



# FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY

## The BCAG and the task of planning ‘in perpetuity’

Over the last ten years National Trust staff may have attended a Car Park Design training day at Stowe or Sizergh; survived being blown around on a snowy hillside near Fountains Abbey; or discussed the Capacity for Change of a 1960s concrete and brick milking parlour in Sussex. Those who may have used the National Trust Guidance on the siting of satellite dishes and aerials on historic buildings, or participated in the audit of the Vernacular Buildings Survey, or, most recently, reserved their place on the ‘Fit for the Future?’ conference to study sustainable energy and the historic environment (3-5 April 2012), will have benefited from the work of the Building Conservation Advisory Group.

The BCAG is what is known as a permanent ‘Task and Finish’ group, whose membership includes ‘operational’ staff as well as the heads of the National Trust’s conservation disciplines. It draws on the Trust’s internal consultancy along with expert colleagues outside the Trust in order to deliver a range of guidance and training, and promote best practice, on all aspects of building conservation.

The Building Conservation Advisory Group first convened in December 2002 with the aim of producing an integrated policy on farm building development. As



*Learning how to split stone to make roof tiles at a quarry near Northleach, Gloucestershire*

we considered how to rise to this challenge at that first meeting around the table in Ilam, Derbyshire, the following words by the architect Adolf Loos seemed a good place to start:

‘Do not build in a picturesque manner. Leave such effects to the walls, the mountains and the sun. Build as well as you can. No better. Do not outstretch yourself. And no worse. Do not deliberately express yourself on a more base level than the one with which you were brought up and educated.

‘Pay attention to the form in which the locals build. For they are the fruits of

wisdom gleaned from the past. But look for the origin of the form. If technological advances made it possible to improve on the form, then always use this improvement. The flail is being replaced by the threshing machine ...

*Continued on page 2*

## RARE PISTOLS RETURN TO DUNSTER

A pair of late 17th-century pistols with a provenance from the armoury at Dunster Castle has been purchased at auction at Bonhams, Knightsbridge, London, for £30,000 including buyer’s premium, with the help of a grant from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund, with funds from gifts and bequests to the National Trust, and from Dunster. The pistols are likely to have been part of the cache of arms at Dunster that enabled Francis Luttrell (1659-1690) to raise a regiment in a mere three days in 1688 in support of William of Orange. Read more in Brian Godwin’s article on page 14.



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‘The work of man must not attempt to compete with the hand of God ... Be true! Nature only tolerates truth. It copes well with iron truss bridges, but rejects Gothic arched bridges with turrets and defensive slits.’<sup>1</sup>

Our responsibility, as custodians of some 13,000 vernacular and agricultural buildings<sup>2</sup> on over 1,000 tenanted farms with 254,000 hectares of agricultural land, is enormous by any standard, and when viewed as a task *in perpetuity* this brings a newly sharpened focus to the notion of true sustainability. It was clear that we needed a robust strategy in order to address the need for sustainable futures for our farm buildings.

### Providing training and guidance

The founding membership included heads of Rural Surveying, Archaeology, Curatorship, Building, and Farming and Countryside, plus other consultancy staff with a particular interest in farm buildings, as well as representation from English Heritage, who were working with Gloucestershire University carrying out related work on the socio-economic benefits of the conservation of historic farm buildings.<sup>3</sup> We drafted a document setting out the process for assessing the buildings on each of our farms, and compared this with what our Whole Farm Plans suggested was needed on the ground. This document was then road-tested over a three-day event at six farms in North Wales in February 2003 attended by fifty staff and external colleagues from English Heritage, Cadw, the RCAHMW, National Parks, the NFU, and the Trust’s Advisory Panels. This was a groundbreaking event in many ways.

