

# Oak House, West Bromwich

Thursday 5 September 2019

A small, select group of hardened RFS members managed to penetrate the West Midlands motorway system and find Oak House, an attractive half-timbered building with some Georgian-fronted original farm buildings. The house is believed to date from around 1630 but probably had earlier origins and it has brick additions to the rear dating from about 1650.

An enthusiastic curator revealed it was the home of the Turton family who had had agricultural and industrial interests. This was a common local situation from the sixteenth century onwards – nobility and yeoman landowners combining estate management with exploitation of minerals under their land. Nail-making was particularly prevalent. Dudley had supplied the nails for Nonesuch Palace.

Turton wealth was already significant but after the Civil War a Turton was appointed to carry out the Sequestration of Delinquent's (Royalist) estates locally. It gave the family significant power among the local Catholic Royalist gentry providing a husband for one of his daughters, although the Turtons were Protestant Parliamentarians. He even appropriated a coat of arms. They had arrived.

The contents of the house have been collected to represent furnishings appropriate to the seventeenth/



Two stage chest on chest, 1675–1700, oak and marquetrie with walnut, bone, snakewood and other woods. Loan from the V&A (W.15-1950). Photo Jeremy Rycroft



Detail of dug out chest, possibly fourteenth century, showing the repair. From All Saints Church, West Bromwich. *Photo Jeremy Rycroft*

eighteenth centuries, though some are earlier. Some items are on loan from the V&A.

Pride of place goes to a high-quality English chest of drawers of 1675–1700 made in oak with bone and walnut marquetry and probably black rosewood and snakewood. There is an early eighteenth-century press dated 1716. Finely carved with a matted ground, it was possibly made in Lancashire. There is also a panelled

and carved oak chest dated 1703. Both have quite ornate scrolling decoration. Scrolling decoration also appears at the top of some of the wall panelling looking older than the lower panels. It would be tempting to date these panels to the mid-seventeenth century.

There was a clamp chest, dated between 1200 and 1400 by the V&A – simple and robust. There was a dug-out chest possibly dating to the fourteenth century. The front had split and an additional plank had been fastened to the chest by iron bands; all the metalwork looked heavily corroded and of a piece. There was also a plank chest with the end boards extending to make legs and circular decorations to the front face, a single lock and chip carving. Although stylistically earlier, some thought it was more likely to be seventeenth century. Finally, there was a linenfold chest in the sixteenth-century style, in a very good state of preservation, also thought to be seventeenth century.

The chairs were mainly c. 1720–1840, but there was one turned three-legged chair in mid-seventeenth-century style that was in remarkably pristine condition. If period, it had had parts replaced and it looked rather later anyway.

The staircase was unusual and had crudely but attractively carved supports and bannisters.

All in all, an interesting and varied collection that deserves much better cataloguing.

*Jeremy Rycroft*



Wall panelling c. 1640-80. *Photo Jeremy Rycroft*