

# A Warwickshire Press Cupboard

I first came across this impressive press cupboard in 2010 when it was on display at Nash's House in Stratford-upon-Avon and I had just joined the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust as Museum Collections Officer. It was part of the furnishing of the main downstairs room – a bit of a mixture between hall and parlour. The house, built around 1600, was presented as the home of Thomas and Elizabeth Nash. Elizabeth was William Shakespeare's granddaughter and his last direct descendant after the death of her aunt, Judith, in 1662.

The cupboard was purchased by the Trust in 1955 from S. W. Wolsey for the respectable price of £105. A large proportion of the Trust's furniture collection was acquired through Wolsey in the 1950s and through another dealer called Oliver Baker in the 1920s and 30s.

We were lucky enough to benefit from the considerable expertise of the late Victor Chinnery in the 1990s and 2000s. Sadly, I never met him but I am grateful to him most days for his clear and consistent descriptions of the furniture in our collection and the methodical way he described every element of a piece. This has helped me reunite furniture with its catalogue record more than once and I have learned a great deal



Press cupboard, oak, dated 1673, Warwickshire. Shakespeare Birthplace Trust



Detail of the press cupboard showing the dated frieze above the central arched panel. Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

from these catalogue records and *Oak Furniture: The British Tradition*, a copy of which is always within reach of my desk.

I can only assume that it was Victor Chinnery who identified the cupboard as possibly having been made in Warwickshire as this information is not on the original invoice or index card and appears as part of a catalogue description that fits his style and structure. Chinnery described the cupboard as follows: 'A late 17th-century oak press cupboard; the moulded cornice above a frieze covered with flower filled trail, centred on date 1673 and initials IA; the upper stage with finely-carved arched panel flanked by a pair of doors carved with thistles and a pair of heavy turned columns; the moulded shelf above a frieze carved with S-scrolls over a pair of three panel doors, the top panels finely carved and with moulded framework; English, probably Warwickshire, dated 1673; top boards, cornice, feet and one keyplate replaced.' A detail is featured in his *Oak Furniture* (1979, p. 175), about which he writes 'This is a sensitive, articulate expression of middle-class provincial carving,

but somewhat fussy in the small scale of the detail'. I note that he is careful to write 'dated 1673' as the cupboard is earlier in style.

The cupboard is now on display at Hall's Croft, the home of Shakespeare's daughter Susanna and her husband John Hall, a physician. The set dressing in the house aims to give the impression of an early 17th-century middling-class home and the cupboard lends an imposing grandeur to the parlour. Both Hall's Croft and Nash's House are owned and managed by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust along with Shakespeare's Birthplace, Anne Hathaway's Cottage and Mary Arden's Farm.

I would welcome thoughts from readers that might add extra light to the Warwickshire attribution.

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