The final draft was launched with a one-day symposium at the Art Workers Guild, and three on-site training days followed. The first was held on the Brockhampton Estate in Herefordshire, where a redundant threshing barn was the subject of a proposal—now up and running—for a micro-brewery. This balmy day fuelled by strawberries and cream was followed by a contrasting event at Fountains, when it snowed. The group of buildings providing the case study on this occasion was How Hill Farm, now completed as a range of holiday lets, which provide local employment and allow visitors to enjoy the local landscape and historic buildings. Sustainable



*Hafod y Llan, Snowdonia: a substantial cattle shed carefully positioned, proportioned and detailed to sit in a highly sensitive landscape, using the BCAG Guidance on Farm Building Development: Assessing Need and Finding Solutions*

energy generation, water consumption and the management of waste materials were particularly carefully considered in this scheme.

The third event, which was especially well-attended by external colleagues, showcased the challenges of caring for highly significant historic farm buildings in an area where the economic trend is heading away from farming and where the value of buildings for alternative commercial use is particularly high. Saddlescombe Farm in Sussex generated exciting debate on the relative Capacity for Change of two buildings: a late mediaeval timber-framed barn, which was seen as a flexible building in terms of sensitive alternative use, and a redundant 1960s milking parlour, significant in terms of its rarity value but highly inflexible for conversion.

The pressure on properties to welcome more visitors inevitably puts pressure on all aspects of visitor services infrastructure, and on car parks in particular. We need to consider not only the conservation implications for our landscapes of new and extended car parks, but also the wider impact on the environment; the likely future patterns of traffic and visitor travel present an exciting challenge. Some properties are already rising to these challenges by working with public transport providers, linking in with walking and cycling routes, and being innovative in ticketing and visitor welcome in order to address these changing pressures and needs. In November 2010 the Car Parks Guidance was launched with the first of two training events at Sizergh. There were highly informative and stimulating presentations on traffic design, along with car park design case studies, surfacing product demonstrations, and discussions on lighting, signage and landscaping, all in the intimate setting of this subtle and sensitively designed car park. This was followed by a second event at Stowe, where there was a thorough examination of a new car park on a wholly different scale, with a discussion on the implications of working in an internationally significant designed landscape, and the learning points to be gained as a project manager.



*Barn, Saddlescombe Farm, Sussex: Adaptive Re-Use training day*

### The future

The work of the BCAG arises entirely out of operational demand; it mainly comprises the gathering and collating of information and experience, and linking this with case studies and sources in order to produce guidance for properties and advisers to use. This guidance is then disseminated through training days with expertise drawn from within and outside the Trust, and always including plenty of hands-on opportunities. The importance of sharing and learning from our own experience and demonstrating best practice is borne out by the fact that all of these events have been open to, and welcomed by, colleagues from all sectors of the Trust and outside organisations.

#### Work completed and still in progress includes the following:

- ◆ National Trust Conservation Principles: the statement setting out the principles underlying the Trust's work and responsibilities
- ◆ Developing the Building Design Guide: an invaluable and growing bank of case studies by topic (eg. Landscape, Visitor Facilities and Engagement, Sustainable Energy, Adaptive Re-Use)
- ◆ Historic Buildings and Structures Survey: template and guidance
- ◆ Vernacular Buildings Survey audit (including summary and recommendations for future development)
- ◆ Damp: a tenant fact sheet with guidance for staff and tenants on damp in dwellings
- ◆ Working alongside the Visitor Facilities Design Group
- ◆ Aerial Installation Guidelines: guidance on the use of satellite dishes and aerials in the historic environment
- ◆ Car Park Design: guidance and training
- ◆ Guidance on Farm Building Development: assessing need and finding solutions



Car Park Design Training Day at Stowe



Photovoltaic cells on the roof of the Geler-Jones store at Llanerchaeron. There will be a site visit to see this during the BCAG's Fit For the Future? Conference on 4 April 2012

- ◆ The Adaptive Re-Use of Historic Buildings: guidance and training
- ◆ Stone sourcing for the repair of historic buildings: meetings held at Hardwick and Northleach Cotswold stone quarry
- ◆ Long distance walk refuges and bunkhouses
- ◆ Skills training days for Direct Labour Teams
- ◆ 'Green' paint research
- ◆ Future work on Design for Play
- ◆ The conservation and interpretation of temporary structures
- ◆ Proposed work on Supporter Engagement through Building Conservation
- ◆ Forthcoming conference: Fit for the Future?, a three-day high-profile conference organised by the BCAG. It is open to Trust staff and tenants and external colleagues, and will look at sustainable energy and the National Trust. To be held at the innovative and inspiring Centre for Alternative Technology, Machynlleth, 3-5 April 2012,<sup>4</sup> with site visits to Hafod y Llan in Snowdonia and Llanerchaeron in Ceredigion to view sustainable energy schemes in action.

