

Visit to Westwood Church and Manor, Wiltshire

Wednesday 28 September 2022

On a fine sunny morning ten RFS members assembled at Westwood Manor, Wiltshire, many of us arriving in time to first visit St Mary's church next door. The treasures there include medieval choir stalls, a beautiful carved and panelled ceiling in the Lady Chapel and a late-medieval ogee font cover with crocketed ribs and a foliate finial. Dating from the seventeenth century are the pulpit, which the church guidebook says came originally from Norton St Philip, and the low chancel screen, with elaborate pierced panels consisting of a large oval with carved roses in each open spandrel. Four turned finials project into each oval. The top rail has pierced rectangular panels below a band of dentils. Various features suggest it has been cut down from former altar rails as the mouldings are not complete around the main panels and one of the pillars is now asymmetrical and clearly incomplete. A fine wooden eagle lectern is of unknown date and provenance.



St Mary's church, Westwood, Wiltshire. The pulpit has the date 1607 in the upper band of arches, one numeral per panel, with carved lozenges in the lower tier and elaborate foliage carving on the angled corner stiles, different in each tier. Photo Linda Hall

Furniture includes an unusual little table with a heavy top above a drawer with a moulded front, carried on two very elaborate lyre-shaped legs; two Glastonbury chairs, one with 'Our Father' in Gothic writing and a lamb and flag inside a trefoil on the back, the other with a band of foliage carving above an 'ihs' inside a decorative circle; and in the base of the tower-cum-porch a 'Country Sheraton' chair similar to those discussed in NL 76 pp. 11-15. Two seventeenth-century-style armchairs may not be what they seem; I needed an expert to metaphorically take them apart and analyse them for me. One has an interesting top crest with acorn finials either side, nice turned front legs and a decorative seat front but is missing the back panels. A small plank chest next to the organ console has simple decoration on the lid and the front, and original pin hinges in seemingly excellent condition. The planks are fastened with the original hand-made nails.

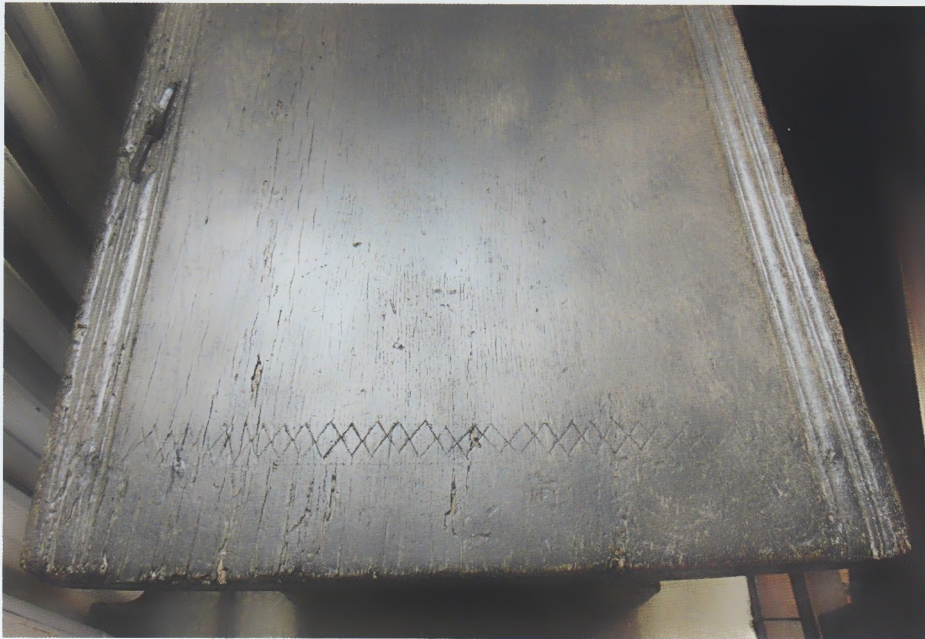
We then headed to the delightful manor house, where the tenant Mrs Emily Azis gave us a very informative and enjoyable tour. The house as seen now is the product of a most sympathetic restoration by Edgar Lister, who bought it in 1911 and spent the rest of his life



St Mary's church, Westwood, Wiltshire. 'Country Sheraton' chair in the entrance through the base of the tower. It has a much deeper top rail than the chairs featured in NL76, and has shallow mouldings on all the elements of the back above the seat. Photo Linda Hall



St Mary's church, Westwood, Wiltshire. Seventeenth-century (?) chest with shallow mouldings, handmade nails and a simple keyplate. *Photo Linda Hall*



St Mary's church, Westwood, Wiltshire. The lid of the chest is decorated with shallow mouldings and simple incised decoration and has its original pin hinges. *Photo Linda Hall*

there (he died in 1956). He collected furniture, pictures and furnishings to return the house to its likely appearance in the mid seventeenth century, although there are now far more furniture and objects than there would have been then. There is wonderful panelling and plasterwork, with richly decorated plaster ceilings and overmantels in several rooms. The hall has the traditional long table board and frame in the centre, with the top able to be turned to present either a best side or a working side. The mixture of seat furniture reminded me of the assemblage described in my ancestor's 1669 probate inventory (see p. 19 above). A second long table against the panelling at the low end of the hall holds some of Lister's collection of small boxes and other treen. Two chests each have a smaller box standing on top and tapestries behind them, again bringing to mind inventories which refer to chests, coffers and boxes. Lister turned the Great Parlour above the hall into a music room, with a 1537 virginal, a spinet made in 1711 and a nineteenth-century harp. The instruments are kept in playing condition and visitors are encouraged to play both keyboard instruments. It is a far cry from the old days of 'don't touch' notices all

over National Trust properties! Lister gave the house a large and varied collection of chairs with splat backs, carved backs, cane seats and backs, panelled backs, and we missed having any of the RFS chair experts among our party to tell us which regions they came from! The many armchairs are upholstered with needlepoint worked by Lister, and he embroidered the flamestitch hangings for the tester bed in the panelled bedroom. It is a very welcoming house that reflects the love bestowed on it by Lister and by the current tenants, who clearly love living there and sharing their home with their many visitors.

A phone call before we left Westwood told us that Great Chalfield Manor was no longer going to be open due to filming, so we enjoyed an excellent and very leisurely lunch at The George, Norton St Philip, a wonderful medieval inn with miniature galleries along one side of a tiny courtyard. Some of the party then headed for Lacock while a few of us visited Farleigh Hungerford Castle just down the road. One of the few complete buildings, the little chapel has a medieval roof with carved bosses over the porch. Fine monuments in the north chapel include one tomb surrounded by



Westwood Manor, Wiltshire (National Trust). The hall table board and frame arranged with an armchair at each end, a long bench along one side and three joint stools along the other. In the window bay are a small gateleg table and a splat-back chair with an exaggerated crest rail. *Photos Linda Hall*

elaborate medieval ironwork, and the ceiling beams were painted in the mid-seventeenth century with cherubs and swags of ribbon. Two table tombs still have remarkable amounts of surviving colour. The east wall has a huge painted St George spearing a largely disappeared dragon, and above the window an impressive painted arms of Sir Edward Hungerford (d. 1522). There is old glass, a reredos made up of assorted old panelling and a medieval bench with a very narrow seat but a fine panelled back with a different motif carved in each panel. Strangest of all is the pulpit, a bizarre confection of circa 1832 made up of old panelling with a turned baluster stair whose newel posts look like the cut-down posts from a tester bed. The actual treads have long gone and it is no longer used, but remains a strange and unexpected folly. Altogether we had a most enjoyable day, and were very grateful to Jeremy for arranging it.

Linda Hall