

# Dunham Massey

**Saturday morning, 26 July**

RFS members were given a lively introduction to this National Trust property by the curator James Rothwell, who described the chronology of a house that had endured periods of neglect and near financial ruin interspersed with periods of regeneration.

A hall with a high chamber was recorded on the site in the early 15th century, but the house in its present form was largely the work of George Booth, 2nd Earl of Warrington who employed John Norris in the 1730s to rebuild the entire house, making it virtually unrecognisable from Kip and Knyff's 1697 bird's-eye view. In 1758 on the death of Lord Warrington, the house passed to the Greys, earls of Stamford until its bequest in 1976 to the Trust. The bequest of Dunham Massey remains one of the most significant made to the Trust and includes the finest collection of silver in its ownership. Here, however I will concentrate on the furniture.

The interior decoration of the house today owes much to the furniture historian Percy Macquoid, to the annoyance of Compton Hall, the architect who between 1905 and 1908 was given the task of overhauling the whole house. The principal drawing room, known as the saloon, houses two particularly fine satinwood bookcases moved from elsewhere in the house on Macquoid's

direction. Purchased around 1790 by the 5th earl they are similar to designs by Gillows of Lancaster. James Rothwell drew our attention to a large set of early 18th century walnut chairs with cabriole legs and upholstered seats and backs, pointing out that one chair was slightly different, its cabriole leg terminating in a pointed foot rather than the circular foot of all the others. This had given rise to the suggestion that the chair with the pointed foot had been purchased in London as a model to copy and perhaps given to a local chair maker who had overlooked or disregarded this stylistic refinement!

The great hall houses a large refectory table created by Morant & Co in 1908, on Macquoid's instruction, from two 17th century tables with a new top and carved frieze. Macquoid was also responsible for the removal of the original ebonised finish from an impressive George Graham longcase clock.

The billiard room has a Gillows billiard table with a mahogany bed rather than a slate one, supplied in 1830 at a cost of £6. An area of baize has been removed to show the parquet style of construction of the bed which, while fairly flat, would no doubt require any player to learn the nuances of the table!

The grand staircase built in the 1730s in solid mahogany represents an early use of mahogany for a structure generally reserved for oak. Mahogany, it was suggested, was at times during this period cheaper than the finest oak and its importation in large planks made it suitable for such architectural use.

The carved overmantel in the library is the earliest known work by Grinling Gibbons and was mentioned by John Evelyn in his diary (1671). Based on Agostino Carracci's engraving of Tintoretto's painting of the Crucifixion in the Scuola di San Rocco, Venice, the piece was acquired by Sir George Viner in the last quarter of the 17th century for £80.

A final mention must go to the recently re-housed state bed. This had languished in a crate in the house for some 60 years, having been sent to Morant & Co for restoration shortly before the 9th Earl's death and later returned untouched. Bearing comparison with the example at Dyrham, it dates from the early 1680s and the colours of the needleworked tester remain remarkably vibrant.

*Toby Pinn*