With new Terms of Reference to be launched in 2012, the BCAG works to deliver training and guidance on all aspects of building conservation, and welcomes suggestions for future topics.

*Liz Green, Curator, North Wales*

<sup>1</sup> From: *Opel, Adolf (ed.), Adolf Loos, Die potemkin'sche Stadt: verschollene Schriften, 1897-1933*, G Prachnercop, Vienna, 1983. Translated by Jonathan Quinn.

<sup>2</sup> Information from the BCAG Vernacular Building Survey Audit (by Mark Newman, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Gaskell, P, *Living Buildings in a Living Landscape* (EH / HELM / Glos. Univ. 2006).

<sup>4</sup> See NT Intranet Training pages for booking details, or contact Deborah Brierley on 01793 817837 for further information.

Contact Liz Green ([elizabeth.green@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:elizabeth.green@nationaltrust.org.uk))  
Rory Cullen ([rory.cullen@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:rory.cullen@nationaltrust.org.uk))

Visit our pages on the Intranet to find out more:

BCAG page: [http://intranet/intranet/conservation\\_environment/i-bui-feature\\_06/i-bui-building\\_conservation\\_advisory\\_group.htm](http://intranet/intranet/conservation_environment/i-bui-feature_06/i-bui-building_conservation_advisory_group.htm)

Building Design Guide: [http://intranet/intranet/conservation\\_environment/i-bui-feature\\_06/i-bui-building\\_design.htm](http://intranet/intranet/conservation_environment/i-bui-feature_06/i-bui-building_design.htm)

## RISE, DECLINE AND REDISCOVERY AT TYNTESFIELD

Built in 1897, the Grade II\* Listed Orangery at Tyntesfield had suffered severely from lack of maintenance, vegetation damage and water ingress before the National Trust acquired the property. It was in such a poor state that it had been placed on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register.

But 2011 has seen a great transformation. A pioneering partnership project to save this building has been launched, with the development of heritage craftsmanship through training at its core.

The practicalities of making the most of the opportunities for training meant that the project might cost more, take longer and make site management more complex than a conventional project. To overcome these difficulties we secured additional grant funding for training from the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry Commercial Education Trust (LCCICET), drew up a partnership agreement, ensured that the training and engagement elements of the work were included in any tender, and held interviews to select the contractors for their competence as trainers.



*Tyntesfield Orangery in 2003*

This approach has proved very successful: our ambitious first-year targets have been achieved. A six-month full time Heritage Lottery Fund Building Bursary Skills Traineeship was awarded to enable a craftsman to



*City of Bath student at work on the Orangery*

develop specialist skills for the heritage sector. Ten Architectural Stone Conservation / NVQ 3 students from City of Bath College had practical experience working each week on site with Nimbus Conservation Ltd. Students, craftspeople and professional groups were offered the opportunity to gain an insight into stone masonry and conservation by learning from expert craftspeople; 121 people have so far undertaken these practical hands-on workshops and tours. Finally, a Women in Construction open day, visits for schools and colleagues, and other open days have given new audiences an insight into the variety of skills that are needed to maintain our heritage and the careers that are available. A viewing platform allowed visitors a close-up view of the craftspeople at work. Over 6,000 people have witnessed what is happening at the Orangery.

This project has delivered a long-lasting legacy in the maintenance of our heritage, ranging from a small number of intensive practical experiences for trainees to more accessible activities for a wider audience.

We are delighted to report that these achievements have been recognized: the project won an English Heritage Angels Award in October 2011. The project will run for two more years, thus allowing more people the chance to get involved and to learn vital heritage craftsmanship skills.

