

The Landkey Parish Table purchased by the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon

On 21 August 2018 we heard that the Landkey Table was due to be auctioned at Bonhams in London on 18 September. With an estimate of £5,000–£8,000 there was a very real possibility that a wealthy collector might pay up to £30,000 for it, and we didn't want to risk bidding at auction but still failing to save it.

Chris Pickvance and Roderick Butler of the RFS were able to supply me with detailed information to apply for

a grant to buy it for the Museum. They also assisted in demonstrating to the owners, the Trustees of the Landkey United Charities, that it should stay in North Devon. The Trustees agreed that they would, in principle, sell the table to the Museum. However, we still needed to find the money to buy it. Julia Brettell at the V&A Purchase Grant Fund suggested we might try the Beecroft Bequest, which is only open to smaller museums that are members of the Museums Association. The fund focuses on works of art from the eighteenth century or earlier, so the table was a good fit. We submitted our urgent application for funding on 31 August. The Trustees of the Beecroft Bequest responded amazingly quickly, and on 10 September they agreed to give us up to £10,000 as a 95% contribution towards the costs of buying the table. On 11 September the table was withdrawn from auction.

The table with integral benches was almost certainly made for the Parish Room, Landkey, near Barnstaple



The Landkey Parish Table. *Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon.* © Bonhams 1973 Ltd



above The builders helping to get the top into the Museum. Photo Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon

right The top is a single piece of oak. This part may date to the sixteenth century, as the date 1655 carved into the end seems to mark a repair rather than its original construction. The initials refer to the Landkey churchwardens at the time – William Lavercombe and Thomas Gould. Photo Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon

and probably assembled there. It is seemingly one of only two sixteenth/seventeenth-century parish room tables known in Devon, the other being at Sampford Courtenay.

The Landkey Table is a rare example of a type of table found in institutions such as colleges, monasteries and almshouses. The earliest long tables were boards placed loosely on trestles and the seats were long benches or, in higher status contexts, individual stools. By the seventeenth century joined refectory tables were adopted in large houses. The Landkey Table is an intermediate type which still has trestles but where the top is fixed and where the benches are fixed to the horizontal trestle supports. This emerged in the sixteenth century in institutional contexts. The fixed benches are a very rare feature. The table was included by Margaret Jourdain in her study *English Decoration and Furniture of the Early Renaissance 1500–1650* (London: Batsford, 1924), illustrated with photographs and drawings. The fact that the table has stayed in its original context, the Landkey Parish House, is exceptional. The condition of the table is what one expects of a well-used vernacular table of its type after over 400 years of use: it is largely intact but has had necessary repairs.



The Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon is a local authority multidisciplinary museum. We are currently in the middle of a £2million refurbishment project that will extend our floor space by 70%, providing a new social history gallery, learning room and high-quality temporary exhibition spaces. We intend to display the table initially in the Museum Library, which is being converted into a public research area as part of our current extension project. The table itself is now fully funded, however we are still fund-raising for the extension through the Barnstaple and North Devon Museum Development Trust, c/o Museum of Barnstaple & North Devon, The Square, Barnstaple, Devon EX32 8LN.

For more details about the table, see the Museum's blog <https://barnstaplemuseumblog.wordpress.com/2018/10/12/week-14-the-tale-of-a-table/>

We would like to thank all those who helped with its recovery, with letters of support, money and practical

help. They include individuals such as Thomas Cadbury, John Allan, Julia Brettell, Roderick and Valentine Butler, Ian Mortimer, Todd Gray, Susan Andrew, Chris Pickvance, Keith Robinson, Martin Body, Deborah Griffiths, Peter Child, Peter Beacham, Dick Jones, Richard Prowse, David Luggar, Glyn Lane, Bill Parker, Michael Gee, Terry Green, Stephen Pitcher, Lady Arran, Nick Humphrey, Nick Wells and David Houlston. Organisations which helped achieve this happy outcome include the Royal Albert Memorial Museum Exeter, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Regional Furniture Society, Devonshire Association, Devon Archaeological Society, Friends of Devon Archives, Landkey Parish Council, North Devon Council and the Trustees of the Landkey United Charities. And especially the Trustees of the Beecroft Bequest.

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