

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY FURNITURE IN THE CASTLE DAIRY, KENDAL

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On a visit to Cumbria in October 1990, members of the Regional Furniture Society saw a large amount of high-quality panelling and movable woodwork dating from the late 1550s. The oak panelling, overmantels, beds, benches and chairs at Sizergh Castle are well known, especially the inlaid room and bed transferred to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1891.¹ However, the furniture in the Castle Dairy which dates from the same period although recorded by local historians,² does not seem to have been examined by furniture historians.

The fourteenth-century Castle Dairy (Fig. 1) was probably built to supply dairy produce to Kendal Castle. The Keeper of Kendal Castle in the first half of the sixteenth century was Sir Thomas Parr, whose beautiful and accomplished daughter, Katherine, became Henry VIII's sixth wife in 1543. Indeed, the Garnetts who lived at Castle Dairy during this period are said to have been associated with Thomas Parr, and two of the Garnett daughters became ladies-in-waiting to Queen Katherine.³ About the middle of the nineteenth century some interesting artefacts dating from this period were discovered in an oak chest in Castle Dairy, including two sets of roundels, and a missal.⁴ It is interesting to speculate on whether these once belonged to the Garnett ladies-in-waiting or possibly to Katherine Parr herself.

Kendal Castle was untenanted by 1543,⁵ sometime after this date Anthony Garnett undertook building work at Castle Dairy which he completed by 1564, the date which once appeared on a stone plaque containing his initials and cypher on the exterior of the building.⁶ Indeed, Garnett seems to have had a particular liking for mottoes, devices and, fortunately for the furniture historian, he dated some pieces. The earliest is 'Pax Huic domini 1558' carved on a solid sixteenth-century oak door surround with a boldly moulded ogee head on the screens passage. The date 1560 appears on a post in the hall and above a window of three trefoiled light on the exterior of the hall is a shield with initials and date 'A G 1564'. Various painted glass quarries bear the dates 1565 and 1562 (or 67?).

Unfortunately, little is known about Anthony Garnett, possibly due to gaps in the Parish Church Registers during this period. However, some entries do appear: Henry, the son of Anthony Garnett, was baptised at Kendal on 27 October 1558, the year the first incised dates appear at the Dairy, and the wife of Anthony Garnett was buried on 9 March 1571.⁴ Presumably Garnett married again, since in 1575 his widow gave the substantial sum of £20 towards the incorporation of the borough of Kendal by Queen Elizabeth. Widow Garnett must have been prosperous since only eighteen residents of Kendal contributed larger sums.⁷ An as yet unconfirmed story is that Anthony Garnett was a silk merchant, and certainly the town was famous for its weaving trade from the fourteenth century; 'Kendal Green' dyed cloth was well known throughout the land, and Katherine Parr gave her husband Henry VIII a coat of Kendal cloth on her marriage. Flemish weavers settled in the town at an early date, and some authorities believe that Flemish carvers also settled in the Kendal area in Tudor times.