*Kate Gunthorpe MRICS MCIQB,  
Building Surveyor (Projects)*

Bookings are now being taken for workshops and tours in spring/summer 2012. Please contact Katie Laidlaw (Skills Supervisor) for details : [katie.laidlaw@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:katie.laidlaw@nationaltrust.org.uk)

## ‘AND SO TO BED’ – DUNHAM MASSEY’S HEADACHE

### Cleaning, marking, measuring and photographing the huge bed collection

Dunham Massey Hall, Cheshire, holds one of the largest collections in the National Trust. The family who lived here for centuries were hoarders who threw little away. As fashions changed and new owners tried to stamp their mark on the house each generation added to the collections of furniture, textiles, paintings, ceramics ... and anything and everything. Whilst this long collecting history is a curatorial advantage, allowing us to tell plenty of Dunham’s stories using the original objects, in terms of storage and care it can prove to be a bit of nightmare!

One such large storage headache was the collection of beds. Dunham has four bedrooms on show; two were used by family and guests into the 20th century, and another contains the recently restored 17th-century State Bed, and the bed slept in by the Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia in 1938. But behind the scenes many more beds lie in store. They used to be gathered together haphazardly, having been stored originally in outbuildings. In fact, it was in an outbuilding that the 17th-century State Bed’s bedpost was discovered in 1999, sparking an eight-year project to restore the bed.

In 2010 we decided that we needed to tackle the bed store once and for all. The objects needed to be cleaned, their inventory descriptions needed to be checked, and they needed to be photographed for the Trust’s Collections Management System (CMS). All 14 of the other stores at Dunham had been checked and inventoried. We had put the bed store off long enough.

One of our biggest worries on starting the project was that two earlier attempts to put the bed store to rights had not been completed. As a result the beds had many labels, some historical, some from the 70s and 80s, and some from the late 1990s.



*White-painted poles with floral decoration*



*Just some of Dunham’s spare bedposts*

The Conservation team and volunteers, working with Dunham’s Inventory Project Officer, Rachel Conroy, decided on a plan of action which involved emptying the store and moving all its contents to the nursery floor. We filled four rooms with bed parts,



*Historical label giving location details*

and the corridor was littered with side rails, end rails and posts.

One major benefit was that I had worked at Dunham during the State Bed project, and had been part of the team that built the bed *in situ* in its room. It was an important contribution to the speed of this project that we were therefore able to identify each part of a bed relatively easily. We set ourselves the task of trying to match up beds as fast as possible, and the work initially cracked on well. The bed parts themselves held a few clues, such as carpenters’ marks.

The monotony of moving, cleaning, marking, measuring and photographing seemingly endless pieces of structural brown wood was broken by moments of delight when we discovered the hidden treasures of the stored beds. A set of beautiful white painted poles with floral decorations broke the tedium of photographing brown poles, and hinted at the possibility of a gloriously girly Dunham bedroom.

Within a few weeks, however, we had hit the point where we had problems to solve. We discovered an upper outer frame with a huge gilt metal rose, covered in an orangey-brown silk. Moving the parts into the strong light for photography showed up a faint stripe in the silk. We recognised it as being identical to a bizarre set of brown silk bed hangings that are probably from one of Dunham’s lost Regency schemes. From this connection we managed to put together a complete bed.

Another treasure was the discovery of a tiny four-poster bed in the clock tower. The bed was complete with side and end rails, and each of the four posts had a little spike, possibly for a tester and finial. It must have been a very grand little bed. But who would have slept in a nursery bed made of mahogany? Such a bed could only be for someone truly important. We knew, because of the hexagonal shape of the posts, that it was early, and during a visit from the textile historian Annabel Westman, she confirmed that it was early 18th-century. Could it be the bed used by the 2nd Earl of Warrington’s only child, Lady Mary Booth, born in 1704?

Despite the successes that we had in linking bed parts together, at the end of the project there were still hundreds of pieces of wood in the bed store that we couldn’t match up. The photograph shows a small number of Dunham’s spare bedposts.

As with any storage project, we succeeded in creating a better environment for our collections, made them easier to care for and look after, and increased our knowledge about the collection and the history of the house. We no longer walk past the bed store and shudder at the thought of what lurks inside.

