

David Wilson, who spoke on **Furniture in Gloucestershire Churches**, began his lecture by pointing out that furniture dialects do not conveniently change at county boundaries and that the two very different geological areas of Gloucestershire, the low-lying Vale of Gloucester to the west and the limestone uplands of the Cotswolds, have more effect on the county's furniture than any county boundary. One effect may be the apparent restriction to the Cotswold area of pulpits as gifts by individual patrons, and probably it was the wealthy sheep magnates of the Cotswolds who were in a position to indulge in such patronage.

The work of a highly skilled and known carpenter, Edward Taylor, was then discussed. He had worked for Christopher Wren in London, returned home to Gloucestershire and re-roofed the nave at Newent church. David suggested he may have also made the pulpit at Newent and he quoted from the inventory of Taylor's belongings at his death in 1702. His tools, which included a lathe, were valued at £3.

David then illustrated and discussed some of the main motifs associated with Gloucestershire furniture. The dragon motif appears on both domestic and religious furniture in Gloucestershire, as it does in many counties, but David said it develops from the Saxon tradition rather than the Celtic and is consequently not often found in Wales. He illustrated dragons on pulpits in Frampton-on-Severn and Elkstone, and then, on the crest rail of an armchair at Ashurst, dated 1642, the dramatic opposed dragons. Seven chairs with similar crest rails are known, all dating between 1630-42. Two chairs with identical crest rails of opposed dragons and a central flower were illustrated, one from Barnsley in the Cotswolds and one from Elmore near the Severn. Were they from the same workshop?

Opposed heart motifs are another known Gloucestershire feature but they are rare. Quatrefoil decoration appears at Slimbridge church and its neighbour, Ham, both of which also have identical lunette lappets. An armchair with quatrefoils at Hampton Maysey was illustrated and David pointed out that ears are quite a common feature on Gloucestershire armchairs and also that carving on the arms themselves appears on chairs in Gloucestershire.

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Between the morning and afternoon lecture sessions we paid a visit to the **Parish Church of St John the Baptist** in the Market Place. We were very fortunate that Bill Cotton, who knows the furniture in the church well, was able to be with us and lead this visit. Mr Barnard and John Laurence, who arrange visits to the church, met us and showed us round. They had kindly arranged access to the Garstang Chapel so we could look closely at the Gorges Chest, polychromed, carved and dated 1539, and had also unlocked other chests for us to examine their construction. They also took us up to the first floor of the celebrated south porch, to see the room built for the use of the town guilds. A most interesting discussion concerned a chest in the base of the west tower, item 15 in the catalogue of Temple Newsam and Bristol Museum's 1976 exhibition of *Oak Furniture from Gloucestershire and Somerset*. This chest, dated 1786, is in the catalogue as Gloucestershire (?) and the entry mentions three similar examples, one in the V&A bought as Dutch. The

construction of the Cirencester one is very interesting – appearing to be framed and panelled but in fact of plank construction. The consensus of opinion on the day was that the chest was German.

The day ended with an **open microphone session**, with contributions from several members and guests. Keith Pinn introduced the subject of almshouse-related furniture sometimes to be found in churches, and he spoke of two intriguing items in the Church of St Michael in Framlingham, Suffolk, both deserving of further research. The first was a most unusual double-sided, cabriole-leg bench, which appears to date from the second quarter of the 18th century (Fig 1). A chest from another Framlingham almshouse, the Thomas Mills Charity, is also in the church. It is an unusually long six-plank chest, fitted with seven locks, presumably to ensure all trustees attended each opening of it.

Gerald Cole then gave an inspirational account of building a medieval screen. Inspired by the six screens installed in Carlisle Cathedral in 1485, unfortunately swept away in later re-orderings of the interior, the late Roy Thompson and Gerald embarked on a project to re-create a medieval screen. Charles Tracy, who was still with us, was one of their advisers. The Forestry Commission donated the timber and we saw slides of Gerald and Roy cutting the oak in the Grizedale Forest and converting it with the same tools and in the same manner as in the 15th century. The screen was raised in Carlisle Cathedral on St George's Day (23 April) 2003 and after a period on display, was taken down to be finished. Unfortunately Roy Thompson did not survive to see the project through; the screen is now constructionally complete but requires carving and assembling. It also needs a home: Gerald is very keen to hear from any member who might have suggestions.

Peter Stone followed with another most interesting discussion on construction, this time on some oak pews c.1870, recently removed from his local church. Peter had brought along parts of the pews in their dismantled state, an opportunity to see the parts not normally reached. The quality of the pews was evident and they served to illustrate Jonathan Harris's plea (page 21) for more research on the church furnishings of this period.

A very full afternoon meant time was now fast disappearing but Carolyn Heighway, the archaeological consultant to Gloucester Cathedral, used the remaining few minutes to tell us about some surviving but redundant fragments of woodwork from the cathedral. She had brought these for display during the day and delegates had been able to view and discuss them earlier. Both Gerald Cole and Peter Stone had also put on displays of their material. Roderick Butler had brought some pieces from a

fascinating collection of material from west country churches. This collection was assembled by the firm of Herbert Read, church carvers, furnishers and restorers based in Exeter throughout the 20th century.

Jim Green, who is working on recently rediscovered carved spandrels in Saint Peter & St Paul's Church, Northleach, produced sheets of interpretative drawings for delegates to take away, consider, and suggest alternative interpretations. The spandrels include a mermaid with round mirror and comb, and the winged bull of St Luke. Further copies are available from Jim if anyone else would like to participate.

We would like to express the Society's thanks to all our speakers, and also to those who contributed to the displays and to the discussions. Many non-members, including archaeological consultants, local authority conservation officers and church recorders, joined us for the day and contributed greatly to the discussions. We would also like to thank the members of the Ashcroft Road Methodist Church for the excellent venue, Mr Barnard and John Laurence at Cirencester parish church for their assistance and patience during our visit to the church of St John the Baptist, and especially David Viner, chairman of the Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society, and his wife Linda, both museum and heritage consultants, whose assistance contributed enormously to the smooth running of the event.

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Fig 1. A double-sided, 12 seater oak settle provided for the occupants of the Hitcham almshouses in Framlingham Church. The seat backs are veneered, crossbanded and inlaid with herringbone banding in oak.