



View of Townend from the car park. (Photo David Dewing)

Townend Farmhouse, Troutbeck

The approach to Townend farmhouse from the National Trust car park is dramatic, down a winding path through the trees, with the house nestled into the hillside beneath a backdrop of glorious fells stretching into the far distance. The house is very much part of the landscape, built with local stone under a slate roof, topped with distinctive round chimneys. It dates from the 16th century and was the home of successive generations of the Browne family, successful 'statesmen', to use the term Wordsworth and others used to describe the prosperous tenant farmers of Westmorland. The earliest part of the house, termed locally the 'firehouse', was thought to be 16th century, with the kitchen added in the early 17th century, and a further extension built to the rear in the late 17th century providing a parlour and bedroom above. Either side of the central core, wings were added in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Inside, the house is furnished in an antiquarian manner, to give the impression of a 17th-century home, and is largely the creation of George Browne (1834–1914). He was a keen collector of oak furniture which he embellished with his own carving, to such an extent that it is quite hard to spot anything which has not been 'enhanced' by his restless chiselling. Thankfully, Frank Wood has been

carefully studying what is original and what is invented or copied and after a while most of us were becoming reasonably adept at identifying what was genuinely old and what was almost certainly a Browne intervention. George was keen to add initials, dates and heraldic motifs to demonstrate ancestry, and to copy locally traditional decorative patterns to enrich otherwise plainer panels and friezes. Very few pieces of furniture and woodwork are untouched.

One or two items deserve special mention. In the kitchen there is a rather delightful confection of 17th- and 18th-century furniture running along the wall opposite the door. It includes the base of a 17th-century oak dresser, the top section of an early 18th-century oak bureau bookcase with arched doors, two 17th-century oak boxes with sloping lids, a 17th-century oak livery cupboard with spindled front and an 18th-century long-case clock by William Wilson of Kendal (d. 1781). Any odd gaps have been filled with sets of small spice drawers. The whole effect is surprisingly successful. And in the 'firehouse' there is a remarkable oak table probably 20 feet long with powerfully turned baluster legs and a pair of benches, described in a 1730s inventory as 'buffet forms', which would likely have been stored between the table legs on their sides. In the same room there is an imposing 17th-century oak press cupboard, clearly in the local



Cradle, probably late 17th or early 18th century, with added 19th-century carving by George Browne, including the initials and date (Photo David Dewing)

tradition but much of it overcarved by George in the 19th century.

The small parlour added in the late 17th century was turned into a library by George Browne, based on a collection of over 400 books recorded in the house in 1750 and added to by successive members of the family; the collection includes rare 'chap-books', cheap and popular throw-away publications which somehow survived in this unusual household. Upstairs we puzzled over a cradle with spindles supporting the hood: George had certainly been at work in adding decorative carving to the panels but were the spindles original? And in the smaller bedroom we were shown two large oak chests stood on their ends, with the lids each forming a door and the insides fitted for hanging clothes. These were also dated and initialled, no doubt by George, who perhaps was responsible for this adaptation. Altogether a delightful if slightly eccentric house and contents.

Townend was certainly interesting, amusing and eccentric; we left rather bemused by the idea of this obsessive man chipping away during the long summer evenings while his long-suffering wife and three daughters got on with running the household.

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