*Katie Taylor, House Steward, Dunham Massey*

## ‘A SMALL BUT VERY VALUABLE LIBRARY’



JOHN STACEY

*The Library as it is today with the Norris books on the left*

THE ABOVE ASSESSMENT<sup>1</sup> of the Library at Osterley Park House was made by the renowned 19th-century bookseller Bernard Quaritch. Much of the collection had been the creation of the Commissioner of Customs, Brian Fairfax (1676-1749), but it was acquired *en masse* in 1756 by the banker and owner of Osterley Park, Sir Francis Child. The purchase was strong proof of his claim to the learning and discernment to which he felt his vast fortune entitled him. Celebrated for its eleven books printed by Caxton, the library also boasted Fust and Schoeffer's 1462 Mainz *Biblia Latina*, as well as a *Prymer* (1538) belonging to King Henry VIII, amongst a collection particularly rich in 17th- and 18th-century books.

The room in which they were housed was the striking creation of the architect Robert Adam. Adam devised three different designs for the Library in 1766, two of which featured his familiar and distinctive palette. It appears, however, that the family favoured the third design, an arresting white monochromatic scheme, which allowed the books and their glittering 17th- and 18th-century bindings to take centre stage.

Following the sale of the Osterley books in 1885—Quaritch bought most of them—they have been distributed throughout the world, leaving the National Trust with the difficult task of replicating their splendour in a room designed to be worthy of them.

Until recently it is books kindly loaned by the Athenaeum Club which have lined the Library's shelves. These books, whilst typifying those normally found in a country house library, are uniformly bound in a monotonous dark brown leather. In a successful attempt to 'lighten the atmosphere,' and to introduce books more representative of those housed in this room before the 1885 sale, a section of the Norris collection held at Ham House has now been transferred to

Osterley. As a result the room has changed dramatically in appearance. What is more, the comparison which can now be made between the existing Athenaeum books and the Norris newcomers is a rare opportunity to witness the power the bindings of books have to dictate a room's character.

Not only has the room's appearance changed, but the books themselves deserve closer inspection. The Norris collection was bequeathed to the National Trust by Norman Norris (1917-1991), and was formed at his Brighton home, The Wayside. Although many now line shelves at Ham, a large section of the collection remained hidden from view, and it is these works, which have not previously been on display, that can now be seen at Osterley.

The books include topographical works, books on bibliography, and a collection of early library catalogues. However, the most exciting acquisition is easily the 1771 *Catalogus Librorum in Bibliotheca Osterleiensi*, a catalogue of Osterley's lost library, of which only 25 copies were printed. In an amazing coincidence, this particular copy of the catalogue was used during an examination of Osterley's books on 17 August 1782 by William Linnell and Israel Lewis. During that month the two men undertook a full inventory of the park and the house, and at that time they took the opportunity to add in manuscript an appendix of 18th-century 'modern' books to the catalogue.

The return of this book, alongside others in the Norris collection, has allowed the room to reveal its personality to the visitor once more. It is also hoped that the catalogue will provoke further research into the dissemination of this most valuable of country house libraries.

*Claire Reed, Collections and Premises Manager, Osterley Park*

<sup>1</sup> Quaritch, B., *Dictionary of English Book Collectors*, Vol. 4, London, 1893, p. 9.

## REVEALING A COLOURFUL PAST AT HAM HOUSE

### An investigation into the true colour and pattern of the Dolphin Chairs

The 1677 inventory of Ham House, Surrey, lists ‘six arme chairs with carved and gilded frames covered with Brocade: six back stooles of ye same’. This entry records the suite of furniture now known as the Dolphin Chairs after the carved and gilded decoration of their frames. These chairs are currently displayed in the North Drawing Room at Ham.

On each chair, an upholstered back and seat is fitted with a loose cover held with hooks and eyes. The covers are constructed from an elaborately woven silk brocatelle placed over a linen lining, trimmed with multi-coloured silk and parchment fringes.

To the visitor at Ham House today the Dolphin Chair covers appear dull red and gold in colour with a design that is only just visible, worn away by years of use and display.

However, a guest at Ham in the late 17th century would have seen a very different and more colourful picture.

