

# Annual Conference, Shropshire

## Wednesday 10 July

### Dudmaston Hall and St Andrew's, Quatt

Back in 1994, with the not inconsiderable help of Adam Bowett, I organised that year's Regional Furniture Annual Conference, in Cambridge. I am somewhat ashamed to admit that it took me exactly a quarter of a century before I attended my second conference, this time in the graceful countryside of A. E. Houseman's Shropshire, far removed geographically and atmospherically from the bustling heart of our second oldest university city.

Flattered but a little daunted to have been asked to record a few observations on the furniture we would encounter on the first day of the conference, the afternoon of Wednesday 10 July found me, notebook in

hand, amongst fellow members gathering at Dudmaston House, a well-mannered early seventeenth-century redbrick house, the oldest part of which was built for Sir Thomas Wolryche (1672–1701), apparently to a design by Francis Smith of Warwick (1672–1738). The soberly panelled and entirely original entrance hall contains a mixture of furniture including two sixteenth-century Italian pen-worked cedar chests and an eye catching early eighteenth-century oak press with a centrally placed male bust seemingly carved as a green man. The press shares two features that are vaguely related to those found in the coffer in the same room; firstly, panels with exaggeratedly carved lozenges that all but touch the edges of panels and secondly, vigorously carved muntins, each decorated with a curious interlaced guilloche motif and/or attenuated stiff leaves. These are



Oak chest, fifteenth-century, St Andrew's, Quatt. *Photo Keith Pinn*

noteworthy, but do these shared features qualify as regional characteristics?

Nearby, in the orderly brick-built church of St Andrew in Quatt, we later encountered our first early fifteenth-century oak chest of the weekend. Viewing this item in isolation, it was tempting to hope that its construction would prove to be of a type that we would continue to encounter throughout the conference, but this turned out to be only partly the case. An unusual variant of the clamped front chest, its boarded front is nailed to its rebated ends. Frustratingly, although its stiles are carved with a half-rondel motif we were to encounter again, its construction was to prove anything but typical in as much as the sides and front of every other chest of this type we later examined were joined by primitive but remarkably early dovetails of imposing proportions – but that’s another story which will be told by other contributors to this edition of the newsletter.

*David Fletcher*