1. Castle Dairy, Kendal

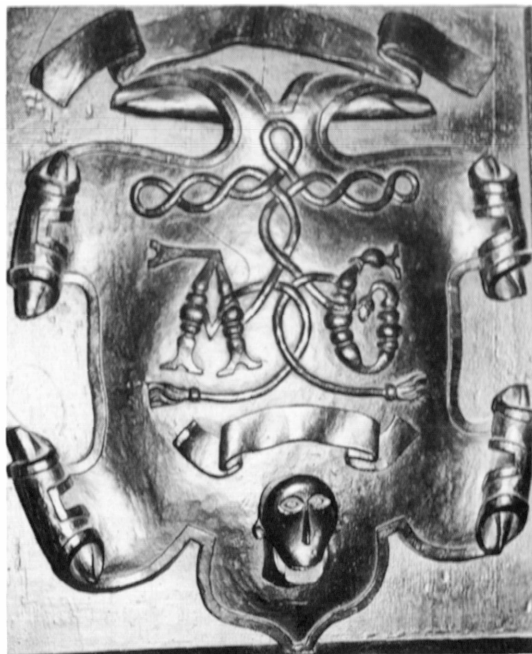
The most striking room in the Castle Dairy is the bedroom known as 'The Chapel', on the upper floor of the north-west wing. The barrel-vaulted ceiling has three oak cross ribs and two oak bosses bearing the arms of local families quartered: Parr, FitzHugh, Roos, Garnett, Deincourt and Strickland, a third boss is missing. The painted glass in the windows (probably restored since Kendal Corporation acquired the building in the 1920s) contain the mottoes 'Omnia Varitas', and 'Vendra le Jour', Garnett's initials 'A G' and the date 1562. This small room is reputed to have been used as a Roman Catholic chapel by Kendal people during the Reformation, the nearest other chapel being at Sizergh Castle. Part of a carved reredos, removed from behind the small altar in the Parr Chapel in unsettled times, was once reputed to have been used in this room, but no evidence remains today.⁸ However, this room contains two remarkable pieces of furniture: an oak tester bed and an oak aumbry bearing the date 1562 (Fig. 2). The decoration on both items is related, lion masks and open volutes appearing on both. Both pieces have been in their present positions for some time. The wall behind the bed appears not to have been decorated for many years and the striking board does not run behind the furniture. The cornice on the bed is slightly embedded in the wall. Their present position is awkward as part of the bed cornice has been cut away to accommodate the top of the cupboard. However, confirmation of their early presence in the room is given in the first edition of *The Annals of Kendal* by Cornelius Nicholson, published in 1832:² 'In the oratory is an antique carved bedstead, the panels of which are filled with grotesque figures of monks. There is also an altar containing the Pix — the chest or box



2. Bed and aumbry, Castle Dairy, Kendal



3. Mask, top left-hand panel, bed, Castle Dairy, Kendal



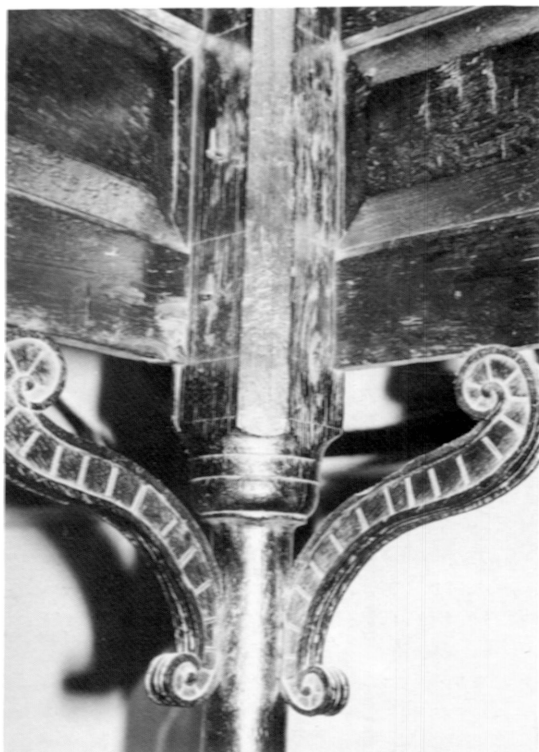
4. Central cartouche from head of bed, Castle Dairy, Kendal, bearing initials of Anthony Garnett



5. Mask, top right-hand panel, bed, Castle Dairy, Kendal



6. Lion mask, one of three smaller examples on bottom panel, bed, Castle Dairy, Kendal



7. Scrolls viewed from interior of bed, Castle Dairy, Kendal



8. Bracket, top of bed head, Castle Dairy, Kendal

where the consecrated host was kept. This is inscribed "humanitas, honor, diutae, potestas".

