

Treasures of the North West

Stonyhurst

Stonyhurst College, set in the lush green countryside of the Ribble Valley, Lancashire, is one of the most important Catholic boarding schools in England. It was until 1999 a Catholic boys school, when it became a co-educational institution. Stonyhurst has two museums, the Do Room and the Long Room. It houses the best collection of recusant history in England; Jesuit missionaries and alumni of the school brought back many of the artefacts over the centuries.

Jan Graffius, curator of the magnificent collections at Stonyhurst College, welcomed us and gave us a fascinating and entertaining 'twin history of the school and family' at Stonyhurst. Both aspects were entwined, encompassing the history of Catholic families, the restrictions placed upon them; and the religious climate in England, Europe and beyond which affected their sons' education. Important Catholic families who owned Stonyhurst from 1200 were:

the Bayleys, the Shireburns, the eighth Duke and Duchess of Norfolk, and the Welds of Lulworth in Dorset. The school, the Jesuit College of St Omer (then in Flanders), was founded in 1593 to educate English Roman Catholic boys who were barred from receiving Catholic education in England. The Jesuit College was obliged to move to Bruges, then Liege to avoid persecution. Finally in 1794 the Jesuit priests and their English pupils fled to England anticipating the arrival of the anti-Catholic French Revolutionary army. They came temporarily to Stonyhurst by invitation of ex-pupil Thomas Weld, and stayed!

Pupils were often the sons of gentry and important families like Thomas Weld of Lulworth in Dorset, who had inherited Stonyhurst in 1754. Weld employed his fellow Catholics, Gillows of Lancaster to make ecclesiastical furniture for Stonyhurst in 1771, namely a 'large and handsome mahogany tomb altar of curious wood' for his chapel, and two cupboards to stand at either side of the altar. Richard Gillow also provided 'a very neat tabernacle



Fig. 1 15th-century Flemish oak window re-ordered to make an overmantel

& steps, with a dome & temple' which was inlaid, carved and gilded, and six 'handsome candlesticks all carved and gilt'. The later I believe are still at Stonyhurst. When Thomas Weld gave the house to the Jesuit priests and their pupils fleeing the French Revolutionary army in 1794, Stonyhurst's illustrious history as the oldest and most important Catholic boarding school in England began.

Jan Graffius gave us a very extensive tour of Stonyhurst and its important collections. The oldest surviving building is the Shireburn mansion comprising the gatehouse known as 'the tower' with classical columns of the four orders of architecture, and the left wing built by Richard Shireburn in the 1590s. However, the family ran out of money so building stopped and it remained 'a half house' until Richard Shireburn's grandson, Sir Nicholas Shireburn extended the mansion by adding the Great Hall and two ponds 660 ft by 112 ft and an avenue or causeway between them in 1696. The Elizabethan Long Gallery, with its two

priest holes set between the ceiling and the floor of the room above, contains a wonderful collection of Victorian stuffed birds, and curious and exotic objects given by past pupils over the centuries and from all over the world. They are housed in Victorian display cases; Thomas Wolstonholme's collection is also displayed in this gallery, which was returned to its proper function in 2003 by the tireless efforts of its curator Jan Graffius. There is no space here to give a full account of the house tour that included two magnificent chapels, one dedicated to Saint Peter and the other Saint Aloysius. The latter was designed and built c. 1870–88 by Dunn & Hansom as part of the Renaissance revival South Front building. The chapel itself is in an unusual Gothic revival style with internal oriel windows: the woodwork was by Hansom including rare fan vaulting, as was the reredos. It also has gesso paintings by Percy Bacon. A. W. N. Pugin stayed at Stonyhurst whilst he was building Conishead Priory; no furniture by him survives; a crucifix once in the house has since been lost. Three



Fig. 2 A view of the Stonyhurst chapel of 1870–88 where one can plainly see the fan vaulting by Dunn & Hansom. (Photograph Jeremy Bate)



Fig. 3 The long oak table upon which Oliver Cromwell is alleged to have slept in 1648



Fig. 4 (left) Curator Jan Graffius and Richard Brown discussing a point in the chapel of Stonyhurst (Photograph Jeremy Bate)

Fig. 5 (above) The brass plate on the long refectory table (Fig. 3) recording Oliver Cromwell's visit to Stonyhurst

stained glass windows designed by him, one just outside the chapel have survived.

Stonyhurst has an idiosyncratic furniture collection, some items of which were glimpsed during our tour. It included some cupboards that appeared to be made out of several 17th-century court cupboards probably in the 18th century. These were used for vestment storage. There were scores of trestle tables used in the Great Hall in the



Fig. 6 One of the tables from Gillows of Lancaster who supplied some of the furniture to Stonyhurst in the late 19th century

mid-19th century by the pupils for dining; and a long row of school desks from the 19th century extensively and deeply carved with the names of bored pupils. Other institutional furniture included several chairs stamped GILLOW and CO. LANCASTER, numbered L 8557, indicating a date of about 1880. One of the most interesting early pieces was a trestle table with a plaque stating that Oliver Cromwell had slept on it, apparently in full armour, before the battle of Preston in 1648, whilst his army was camped in the grounds of Stonyhurst.

