Request from Jenny Lever:

I am one of a team of volunteers who are researching the walled kitchen garden associated with the Archbishop of York's Palace, in Bishopthorpe near York which dates from around 1767. It is being well managed as a kitchen garden by a local charity but we are applying for grade 2 listed status to give the walls and backhouses some protection. As such, we are researching the history of the gardens and have found several interesting invoices from 1772-3 that describe extensive glazing work in the walled garden including what I think might relate to the first of a series of pineries that we know were on the site (sadly dismantled in the 1960s).

The invoice includes the prominent use of the term "His Grace the Lord Archbishop's Brough Oven". This is a major header on this invoice but I can't find any reference to a "Brough Oven" on the internet or in the other references I have looked at (e.g. Miller's dictionary"). It is spelt alternatively in the invoice as "Brought Oven" (the glazier's spelling is variable!).

Ideally I want a Brough Oven to be a synonym for a stove or pinery but have no evidence for this. Any information the Walled Kitchen Gardens Network may have would be much appreciated.

Regarding the architect. we’re still piecing it together - we don’t know for certain who built the pinery at the moment but we do know that the York-based architect Thomas Atkinson was on site both between 1763-1769 (during which time the original garden was built) and also in July 1773 when he, amongst other things, was “fixing staples to the garden doors” (I read this as ‘finishing touches’). During 1763-1769 Thomas Atkinson undertook a major remodelling of the Bishopthorpe Palace estate which included building a new gatehouse, new village church and remodelling the façade of the Palace - he was a serious architect in the region around that time and was involved in developing various stately homes.

Given that the original kitchen garden is reported to have been completed in the middle of this phase (1767) it seems likely to me that he was probably involved in building the walled garden too but this isn’t reported anywhere that I have found yet (people have always been more interested in the principal buildings than the gardens and supporting structures like the gardener’s house!). We also know that the firm of John Carr was on site from 1761-1763 (building the grand new stables under the direction of Carr’s assistant, Peter Atkinson) but this is apparently slightly too early for the gardens and there is no evidence of his firm being involved in Bishopthorpe after that time. My instinct is that it was Thomas Atkinson.

Our evidence for work on the gardens in 1772-3 comes from a series of invoices. I mentioned the glazier’s invoice in my original message, who did a lot of work he entitled ‘Brough Oven’ (this term that I am curious whether it relates to pineries) but Thomas Atkinson’s invoice mentions a few items which are intriguing.

He is doing various things across the estate, including work in the drawing room of the main house for example, but one of the things he invoiced was for “cast iron stoves [note plural] in the kitchen” (costing £2, 4 shillings and 6 pence). We suspect there were two stoves in the original pinery, so this is quite tantalising – does he mean the main kitchen in the house, or does he mean the kitchen garden? No mention of “garden” in that item, but it is followed immediately by “Fixing staples to the garden doors”. He also invoiced for rebuilding a wall that took 170.5 man days and needed scaffolding – which is a large project – we can’t for certain pinpoint which wall this refers to but can we infer that he was building one of garden’s walls? There are no tall walls around that estate of that age (which still are standing anyway), which weren’t already built… other than possibly the kitchen garden’s heated wall which we know was not part of the original garden but was definitely in place sometime before 1785 - ????

We also think that the larger of the pine houses (no glass anymore but backhouses still stand) was built sometime later (the backhouses look more 19th C) but we haven’t started looking at the records of that era as yet, so we don’t know exactly when or by whom. I have attached a photo of the backhouses so you can see the different phases of construction. Maybe there are clues in the architecture which experts will be able to use to date them? I have also attached a photo from the top of the local church tower from 1949 showing the layout of the glasshouses – the glasshouse we believe is older is the one with 14 panes along the top, next to the double doors (left side of the glass houses that are against the walls – the glazier’s invoice from 1773 specifically mentions “14 garding glassis [sic] with strong cast covers and handles” which we think probably relate to these 14 panes still visible in 1949).

The other thing I am trying to find out is whether Thomas Atkinson was known to have built any other walled gardens – these will be in Yorkshire as he only seemed to have worked locally. I know John Carr built several walled gardens but can’t find any evidence so far for Thomas Atkinson having been involved in their construction.

Thank you, and if you can help, please email us at: jms.medicalwriting@gmail.com