

Hello. This session will consider Gothic interiors — mostly domestic — created in Britain during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We will look at the sources for Gothic interiors, and the different manifestations of medieval architecture's motifs in contemporary fashionable and antiquarian interiors that were at the height of fashion in the Georgian and early Victorian periods. During the 1750s there was what has been termed a 'mania' for Gothic furniture — not genuinely medieval furniture — but pieces made and promoted by fashionable London-based cabinet-makers, including Thomas Chippendale. This craze was criticised in printed works, such as *The World by Adam Fitz-Adam*, yet the style spread through aristocratic society. It even filtered down through the merchant and middling classes.

The importance of a Gothic interior to the idea of the Gothic house is illustrated well by a passage in Jane Austen's critique on the Gothic Novel — *Northanger Abbey* (published in 1817; dated 1818; but originally composed in the late 1790s). Catherine Morland, the heroine of the novel, is keen to catch a glimpse of the Gothic house, Northanger:

her impatience for a sight of the abbey [...] returned in full force, and every bend of the road was expected with solemn awe to afford a glimpse of its massy walls of grey stone, rising amidst a grove of ancient oaks, with the last beams of the sun playing on the beautiful splendour of the Gothic window.

The reality of the interior, however, did not match her expectations:

The windows, to which she looked with peculiar dependence, from having heard the General talk of his preserving them in their Gothic form with reverential care, were yet less what fancy had portrayed. To be sure, the pointed arch was preserved — the form of them was Gothic — they might be even casements — but every pane was so large, so clear, so light! To an imagination which had hoped for the smallest divisions, and the heaviest stone-work, for painted glass, dirt and cobwebs, the difference was very distressing.

Austen's Morland is horribly disappointed to find that, though aspects of the medieval style remained at Northanger Abbey, its interiors lack all traces of the Gothic. Its furnishings have been replaced by the improvements of modern convenience and luxury, and it is for this reason, perhaps, that she makes a Gothic fantasy out of those few old objects that remain.

As in this passage from Austen, attacks upon the popularity of Gothic design in mid-Georgian Britain concentrated upon the style's frivolity, which, ultimately arose from the fact that Gothic was framed in binary opposition to Classical design (and architecture), which was considered to be the 'gold standard'. We explored this in detail

in last week's session, but the point is worth emphasising. Look at this comment, for instance, from the anonymous contribution to *The World* from 1753:

FROM a thousand instances of our imitative inclinations I shall select one or two, which have been, and still are notorious and general. A few years ago everything was Gothic; our houses, our beds, our book-cases, and our couches, were all copied from some parts or other of our old cathedrals. The Grecian architecture [...] which was taught by nature and polished by the graces, was totally neglected.

And in the same essay the author continues by complaining that

ACCORDING to the present prevailing whim, everything is Chinese, or in the Chinese taste: or, as it is sometimes modestly expressed, *partly after the Chinese manner*. Chairs, tables, chimney-pieces, frames for looking-glasses, and even our most vulgar utensils, are all reduced to this new-fangled standard; and without-doors so universally has it spread, that every gate to a cow-yard is in T's and Z's and every hovel for the cows has bells hanging at the corners.

THE good people in this city are, I perceive, struck with this novelty; and though some of them still retain the last fashion, the Gothic, yet other have begun to ornament the doors and windows of their shops with the more modern improvements.

HAD this taste prevailed in the latter end of queen Anne's time, the new churches themselves had doubtless been pagoda's; nay, it is expected at present that Something which is rising on the building at horse-guards, if ever it should come to a conclusion, will terminate at last *partly after the Chinese manner*.

Despite unified criticism, Gothic forms were promoted by cabinet-makers and designers, who responded to, but simultaneously promoted their own interpretations of prevailing tastes. For example, one of the most fashionable and influential of London-based furniture makers and designers, Thomas Chippendale, promoted Gothic designs within the broader context of the mid-Georgian preference for Rococo furniture — the Rococo being a style characterised by asymmetry, C- and S-scrolls, dripping wax and bold, organic, carving. In one third of the plates included in Chippendale's high-profile and successful furniture pattern-book published three times in the 1750s and 1760s, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director*, he incorporated Gothic motifs either overtly or covertly. The broad insertion of Gothic motifs in the preeminent furniture pattern-book in Georgian Britain (circulating widely amongst both craftsmen and the moneyed classes — aristocrats and the newly-wealthy merchants), promoted a Gothicised form

of the Rococo, which was adopted and adapted throughout the remainder of the century. The furniture depicted in Chippendale's plates was fashionable and was intended to go into country- and town houses of any period and style: Rococo Gothic furniture need not be placed in a medieval house, or even a Gothic house created newly in the Georgian period: it was perfectly acceptable even in Classical houses that needed re-furnishing to bring their interiors up-to-date in terms of fashion and comfort, including Hopetoun House, Edinburgh, or to furnish newly-constructed Palladian-style houses, such as Dumfries House, Ayrshire.

Of Chippendale's designs for the *Director*, some include the key components of medieval architecture also incorporated into Georgian Gothic architecture, namely pointed and ogee arches, tracery, cusping, quatrefoils and clustered columns. This can be seen in the following illustrations, now on screen, for a Gothic Bookcase and a pier-glass. Other, less overly Gothic, designs with a larger amount of Rococo attributes can be seen in the design now on screen, which is for wall brackets. These designs were not always realised exactly as specified by the furniture designers, which was the idea. Chippendale, for example, suggested that the patters were models that cabinet-makers and carvers could elaborate upon, or pare back depending upon their skill, or their clients' budgets, or a combination thereof.