

The Castle Dairy and Sledall Hall, Kendal

Friday afternoon, 2 October 2009

The society had last visited the Castle Dairy in October 1990 during a visit organised by Susan Stuart to Lancaster and the Lake District. She had told us how, on an evening at the restaurant that then occupied the Castle Dairy, she and her husband had come across an early oak bed and livery cupboard. It would be fair to say there were some sceptical people in the group waiting outside the Castle Dairy that day. How could an important early bed and livery cupboard not be well known to furniture historians? If they were 16th century, what were they doing here and how had they survived in a building that looked early but not particularly grand or important?

The case was different on this occasion: thanks to the article published by Susan Stuart and Susan Bourne (*Regional Furniture* 1991, vol 5) even those who had not attended the previous visit knew about Anthony Garland, his initialled bed in a very architectural renaissance style and early form with mortised and tenoned struts connecting the two front posts to the bed frame, the canopied livery cupboard dated 1562, and the similarities between these carved and moulded pieces and some of the furniture and fixed woodwork, also of the 16th century, at nearby Sizergh Castle. Some who had not visited previously were keen to see if they were convinced by the 16th century date for bed and cupboard.

On this visit, when the Castle Dairy was unoccupied and completely empty apart from the bed and cupboard, we were able to look over the whole building and see some of the architectural details we had missed in 1990, including the canopy at the dais end of the hall from the house which two of the Garland daughters of a generation earlier than Anthony left to become ladies-in-waiting to Queen Katherine Parr.

We were very lucky that Dr Adam Menuge of English Heritage was with us and he outlined his first thoughts on the architectural development of the house. With an early house that has been almost continuously occupied this can be very complicated. For example in the upstairs room, where the bed and livery cupboard are now, is a small fireplace, the mantel shelf of which is supported by swept profile-cut brackets to a back board finished with a flush bead to its lower edge. This was very similar to the construction of a shelf we had seen recently among the fittings of a house in Minor Canon Row, Rochester (1723), and the 1936 Royal Commission volume on Westmorland records late 17th-early 18th century work in other parts of the house. Perhaps there will be an

opportunity for a more detailed survey of the building in the near future.

Similarly Susan Bourne and Susan Stuart hope to undertake further research on the bed and cupboard, including looking at the Strickland archive at Sizergh Castle, which they were unable to research in 1990. Perhaps the society will make a third visit following the publication of their next article. Many questions remain about the origin of the makers of these pieces and the use of pattern books: there is a Strickland family tradition that Flemish workers were employed in the joinery workshops set up at Sizergh in the mid-16th century by Sir Walter Strickland, while Anthony Wells-Cole has suggested Newcastle as a possible source for the work (*Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England*, 1997, p199).

As I write this report I understand that Kendal College has recently announced that it has the funds for a project to take over the Castle Dairy as an exhibition gallery and café - an interesting project that we hope will allow for public access to view these two important pieces of 16th century furniture. We also hope the college will appreciate the condition of the bed and livery cupboard and will resist undertaking unnecessary restoration. Both articles have a patinated surface which should be preserved, while the fact that the cornice of the bed is now slightly embedded in the wall and part has been cut away to accommodate the top of the cupboard are part of their history - it may even be possible one day to establish just where the two items originally stood in the house. Equally the alterations to the short posts, which as Susan Bourne suggested may have been done to accommodate a box spring and mattress, is also now part of the bed's history. Our thanks are due to Peter Knapton of NPS Group for opening the Castle Dairy for our visit and accompanying us.

We then crossed the road to visit Sledall Hall at the invitation of Andrew and Robert Aindow; some members knew this property, as the Aindowes have run an antiques business here for many years. Sledall Hall is of a similar date to the Castle Dairy and they very kindly took us into what is currently a storeroom to show us some decorative plasterwork above the chimneypiece, the first of several examples we were to see over the weekend.

Michael Legg