

Tour of Temple Newsam House with James Lomax

9 October

Our tour of Temple Newsam began in the Still Room where James Lomax, one of the curators, gave a brief résumé of how the house evolved. Originally built by Lord Darcy in 1520, it has been remodelled at various times, and its symmetrical plan dates from Lady Irwin's influence in the early 19th century. The estate was offered by Lord Halifax to Leeds County Council in 1922, complete with 1000 acres of land for £25,000. The contents, also offered at the time for £10,000 were eventually sold off and dispersed. Since then the curators of Temple Newsam have endeavoured to restore the building to its original historical setting, refurnishing the rooms and interiors with appropriate period furniture, paintings and artefacts. Gradually, as original pieces that were once in the house have appeared on the market, they have been purchased and replaced in the appropriate rooms. Many members had visited Temple Newsam before, but it was refreshing to see the most recent additions by RFS members Bill Cotton and the late Roger Warner.

The Still Room had been recently refurbished, and here a collection of vernacular chairs donated by Bill Cotton attracted a lot of attention. They included rush-seated West Midlands chairs, a 'Taylor, Grantham' smoker's bow armchair, a 'Charles Leicester' Macclesfield bar-top chair,

and a Dales chair, to name a few. An impressive suite of glass-fronted cupboards in breakfront style along one wall has been refurbished as in 1733-1745. Also in this room was a chest of drawers from Herefordshire dated 1674 – a bequest by Roger Warner.

A few items stand out in the memory as objects of special interest. The carved figures at either end of the Great Hall were found in the cellars, originally fitted with oil lamps, now restored to their former positions and rewired for electric lights. The Chippendale furniture in Mr Wood's library, and especially the great Chippendale writing table, one of two dated 1771, was bought in memory of Christopher Gilbert. The spinning wheel in Sheraton style in one of the bedrooms, by John Planta of Fulneck, Leeds, was of special interest to me. Fitted with the John Antis worm and wheel mechanism to traverse the bobbin back and forth, it probably dates from 1795 or slightly after. John Planta is known to have made around 20 examples of varying quality. It would have been nice to dress it with flax to see how it would spin! Another item that attracted attention was a mahogany breakfast table with a top slide folding down either side like a Pembroke table. With the inner tray removed, the table top could be closed by lifting the two side flaps. Members spent some while trying to work out how to put it back together again!

The embroidered winged armchair in the Gothic Room, another bequest of Roger Warner, attracted particular scrutiny. Our final stop was in the Green Room, restored in 2009. A schoolroom in the 19th century, the contents are set out to recreate this use. They include an amazing dolls house, originally from Swarcliffe Hall, later bought by Roger Warner, and then acquired in the Warner Collection sale at Christie's. The intricate dolls' house furniture had been collected by Roger over a number of years. Altogether it was an excellent tour and many thanks to James Lomax for sharing with us his knowledge of just about everything we wanted to know.

David Bryant