

Two private collections

Over the course of two days, the Society was exceptionally fortunate in being invited to visit two private collections, that of Michael and Margaret Snell, and that of Ronnie and Candy Butler. At both, members were warmly encouraged to examine a fine collection of Salisbury furniture built up over many years – which would have been impossible without patient, local knowledge and shared expertise. At both, our hosts were as generous with their expertise as with their very liberal hospitality. Both collections

demonstrated the remarkably consistent features of Salisbury furniture c. 1580–1650 and the endless variety with which they were handled by, it is presumed, several dozen craftsmen in several workshops. It is very much hoped that the quantitative analyses charted with such perseverance by the Butlers might be developed to publication in due course. Naturally, we saw more examples of Salisbury armchairs (and since they are generally so robust, tried them for ourselves), and pondered details such as the ‘pellet’ moulding and ‘gun barrel’ turning, the (almost always) lost finials and lack of evidence for painted surfaces, the frequent initial stamps (either for owners’ or makers’), whether oak was really preferred (as appears from the survivals), and whether a distinctive Salisbury side chair (without arms) ever existed. A 17th-century Salisbury armchair with a romayne back panel was an interesting example of early antiquarianism: the identical grain of the timber on the panel and uprights made clear that the panel was not a recycled 16th-century one.

These two private visits also broadened the discussion very helpfully, by providing actual or illustrated examples of other distinctive Salisbury furniture types: stools, tables, chests and boxes, a rare court cupboard and box chair, and more numerous, folding gateleg or ‘credence’ tables. This last type features a hinged 8-sided top set on a 6-sided base with three arches, single drawer and ‘pot board’, characteristic Salisbury carving (such as the almost ubiquitous guilloche motif) and turnings that are often supplemented by split turned ornament. Beside those illustrated in *Oak Furniture*, an example from the V&A’s collection (museum no. Circ. 359–1961) may be seen in detail on the V&A’s website (search ‘Salisbury oak’) or at Blakesley Hall, Birmingham where it is currently on display.

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