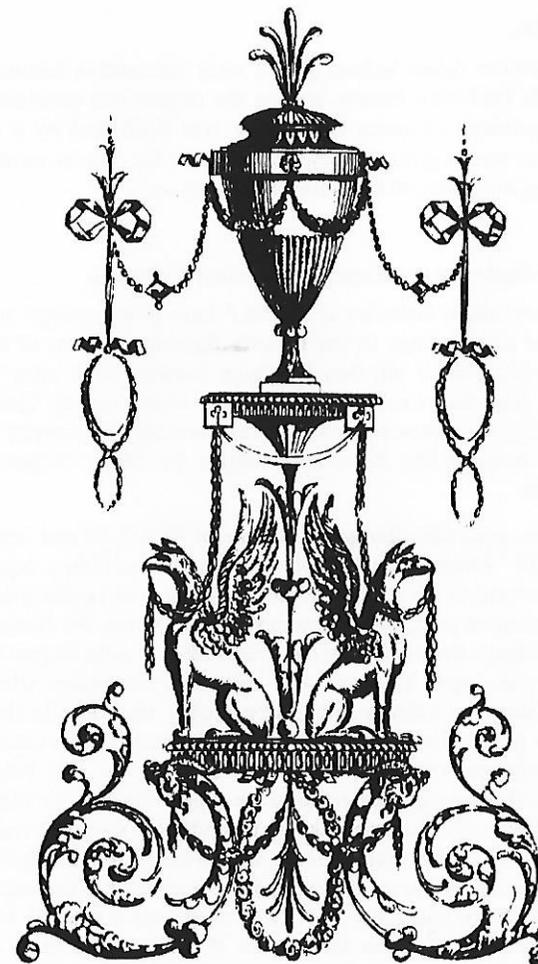


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The Chippendale Society

President: Lord St Oswald



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AUTUMN LECTURE

On Monday 12 November Adam Schoon gave a most informative lecture on *Rockingham: the Rise and Fall of Yorkshire Pottery*, tracing the origins and development of this most prestigious of all Yorkshire ceramics factories. It was illustrated by a number of pieces recently sold and there were a group of items for us to handle. We are most grateful to Adam for once again sharing his erudition and enthusiasm with us.

REVIEW

The New British Galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum

The newly refurbished British Galleries at the V&A have at last opened and are the greatest success. The familiar old displays in the nation's flagship museum of decorative art had looked increasingly dated (after all, they had been installed soon after the war), and the effects of pollution from the Cromwell Road were visibly taking their toll. Piecemeal additions had only added to a growing sense of confusion and the contrast with the other revamped parts of the museum (the Japanese Galleries, the Silver Galleries) only increased the urgency of the task.

Now visitors can walk gracefully through 400 years of British art and design, from the late Middle Ages to the 20th century, stopping off to look, learn and enjoy anything which takes their interest and at whatever level they choose to engage. The period rooms and 'star turns' are still the big punctuation marks - the Bromley by Bow Room, the Henrietta Street Room, the Norfolk House Music Room (but minus the Sizergh Castle Room which returned to Westmorland some years ago). Everyone will have their favourites, whether they are the Great Bed of Ware, Margaret Laton's embroidered jacket, the Melville House State Bed, or the Great Exhibition pieces. Everything has been 'refreshed', and in some cases the rooms can be walked through and experienced 'in the round' for the first time. Down the side aisles of the main exhibition space are some of the supporting didactic displays: everywhere the objects are beautifully lit, and despite being behind glass somehow manage to be shown close up to the spectator. An important new feature of the displays is the inclusion of many more paintings than before. There is no need to feel exhausted or saturated as there is ample seating, discreet interactive discovery and study areas and a general impression of well managed space (so rare in museums in Britain). If the intention is to create a sense of relaxed enjoyment it certainly succeeds. The day I visited there were groups of children, parties of pensioners and studious connoisseurs all happily engaged in their pursuits without trampling over each other.

The visitor is encouraged to keep four ideas or questions in mind when taking this promenade through history: 'Style', 'Who led Taste?', 'Fashionable Living', and 'What was New?'. In other words we are not just encouraged to see the decorative arts in isolation but

within their overall context in which they were made and used and in the ways they mirrored their age. This is how Chippendale has been presented here, cleverly juxtaposing him with his troublesome clients David and Eva Garrick as 'leaders of fashion'. Indeed Chippendale is the only craftsman-hero of the 18th century to be given his own bespoke space in this pantheon. There is a copy of the *Director* next to a modern edition whose pages we are encouraged to turn; a wonderful mahogany breakfast table, and the bureau dressing table probably from Harewood. The museum's 'plate 14' parlour chair is the subject of a fascinating touch-screen presentation entitled '*Did Chippendale make this Chair?*'. Under the 'shoe' of its back is the enigmatic inscription '*6 pedistals for Chipendel's backs*' (sic): does this mean that the splats were supplied by Chippendale for another furniture maker to add to a frame, or does it mean that the splats are copied from Chippendale's engraving? The presentation then takes us through the reasons why the latter explanation has to be preferred. Elsewhere in the displays there is a 'dismembered' splat-back chair which we are urged to re-assemble with the help of the instructions nearby.

Next to the Chippendale displays is the corner devoted to the Garricks as leaders of fashion, with some of the furnishings from the villa at Hampton, including the twin to the Society's own small bookcase. An elegant touch is the way it has been filled with books with green and cream spines, to match the rest of the décor. Their bed is hung in a faithful reproduction of the famous chintz which nearly landed Chippendale in prison (see Gilbert p. 240); and there is the formidable Eva's hand-painted Chinese silk dress, perhaps not unlike the original hangings of the state bed at Nostell. We also see their smart neo-Classical silver tea and coffee service with vertical stripes of alternating matt and burnished finishes. Close by is a painting of a Thames-side quay showing huge bales of cargo being unloaded: we are left guessing their contents - more contraband chintz bound for St Martin's Lane, perhaps?

CHIPPENDALE SPOTTING - ADDENDA

Stephen Wood has pointed out that the pair of 'Clarence House' style chairs sold by Phillips London on 9th February 1999 did not remain unsold as reported in Newsletter No. 91 but realised £47,000. Also the suite of seven side chairs and a stool formerly at Chesterfield House offered by them on 20th April sold for £140,000.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Visit to Burton Constable

This will take place on Monday **15 April 2002**. See separate sheet for details.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting will be held in the Christopher Gilbert Room, Civic Centre, Boroughgate, Otley on Monday **13 May 2002** at 7.30 pm.

The Annual Dinner

This will be held at Otley Golf Club on Tuesday **11 June 2002**. The speaker will be the Countess of Wemys. More details of this event in the next Newsletter.