

# Visit to Nostell Priory

10 October

Taking shelter from the chilly early morning wind we assembled in the lower hall where Roger Carr Whitworth introduced us to the house and then proceeded to expertly guide us up through it to the newly opened bedrooms on the second floor. However, the lower hall and its adjoining rooms proved a strong magnet for our members. We were immediately drawn to the wonderful 17th century furniture collected early in the 19th century by Charles Winn who, having unexpectedly inherited the estate in 1817, found himself in the unique position of being both squire and local vicar. A scholar and avid collector, he was very much part of the antiquarian revivalist movement, but in collecting old oak and historical portraits he also endeavoured to promote the notion of the Winns as an old established family with important early connections, not least being Thomas More. Sadly, like many other collectors, he fell victim to the unscrupulous and much fun was had by our members trying to distinguish the truly original from additions/alterations or the downright fake. Peter Brears drew our attention to a '17th century' side chair with a back panel which he recognised as part of the wall panelling from Leconfield Castle in East Yorkshire and dated to pre-1525.

Tim Phelps pointed us in the direction of an 18th century fitted desk with its original paintwork and handles, one of many scattered throughout the house. On to the muniment room where Tim was on hand again to explain the exquisite detailing of the fitted architectural cupboards by Adam/Chippendale (?) with original internal paintwork, part 18th and part 19th century. Most had highly sophisticated locks (38 in all), with one unusual engraved key opening all, a similar arrangement existing in the library upstairs. Before leaving the ground floor we viewed the famous dolls' house made for the Winn family, c.1735, with almost all its original furnishings and probably made more as a model for adult pleasure than a child's toy.

At the foot of the Paine staircase with its beautifully moulded mahogany handrail, Roger highlighted the Chippendale apothecary's cabinet, an example of the many items of well made plain furniture supplied by Chippendale which possess an understated functional elegance. Up to the piano nobile to view the well documented Paine/Adam interiors with their Chippendale furniture and a Gillow layer added by Charles the vicar/squire. Roger reminded us of the only known barometer case made by Chippendale, at the head of the staircase: it is of tulipwood and ebony with a movement by Justin Vulliamy. He also pointed out the large quantity of giltwood picture frames of varying sizes supplied by Chippendale.

In the dining room our attention was drawn to the unique white painted side tables by James Paine (with later tops by Adam), some of the very few documented items of Paine furniture. The maker of the dining chairs is unknown, and although of high quality, their slightly stilted appearance suggested a provincial maker, possibly Wright & Elwick of Wakefield. In the adjoining saloon, Tim Phelps highlighted the late use of walnut in the case of Jacob Kirckman's harpsichord of the 1760s, suggesting that further study of instrument cases which, like longcase clocks, can often be accurately dated, could reveal useful information on timber usage. This room also contained a pair of Adam scagliola-topped giltwood pier tables by Richter & Bartoli which, at £157.10s, cost more than any other item of documented furniture in the house.

Next, the library and its magnificent desk – one of Chippendale's masterpieces and the single most expensive item made by him for Nostell. A quick look at the built-in medal cabinet with its original oiled finish before we proceeded to the billiard room. Here the highlight for many was the 1717 John Harrison longcase clock with its mechanism almost entirely made of wood (see FHS Newsletter 175 and RFS Newsletters 52 and 53). Son of the estate carpenter at Nostell, Harrison was sufficiently well regarded in the 19th century for the Winn family to buy the clock, thereby strengthening their association with him.

Already our time was up and we had only skimmed the surface of this wonderful treasure house. We emerged into brilliant sunshine and lunched on the lawn by the stable block. Later, some returned to the house while others strolled around the beautiful lower lake with distant views of Adam's unusual pyramidal Featherstone Lodge.

*Gerry Coughlan*



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