Curator's Picks

Our Curator has picked two of his favourite objects from John Wesley's House to share with visitors; John Wesley's Library Gown and a painting of Rev. Adam Clarke and two former Buddhist monks.

John Wesley's Library Gown

Long thought to have been a preaching gown, this garment was actually a library gown. Gentlemen wore this type of 'undress' coat at home, much like today's dressing gown, to keep warm. Often, library gowns were made from luxurious materials such as silk and damask. In fact, they were thought sufficiently 'posh' for receiving visitors at home, and many 18th century paintings exist which depict gentlemen in their 'undress' clothes.

This particular gown is very interesting. It is an early example of recycling - and it was woven from horsehair! In the past, when horsehair was plentiful, horsehair was often turned into fabric, especially for upholstery. It had a sheen similar to damask and was exceptionally hard wearing and long lasting. However, the way this gown was put together, with a pattern which does not match up across the arms, back and front, and the pattern being used upside down in places, indicates that only a limited amount of material was available.

Was the fabric left over from an upholstery project, or was the gown a gift, perhaps? John Wesley was known to be economical and thrifty, so a gown made from reused material would be entirely in keeping with his character.

Painting of Rev. Adam Clarke and two former Buddhist Monks

The painting shows Adam Clarke (1760 - 1832), a friend and associate of John Wesley, in his library with two former Buddhist monks.

Arriving in England in May 1818, the two monks were met by Clarke, a well-known scholar on the New Testament. Clarke looked after the monks. In 1820, he wrote: 'did so; and in doing it encountered many difficulties, which, because the good hand of my God was upon me, I surmounted; and, after twenty months instruction under my own roof, I was fully convinced that they were sincere converts to the Christian religion, and that their minds were under a very gracious influence. At their own earnest desire I admitted them into the church of Christ by baptism'.

At the time, the idea of 'mission' and bringing Christianity to other peoples and continents was thought the right and 'Christian' thing to do. Local cultures and traditions were usually ignored and the so-called 'heathens' were converted. Sometimes the conversions were a success- others brought heartache and suffering.

Chintz was a popular design for fabric in the 18th century