel with the contents of wealthy homes.

His contribution to the study of vernacular furniture now provides precious and rare insights into the lives of working people, and this, in combination with his personal warmth and love of being among other furniture people, mark his life and achievement highly. He will be greatly missed by this author and his many friends.

Bill Cotton



Christopher Hartley