

## Dr Catherine Richardson: *A Day at Home in Early Modern England*

We returned to the Geffrye Museum for the 2014 lecture. Catherine's preoccupation, as Reader in Renaissance Studies at the University of Kent, is with the experience of domestic life in the early modern period, circa 1500–1700. For us, she shone a spotlight on 16th- and 17th-century reports of court depositions, mainly in Kent and the Midlands, for evidence of furniture and its placing in houses, particularly of the middling sorts.

Inevitably, as the most important item in a household, the bed featured in many of the examples she gave us – and not just the frame, but the bedding and textile furnishings too. References to beds could range from large tester beds enclosed by curtains to single frames that could be moved about relatively easily; or they could mean no more than the bedding taken by an apprentice going into employment. In noting a hierarchy of furnishings besides beds she listed chests, stools, cupboards, clothing and silver (candlesticks for example) forming important

elements in bedrooms, as were the hangings and sometimes wall paintings in choice examples.

Occasionally a document would demonstrate the positioning of the furniture, as in the house of John Best, sometime mayor of Faversham, who died in 1592. He had a three-storey house and the most important room was the 'chamber over the hall' in which there were many textiles and much linen, as well as chairs, tables and other furniture. A central first-floor room such as this, which was likely to feature a street view, was of course an advantage in keeping up with local knowledge at first hand!

Catherine referred to William Harrison's *Description of England* (1577) as an important commentary on the furnishing of rooms, and to Francis Bacon's 1626 assertion that textiles could give 'solid protection', in other words sound-proofing, but could also be a trap. The bed curtains of a Worcester hatter, reported to be 'jingling', were perhaps an example of this.

For RFS members, the lecture provided a refreshing change of emphasis in research, perhaps a complement to our more usual practical studies.

Noël Riley