

Study Day at Cothele with Victor Chinnery

Friday 28 March, 2008

Cotehele is a magical house clinging to the edge of a wooded valley. Something of its mystery attracted me when I first visited in the 1960s. It came as no surprise that for Victor Chinnery it had worked its magic in the same way and in an elegiac introduction he evoked the gentle greens found in a Flemish tapestry. What did come as a surprise was his confession that he had been reprimanded for looking at the furniture too closely. What horrors the assiduous National Trust guardians of the '60s would have had to see the RFS unleashed!

After Vic had set the scene Rachel Hunt gave an excellent overview with some fascinating Victorian photographs of the interiors and useful information such as what to do with a 'summer andiron': apparently it was no such thing, but a stand for a trunk. The centrepiece of the morning was something of a furniture historian's duel between Richard Bebb and Nicholas Riall concerning the so-called Cotehele panel. Was it circa 1525 from the Golden Valley in Herefordshire or as late as 1570? Both arguments were convincing, and later examination didn't help much. But it did illuminate the depth of learning of our protagonists and how enriching it can be to air such disputes.

Chris Pickvance raised further questions and Roderick Butler began to speak on the metalwork. He gave a brief but excellent synopsis of what we would see in the afternoon when we examined the furniture and metalwork helped by the knowledge of the assembled company. Many thanks must go to all the speakers, the organisers and Rachel Hunt and the National Trust for making us so welcome.

Jonathan Meyer