



Fig. 1 Norton Conyers, near Ripon, North Yorkshire

## Norton Conyers

At Norton Conyers (Fig. 1), an attractively unpretentious house, Sir James and Lady Helena Graham, in whose family ownership it has long resided, greeted us. Architecturally it is a 17th- and 18th-century accretion incorporating earlier fragments and a history going back to Viking times. Its furnishings offer a typical country house mixture of oak and mahogany, which was keenly examined with the additional help of local restorer members Tim Phelps and Andrew Cox-Whittaker, as well as historian Peter Brears, and Ann Lister a specialist in historic fabrics.

As the house was briefly out of Graham ownership from 1865 to 1879, it is thought that much of the contents arrived after this time. We began with a display of 18th-century mahogany that Tim and Andrew were researching with possible links to the local Yorkshire firm of Wright & Elwick of Wakefield, who are recorded as working here. This included a pair of small window seats and a rectangular stool, both with square legs carved with Chinoiserie fret (Fig.2). The key details were ash seat rails and unstitched bunched grass edges to the upholstery

round horsehair centres, which allowed for thinner upholstery. These are probably more Yorkshire features than specific to this firm however. Dining chairs at Nostell Priory have similar details.

Peter pointed out a wainscot chair dated 1653 that was virtually identical to one in the Yorkshire Museum, a side table which had Westmorland features, and the star piece of furniture, an important early to mid-16th-century South German banqueting table, square with beautiful coloured inlay and a Spanish limestone insert intended to keep displayed sweetmeats cool (Figs 3 and 4). Recorded in the house in 1838, it is thought possible that it might have been made for a banqueting house in the centre of a lake here.

Upstairs was a very fine small Swedish marquetry bureau from the third quarter of the 18th century. The fact that the central motif appeared to represent Minerva or Britannia might imply that it was made by an émigré in London. In King James's Room, where the future King stayed with Mary of Modena in 1679, an oak tester bed was judged to have been made up, probably in the early 19th-century Romantic Revival, using an unrelated 17th-century





Fig. 2 (above) Tim Phelps revealing the upholstery of a window seat



Fig. 3 (below) The magnificent inlaid South German banqueting table

Fig. 4 (inset) Detail of the inlay







Fig. 5 Detail of the bed post in King James's Room

back-board and carved baluster posts (with puzzling pitch-inlaid, almost Chinoiserie bases), while the frieze of a carved press had the tell-tale row of holes showing that it had been reused from a bed rail (Fig. 5).

A further excitement was the revelation of some well-preserved fragments of 1760's architectural wallpaper with a Vitruvian scroll frieze, and a series of boards of probably local oak, painted in c. 1520–50 with fictive fabric, one series in red and another in white, the latter imitating linen damask (Fig. 6). We were also shown a rare and truly vernacular survival of a horizontal storage rack for vegetables with its original stone base. This had been spotted and published by Christopher Gilbert.

We are most grateful to our specialists and to Sir James and Lady Graham for facilitating a fascinating visit.

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Fig. 6 Painted detail on the underneath of the floorboards