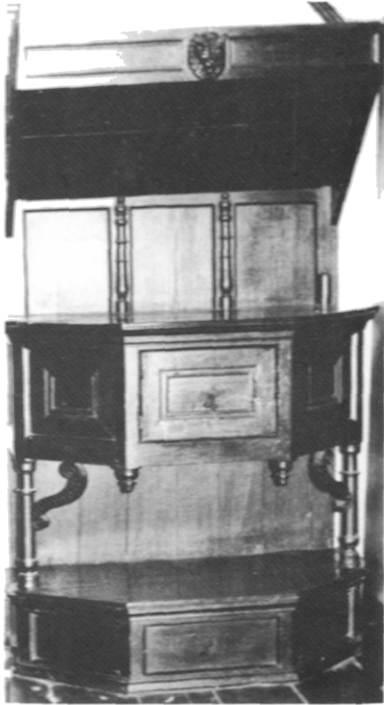
The decoration is of a restrained architectural form with a clearer understanding of Renaissance structures than is usual in English carved oak beds; this is well illustrated by the simple architectural pediment on the headboard. Nicholson appears to have misinterpreted the applied masks on the panelled headboard, since no monks appear. The top row of panels bears two familiar faces with animal ears and horns (Figs 3 and 5) with in the centre a scrolled shield bearing the initials A G with a looped and tasselled cord and a primitive Celtic type head (Fig. 4). This device is repeated on a painted quarry in the window of this room bearing the date 1562 (or 7?). On the lower row are three lion masks, one bearded, one with a ring in its mouth and one with its tongue out (Fig. 6). Earlier writers have suggested that these lion heads are not original, but on close examination they do not show evidence of having been altered or applied later. The carved grotesques set in panels moreover are very similar in style to those half-human, half-animal heads on the bed in the Bindloss Room at Sizergh Castle, which was made up out of part of the sixteenth-century Strickland pew in Kendal Parish Church (Fig. 10). The pew was taken to Sizergh Castle in the 1850s when the tidy Victorians descended on the old church. Removing '... at one fell

swoop all of the old unsightly higgledy-piggledy square shaped pews and pens, with which the interior was so long encumbered', and substituted 'the present convenient benches'.⁹ Linking the posts and the tester are four scrolls or open volutes with incised decorations resembling a series of Is (Fig. 7). At the headboard there are smaller similar scrolls enclosing fruit and leaves (Fig. 8). The incised Is, however, are curved and a dot appears between them. The same designs occur on volutes incorporated into contemporary furniture and fixed woodwork at Sizergh Castle (Fig. 11). For all its sophistication, the bed is not large, its overall height is 87 inches, width 69 inches and depth 85 inches. Nor is it elaborately carved and inlaid compared with many surviving oak beds of the period. Carved decoration is restricted to corner scrolls and the five applied masks and cartouche. The bed relies on its architectural form and mouldings for its effect.

The basic structure of the bed at the Castle Dairy appears to have been little altered. Until some twenty years ago, it retained the rope base. A section has been taken out of the short posts, perhaps to accommodate a mattress, and the mouldings around the foot of one of the large posts are missing and the mouldings around the edge of the upper part of the plinth of the column have been replaced. The bed is of mortice and tenon construction, made of oak with blacksmithed hooks under the edges of the tester at the corners. The unseen top of the tester is well finished, presenting a flat panelled appearance reflecting the plain panels of the underside. As with many of the better quality massive oak beds of the sixteenth century, the bedstocks are supported by two short posts with the large posts supporting the canopy. Unusually, the two posts are not separate, but are linked by an angled member. The bedstocks have ropeholes through the sides and seven larger holes in the top of the two side pieces, possibly for bed staves to hold in place the numerous mattresses, sheets and blankets used with such beds. Both pieces of furniture have been stained.

An aumbry (or ambry) is a type of cupboard used for various purposes, one of which was 'a recess for church vessels'.¹⁰ The aumbry in the Castle Dairy is a five-sided canted cupboard with backboard, sloping canopy above, supported on two turned columns above a raised base board (Fig. 9). The canted form dates from the fifteenth century and is also seen on French dressers.

