

Friday 3 July

Hall, Bishops Tawton, North Devon

The first house that we saw on the Friday was Hall, just Hall and so-named after the first owner in the 15th century, one Simon Halle, a lawyer, whose only daughter married a Richard Chichester in 1461. The house and estate are still in the hands of the Chichester family who were significant in Devonian history (the aviator/sailor Sir Francis Chichester (1901–72) was a direct descendant, being born in Barnstaple).

After a very long steep drive the first buildings one saw probably dated from that first marriage. There is a surviving ledge-door with decoration that must be 16th century and two earlier windows; however, this was just an outbuilding. P. C. Hardwick built the main house for Robert Chichester in 1846–50 in a neo-Jacobean style. This replaced a rambling old house and re-orientated the main elevation by 90° from facing west, to looking south, over the Taw valley. The house has two floors plus attics (the ground floor is slightly raised). On the western end of the building is a double height Gothic Hall

The present owners, Michael and Clare Campbell-Lamerton (née Chichester) met us outside the porch. The house had suffered rather from a large sale in 1996 where a number of interesting things went, but what survived was still fascinating. On entering the hall the first thing one saw was a vast trestle table, probably mid-17th century in date. The staircase was of oak and dated from the rebuilding of the house but the crowned lion newel posts were certainly much earlier and I am indebted to Linda Hall for raising this point. To the left of the hall was the dining room with an interesting set of walnut (?) cabriole legged chairs stamped 'T Jones' and dating to c. 1880. In a passage outside the dining room was a splendid small two-door cupboard with four drawers inside, c. 1680; strangely it did not sell in the 1996 sale. In the Study was a very unusual

oak cupboard, somewhat in the manner of the Welsh tridarn; the lower part was like a plainish court cupboard of two small cupboards and two large ones below but a tall top shelf out of proportion was set above. It was all quite correct, but just rather strange and caused much discussion.

At the doorway to the Gothic Hall was a cedar coffer, possibly mid-17th century that was the basis for much speculation, as we knew that we were to see another coffer somewhat earlier in date, in Braunton St Brannock (see below, Ed.). We had a splendid lunch that finished with strawberries and Devonshire clotted cream when Keith Pinn told us about three rare steel-handled brass warming pans, all mid-17th century or earlier. One embossed with a rose and written around the edge 'To this Rose Put thy Nose' and another, of which only the lid survived, but had a 'C. P.' embossed and the words 'God save Prince Charles' dating it c. 1624.

Outside there was a fascinating small granary building raised on brick 'pillarettes' and a wonderful belt-driven saw-mill, the base-plate of which must have been 20 ft in length.

Altogether an excellent visit and the Society are immensely grateful to Michael and Clare Campbell-Lamerton and their team for the welcome and lunch.

Treve Rosoman