

Unlike fashionable Georgian Gothic furniture that we looked at in the first video of this session, a number of newly-built Gothic houses with Gothic interiors were created in the Georgian era. Of these, there are a number of particular interest when we take into account the architects or designers responsible for them. William Kent's Esher Place, Surrey (completed c.1733), as shown by the drawing below this video in the image resources section, illustrates his bold application of cusping to the octagon's ceiling and chimney piece. This is certainly unlike the fashionable Rococo-Gothic furniture proposed by Chippendale and the Linnells, another leading cabinet-making firm, for example, and instead is exclusively architectural. This difference reflects the opposing traditions that Kent and these designers took when creating Gothic pieces for domestic interiors. Kent was an architect and he created his Gothic furniture according to the same style. Chippendale and the Linnells, on the other hand, were not architects. They, instead, deployed Gothic motifs in line with furniture designers' traditions and conventions of lightness of form and ornament, unlike Kent's heavy, massy, approach.

Horace Walpole's villa, Strawberry Hill, which we looked at in terms of exterior architecture in the last session, is another instance of a thoroughly Gothic house. The interiors of the house are the best documented of any Georgian Gothic residence as the antiquarian topographer, John Carter, recorded the house in detail from 1788. These illustrations document the objects collected by Walpole, and the furniture and chimneypieces. The early rooms, such as the Parlour, have a simplistic rendering of Gothic forms. For example, the Gothic characteristics are articulated by the cornice and the chimneypiece. The other notable Gothic ingredient in this room is the suite of eight black-painted Gothic chairs, designed by Walpole himself and Richard Bentley, one of the designers invited by Walpole to join his 'committee of taste', known as the Strawberry Committee. Walpole wrote to Bentley in 1754 concerning the chairs' design, which indicates not only the source for their design, but gives some flavour of the co-operation between them on their form:

In the first place, my chairs! if you had taken a quarter of the time to draw what they might be, that you have employed to describe what they must not

be, I might possibly have some begun by this time. Would one not think that it was I who make charming drawings and designs and not you? I shall have very little satisfaction in them, if I am to Invent them! My idea is, a black back, higher, but not much higher than common chairs, and extremely light, with matted bottoms. As I found yours came not, I have been trying to make out something like the windows — for example I would have only a sort of black sticks, pierced through: you must hatch this egg soon, for I want chairs in the room extremely.

These chairs are the most distinctive examples of movable furniture at Strawberry Hill. They are very much removed from contemporary splat-back parlour chairs designed and made by Chippendale, in that the back is, to all intent and purpose, based upon the idea of a medieval window; the cresting is totally converted into a Gothic arch head, and it is even crested by a finial. The central 'lancet' of the back, however, is not treated in a traditionally-medieval way, for it is filled with octofoil reticulations, whereas the outer lancets are not. The lower edge of the seat rail is carved as a repeating gallery of descending arches, each cusped, and the legs are inset with cusped lancets. In addition, the chairs are coloured black to reflect the ebony furniture that Walpole saw at Esher Place, a type which he coveted and thought to be of Tudor origin.

Related furniture was designed by Bentley for the Parlour, including a black table also made in imitation of ebony. This finish complements the Gothic decoration — a Gothic frieze composed of repeating ogee arches, each septafoil cusped with finial terminals, and a band of repeating lancet moulding runs above. As we have seen before, these are all characteristic features of the Gothic style. The legs are spiral-turned, which

responds to the ebony furniture Walpole collected and displayed at Strawberry Hill, including in the Holbein Chamber. This form also reflects the spiral columns of St Edward the Confessor's Shrine in Westminster Abbey, a source used for the Round Drawing-Room chimney piece.

The process by which Strawberry Hill's Library evolved and developed illustrates Walpole's concern for recreating the forms of medieval architecture. Referring to Bentley's first design, Walpole writes:

For the library, it cannot have the Strawberry imprimatur: the double arches and double pinnacles are most ungraceful; and the doors below the book-cases in Mr Chute's design had a conventual look, which yours totally wants. For this time, we shall put your genius in commission, and, like some regents, execute our own plan without minding our sovereign. For the chimney, I do not wonder you missed our instructions: we could not contrive to understand them ourselves; and therefore, determining nothing but to have the old picture stuck in a thicket of pinnacles, we left it to you to find out the how.

And in 1754 Walpole writes again:

Poor Mr Chute was here yesterday, the first going out after a confinement of thirteen weeks; but he is pretty well. We have determined upon the plan for the library [at Strawberry Hill], which we find will fall in exactly with the proportions of the room, with no variations from the little door-case of St

Paul but widening the larger arches. I believe I shall beg your assistance again about the chimney-piece and ceiling; but I can decide nothing till I have been again to Strawberry.

The design process surrounding the library presses underscores Walpole's later antiquarian pretensions. He repeatedly rejected Bentley's whimsical proposals, including a particularly fanciful chimney-piece with towering pinnacles in the first one. Bentley's rejected proposals are in opposition to Chute's archaeologically-aware design.

Similarly 'antiquarian' schemes for Gothic interiors and furnishings were developed for the Holbein Chamber at Strawberry Hill, where the 'chimney-piece, designed by Mr. Bentley, is chiefly taken from the tomb of archbishop Warham at Canterbury'. The room's vaulting pattern was taken from the Queen's bedchamber at Windsor Castle, and the screen made in imitation of that at Rouen Cathedral. The most spectacular room in the house, however, was the State Apartment, otherwise known as the Gallery. It is the largest room in the house, modelled after a Long Gallery, with a monumental *papier-mâché* vault made in imitation of that in a side aisle of Henry VII's Chapel, Westminster Abbey. As has been recorded by John Carter and Edward Edwards, this room accommodated a wide array of objects, furniture and paintings, with fashionable furniture made by leading London cabinet-makers. The chairs at the end of the room, like the stools, have Gothic mouldings on the seat rails, and the crestings follow the line of the ogee arch, which was embraced in the Georgian period, particularly by William Kent and Thomas Chippendale, and they consequently engage with the room's overtly Gothic design. They contrast significantly, however, with the

ebony furniture already mentioned. Despite moving away from the whimsicality of Kent's Gothic at Esher Place, these chairs were collected by Walpole after he had seen and admired those at Pelham's house:

The true original chairs were all sold [...] there are nothing now but Halsey-chairs, not adapted to the squareness of a Gothic dowager's rump. And by the way I do not see how the uneasiness and uncomfortableness of a coronation-chair can be any objection with you: every chair that is easy is modern, and unknown to our ancestors. As I remember, there were certain low chairs, that looked like ebony, at Esher, and were old and pretty.

Turned ebony furniture — that seen in John Carter's watercolour of the Holbein Chamber — was thought to be appropriate for the Romantic interiors at Strawberry Hill. In reality, such ebony furniture was produced from the seventeenth century onwards on the Coromandel Coast in Southern India. Gothic furniture, in other words, was seldom authentically 'Gothic', but was collected as such for its superficial look, air and appeal.

Similar collections of furniture were amassed at other Gothic Revival houses, including Lee Priory, Kent. One of the rooms in the house, named in honour of Walpole's house, the Strawberry Closet, has recently been shown to have contained such ebony pieces, and indicates not only the influence of Walpole's house, but the furniture he collected for it.