

Charlecote Park and Lord Leycester's Hospital, Warwick

17 April

Despite inclement weather early on, we started our private tour of Charlecote Park at 10am with the residence manager, Pamela Hill, and assistant tour guides. Our attention was drawn to the *pietra dura* table in the entrance hall. Of 16th century manufacture, it sits on a Tudor style stand featuring the Latimer cross. The base was designed for William Beckford's Fonthill Abbey, and can be seen in John Rutter's *Delineations of Fonthill and its Abbey* of 1823 in King Edward's Gallery (below). George Hammond Lucy,

whose family came over to England after the Norman Conquest, purchased it in the Fonthill Abbey sale of 1823. Also of note in the entrance hall is a 'antique' sideboard made in 1837, although the date 1558 is carved into it – the date of the original Charlecote. The vaulted ceiling above is worth a remark: made from plaster, it was painted to look like wood at a time when plaster ceilings were seen as a mark of distinction.

The dining room contained the massive Charlecote sideboard, made by John Wilcox and assistants, and is a prime example of richly carved furniture from the mid-19th century. Further attention was aroused by a quantity of turned ebony furniture, some of it acquired at the

FONTHILL ABBEY.



INTERIOR OF KING EDWARD'S GALLERY,

Looking across the Octagon into St. Michael's Gallery.

Published June 2, 1823, by J. Rutter, Shaftesbury



Figs 1 and 2

Fonthill sale, a lacquered chinoiserie cabinet and a table from Japan in the billiard room. A pair of curious torchères, purchased in Milan in 1829, and a harp with gothic detailing were displayed in the drawing room, and there were boule cabinets and pietra dura tables throughout the house.

The interiors at Charlecote are fitted up with 'ancient' and contemporary furniture in a romantic style as discussed by Clive Wainwright in *The Romantic Interior*. At lunch we were free to discover the treasures on the first floor of the house, where the collection of furniture was no less impressive than that on the ground floor.

We reconvened outside Lord Leycester's Hospital, Warwick for the afternoon session. The medieval hospital was not a hospital in the modern sense, but a place to accommodate the poor or ill and serve their religious needs. The hospital is situated in a row of early 15th century timber-framed houses, and was formed in 1571 by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester for the aged or infirm men who had seen service in the wars, together with their wives.

Our tour was led by Gerald, the 32nd Master of the Hospital, and took in the chantry chapel, great hall and various other rooms. In the guild hall we examined a three-legged turned chair, said to have been made in the reign of Alfred (c.871-901 AD), and a later 19th century copy (figs 1 and 2). The wear on the left hand arm was said to have been caused by the watchman who sat in it facing the 'wrong way'. The crusting rail was used as a support for the rifle barrel and the marks are from the kick-back.

A pair of similarly related chairs in a private collection were brought for comparison (figs 3 & 4) and it is thought that the general design came from the Saxony area on the continent: examples could have been brought back by the Hussars at the Battle of Warburg in 1760. Their relationship, albeit loose, to the turned 'Welch' or 'thrown' chairs (fig. 5) from the Marches was also considered.

It was a highly successful research visit and was thoroughly enjoyable on multiple levels.

Peter Nelson Lindfield

¹ See Ormen, N, and Webster, M, *The English Hospital 1070-1570*, Yale University Press, London, 1995, and Prescott, E, *The English Medieval Hospital 1050-1640*, Seaby, London, 1992.

Fig 3



Fig 4



Fig 5