Our tour finished in one of the large store rooms at Stonyhurst, which was full of the most important Catholic relics, priceless illuminated books, Durer prints and reliquaries made to house bone fragments and other body parts of saints and martyrs including one of the thorns alleged to be from Christ's crown of thorns. A rare inventory of the silverware purchased by the Shireburns from about 1680 is of great interest to metalwork historians. It includes details of a toilet service costing the enormous sum of £650 given by Sir Nicholas Shireburn to his heiress daughter Maria, on her marriage to Thomas Howard, 8th Duke of Norfolk in the early 18th century. This very rare silver gilt toilet service wrought by Benjamin Pyne, one of the best English silversmiths in London, was valued in 2012 at £1.5 million, when the V&A objected to its export.

Christopher Hartley thanked Jan Graffius on behalf of us all for giving us such an interesting and informative visit to Stonyhurst College and its important collections.

Our excellent day in Lancashire ended appropriately with a really delicious traditional Lancashire tea organised and prepared by our host and hostess Jeremy and Rachel Rycroft, who had worked tirelessly to make the day such an enjoyable and successful one.

Jeremy Rycroft



Fig. 7 Stonyhurst curator, Jan Graffius, showing the group some of the documents in the store

Browsholme

The group, including old and new faces assembling at Browsholme was introduced to the history of the family, architecture and collections held within. The Parker family has continuously held Browsholme, a unique treasure of the North West, with the house standing on this site since the early 16th century. The house today remains largely unchanged since Thomas Lister Parker's alterations in the early 1800s. The collections held within reflect the tastes and attitudes of the family, but also give an insight into other houses in the area through the numerous items acquired locally over the years.

Entering the house through the Hall we found an eclectic antiquarian collection of furniture, objects and family possessions on display. An early oak press cupboard, originally from Ingleton Hall, North Yorkshire, sat alongside turned chairs, an 18th-century signpost



barometer and even fragments from a Zeppelin shot down in World War 1. The collection in this room alone had something of interest for everyone and provided a welcoming atmosphere where we were able to examine and discuss at close hand a variety of objects whilst gaining some understanding of the families collecting habits.

We progressed through into the Library with its early oak-panelled walls which came locally from the Kenyon family in 1806. The diagonal brickwork pattern which relates to the panelling of the dining room of Towneley Hall is centred by the great overmantel that bears the arms of the Towneleys of Hapton Tower. Of particular local interest in this room were the 18th-century family portraits by the renowned Preston artist Arthur Devis.

Going into the Drawing Room and Dining Room the house-character began to change; we left behind the Antiquarian rooms and moved to the more grand 19th-century splendour designed by Jeffrey Wyatt. Here we



Fig. 8 An antiquarian sideboard with numerous inset continental panels (Photograph Jeremy Bate)

Fig. 9 An interesting oak chest of drawers with applied decoration of split-turnings (Photograph Jeremy Bate)

found great mahogany doors supplied by Gillows, Regency seat furniture from the home of the architect John Carr of York, alongside earlier furnishings acquired by the family in the 19th Century. Two outstanding items were a chandelier, along with a curious gilt wood side table (possibly by Martin Foxhall) that came from Fonthill, Wiltshire, in around 1815. The group spent some time



Fig. 10 A fine late 17th-century oak Welsh tridarn. (Photograph Jeremy Bate)



Fig. 11 An oak scratch-carved wainscot panel dated 1678 (Photograph Jeremy Bate)



Fig. 12. A mid-18th-century mahogany child's high-chair that has seen, and is still seeing, much use (Photograph Jeremy Bate)

between these two rooms, as there was much to admire and discuss.

Working our way further through the house, along corridors to the main staircase, the style and aura of the rooms reverted back to an earlier traditional feel. The staircase we were told was carved before the 1805 alterations and as we climbed to the first floor, a remarkable stained glass window constructed from early fragments of glass could be seen.

The final rooms of the house, in particular the yellow bedroom were furnished with a mix of early oak and 19th-century revival pieces. The great bed, in the Tudor style with linenfold panels was dated 1891 had been made by Richard Alston and did not look out of place sitting alongside early oak chests and chairs.

Overall Browsholme provided a wonderful start to the day, an exemplary house and collection, which we were all able and keen to learn from and enjoy; our thanks to Robert Parker of Browsholme and to their Visits Organiser, Catherine Turner and her assistant Barbara for making this such an enjoyable visit.

Andrew Cox-Whittaker