

Dunster

On a somewhat cooler and gentler day on the Friday we had the luxury of four hours to absorb the splendour of both Dunster Castle and the parish and priory church of St George. As is so often the case on RFS visits it was a multi-disciplined team that toured the National Trust property and village church and critically examined not just the furniture but the fabrics, metalwork and social and historical context.

While the castle provided an enjoyable visit and luncheon and the location offers views down the valley to the Brecon Beacons and out to sea along the Bristol Channel, the furniture appears to have been largely brought in from other National Trust houses. Christopher Hawley did point out a somewhat rare chimney board and there were some typical examples of the Glastonbury chair. We left wondering whether the RFS should work more closely with the National Trust in giving visitors information on local furniture and its relevance in properties such as this. [Editor: my personal highlight was the magnificent 1680s staircase, made by Edward Pierce the Younger, with its carved balustrade of elm showing hounds pursuing a deer through sumptuous foliage. Equally memorable were the stables with original furnishings possibly of the same period.]

Dunster Castle. The wonderfully complete late-seventeenth-century fittings in the stables.
Photo Linda Hall





The splendid screen constructed in 1499, reputedly the longest in the country. *Photo Jeremy Rycroft*

It was the church which had more interest to regional furniture enthusiasts. The stand-out feature is a 54 feet screen, certainly the longest in the UK and possibly Europe. The screen was constructed locally in 1499 following a dispute between the monks and the parishioners on who should order the priorities on such things as timing of services, payment of fees, use of bells etc. The case went to arbitration in 1498 and it was decided to separate the church into two areas with the screen dividing the church; the parish used the area west of the screen (the nave) and the monks the east. The screen itself has a beautifully carved representation of trees, with fan vaulting concealing its great width and solidity. We left with the image of these carvings being transported at the time of installation by horse and cart down the narrow Somerset lanes to this beautiful church.

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