In the centre of the canopy frieze is a lion mask like those of the bed. The canopy is of quarter sawn oak and is somewhat crude. The remnants of a painted paper or cloth are glued to the centre section. The backboard bears two turned split balusters and the remains of a third. The door and the two front panels of the cupboard are panelled with mitre surrounds, but the side panels, which are not easily seen in the cupboards present situation, have simple linenfold decoration, of a similar design to the small cupboard in the hall. Two carved open scrolls similar to those on the bed link the pillars and the underside of the cupboard, and these have turned pendant finials. The iron work of the door has been altered and replaced but one blacksmith-made strap from a hinge remains and there is evidence of a second strap hinge. Inside the cupboard the thick base boards of oak are fixed with small wooden pegs and there is a narrow four inch-wide oak shelf at the back. Around the base of the cupboard is the following inscription, filled with a type of black-stained composition: 'A G Anno DNI 1562 A G'. On the upper frieze either side of the lion head 'OIA VANITAS HONOR DIVICIE POTESTAS'.



9. Aumbry, Castle Dairy, Kendal



10. Mask from reconstructed bed, in the Bindloss Room at Sizergh Castle, near Kendal



11. Part of screen dated 1558, entrance hall at Sizergh Castle, near Kendal

Later the same day members of the Society visited Sizergh Castle, and were immediately struck by the similarities between the Castle Dairy furniture and elements of the screen (Fig. 11) at the entrance to the hall at Sizergh which is dated 1558 (the same date appears on the door frame in Castle Dairy). The Sizergh screen incorporates two large dragons, an architectural pediment and open volutes. The pediment is of the same shape as the one incorporated in the bedhead and the scrolls are also in the same style. As we were soon to discover, many dates appear on the fitted woodwork and some furniture at Sizergh.

Sizergh Castle is an early tower house which was altered during the mid-sixteenth century when the main block was reconstructed and two wings were added. The work was carried out by Sir Walter Strickland, and after his death in 1569 by his widow Lady Alice. The house is known for its fine oak panelling dating from 1563 to 1575, and the quality of its carved overmantels bearing the dates; 1563, 1564, 1569, and in the Inlaid Chamber of 1575. In addition to the screen dated 1558, chests, chairs and forms dated 1562, 1570, and 1571 have also survived. A group of five oak armchairs, now housed in the Banqueting Hall, relate to the panelling in various rooms. Much of the fixed woodwork at Sizergh is very sophisticated and has been compared with work at Tissington Hall, Derbyshire, Gilling Castle, Yorkshire and Lyme Park in Cheshire.¹ However, the chests and chairs are relatively simple in form and have little decoration.

The Strickland papers remain at Sizergh and apparently do not name any craftsmen associated with the woodwork, however it was not possible to examine them before preparing this article. At this stage it is possible only to make some tentative statements about the origins of the furniture at Castle Dairy and its connection with furniture at Sizergh Castle which date from the same period. During the mid-sixteenth century, in preparation for the new building work at Sizergh Castle, Sir Walter Strickland set up workshops on the ground floor of the new south wing. These workshops included joiners' shops with a smithy just behind.¹¹ This arrangement was paralleled at Fontainebleau where workshops were provided for craftsmen working on the palace. A Strickland family tradition persists that Flemish carvers were employed in the workshops there: and since Flemish weavers were working in Kendal in sufficient numbers for a chapel in the parish church to be dedicated to them, the story may have some foundation. Clifford Smith also suggested Flemish and Italian influences, but also acknowledged in a V & A booklet published in 1915, that 'local tradition indicates native craftsmen working on the spot'.¹ There is certainly evidence that a local apprentice was taken on during the 1570s when the Inlaid Chamber was being constructed, which clearly indicates a transference of skills to local men.¹ Once again solid evidence has yet to be found, but local tradition suggests that the same school of woodcarvers moved on to nearby Levens Hall, and panelled rooms and fine overmantels bearing the dates 1586, 1595, and 1617 can be seen there. One of the most striking dated examples at Levens Hall however is the screen dated 1617 which is a naïve version, almost a parody, of the 1558 screen at Sizergh Castle. It has yet to be investigated if workshops were also established at Levens as they were at Sizergh.

Despite the fact that the furniture at the Castle Dairy is much less ornate than dated fixed woodwork at Sizergh, the quality and similarity of the carving on the grotesque masks set in small moulded panels, and the design of the open scrolls on the bed and aumbry at Castle Dairy suggest that they were probably made in the same workshop, namely, at Sizergh Castle.

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