

Sizergh Castle

Sunday morning, 4 October

The group was met by Richard Dean, curator, National Trust, North West Region and Jeremy Hall. An enthusiastic welcome was also given by the house manager, Margaret Read. The group split into two to examine different parts of the castle.

The castle is mainly a 16th century building with earlier parts dating back to 1300. It stands on high ground, some three miles south of Kendal. Unusually, from its earliest history Sizergh has been the property of a single family, the Stricklands. Walter Strickland (1518-1569) undertook a huge expansion of the castle, adding wings and enriching it with panelling, plasterwork, and stained glass.

Undoubtedly the highlight of the visit was the inlaid panelled room, described to us with great enthusiasm by Jeremy Hall. In 1891 Walter Strickland, the then owner, had decided to dispose of the panelling from the Inlaid Chamber as it was then known, and it was purchased by the Victoria & Albert Museum. In 1999, it was agreed that the panelling and bed should be returned to Sizergh, from the museum, and it was Jeremy Hall who undertook the conservation, transport and re-instatement of this superb room in its original location.

Jeremy described the painstaking work of stabilising the humidity conditions for the inlaid panels, from 30% RH at the V&A to 55% RH at Sizergh. All loose inlay had to be taped, wrapped and transported by road train. Missing sections had to be remade to match the original woods of holly, oak, poplar and bog oak. Elaborate renaissance inlaid panelling of the type at Sizergh is rarely seen in England, and no parallel can be found elsewhere for work of this quality. Based on German and Flemish designs, the bold arcaded panels feature some superb inlays. The castle is indeed a treasure house and a source of wonder for the study of early oak furniture, with many exceptional dated 16th century examples.

Richard Dean conducted the group around the other rooms of the castle, looking at a number of pieces of dated Gillow furniture and Stuart portraits of the 1720s with their original frames. A number of splendid carved oak overmantels dating to the mid 16th century featured the various coats of arms of the four families connected by marriage at Sizergh.

Sizergh provided us with a stunning interior, furniture to inspire us, and is a must for anyone interested in early oak. We were particularly fortunate to be given special access by the National Trust, which was appreciated by the group.

John and Rosy Gall