During the 1980s whilst working for the V&A Museum—then the custodians of the objects at Ham—I was privileged to be involved with the conservation of many of the Dolphin Chairs’ covers.<sup>1</sup> In order to give the worn and fragile textiles the best possible support, it was necessary to unpick some of the fringing and open up various seams on the silk brocatelle.

This revealed the fabric’s true colours on the hidden areas—these had been preserved in pristine condition. The original surface colours could be seen: in addition to a ground of red satin and white plain weave, the weft patterning was in pale green as well as pale pink, salmon pink, cream, pale blue, yellow, light brown and dark

brown. As each hidden section was exposed, I made drawings, noting the colours, and I started to compile an overall picture of the brocatelle’s design.

A flowing pattern of stylistic foliage and flowers was revealed within a loom-width of 25 inches (63.5 centimetres) over a pattern repeat averaging 42.5 inches (108 centimetres). It was particularly interesting to find that the colours in the outer motifs were used asymmetrically and varied from one repeat to the next.

My contact with these objects ended in 1990 when the National Trust took over

the care of the collection at Ham, and so my work on the reconstruction of the pattern ceased too. However, more recently, thanks to support from Victoria Bradley, Collections Manager at Ham, I have been able to return to this project. With the help of digital photographs of the visible areas of the Dolphin Chair covers I have

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*The Dolphin Chair brocatelle*

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*Original colours revealed*



*Recreation of the brocatelle pattern*

completed my drawing of the pattern and then painted the design in gouache to provide full documentation of the original colours.

This research complemented my recent reconstruction of the printed design on the rare survival of the wool textiles from Lord Rochester's Bed, dated c. 1675, and thus contemporary with the Ham brocatelle. In 2005 I was fortunate enough to be involved with the initial care of these hangings on Lord Rochester's Bed, recovered from Blenheim Palace and now in the store in Cornwall<sup>2</sup>.

The hangings are in very poor condition, but a design can still be detected on the main textile, a saye (woollen cloth woven in the south and west of England) printed with reddish ochre decoration on yellow.

From the best-preserved curtain, I made a tracing on Melinex for an overview of the pattern. Then tracings were taken from areas where the printing retains clarity: the top of the curtains protected by



Recreation of the pattern of Lord Rochester's Bed hangings



Lord Rochester's Bed hangings

valances, the inner valances less exposed to light, and patches of the textile used to mend the headcloth.

These could be pieced together to complete a picture of the design, a block-printed repeat approximately 34 inches (86.5 centimetres) square. The symmetrical pattern appears to imitate a woven damask, and is certainly unusual in its combination of European and Eastern imagery. It has no known extant example with which to compare it, and this research incidentally revealed an insight into the process of block printing on fabric in the 17th century.

*Nicola Gentle, Research & Conservation of Historic Textiles, Devon*

<sup>1</sup> Nicola Gentle, 'Conservation of the Dolphin Chairs at Ham House', Post-prints of the 'Conservation of Furnishing Textiles' Conference, The Burrell Collection, 1990, pp.30-41.

Nicola Gentle 'The Conservation of Six of the Dolphin Chairs, Ham House', The V&A Album 1984, pp.316 - 321.

<sup>2</sup> Nicola Gentle, 'Lord Rochester's Bed', Furniture History, Vol. XLV (2009), pp. 35-54.

## ACQUISITIONS

### LACOCK ABBEY, WILTSHIRE

An early 14th-century manuscript by William Brito, *Expositiones Vocabulorum Biblicae* ('Explanations of Biblical Vocabulary'),



Life and learning in medieval Lacock

has been purchased at auction at Christie's, London, for £46,850. This book was originally used as part of the education of the novices at Lacock, one of the most important convents in England. It is one of the very few books to survive the Dissolution of the Monasteries and stay in the same country house for 700 years.

### MOTTISFONT ABBEY, HAMPSHIRE

A portrait of Major Gilbert Russell (1875-1942) by Sir William Orpen (1878-1931), pencil and watercolour on paper, has been purchased at auction at Waddington's, Toronto, for \$5,520 (Cdn). Major Russell (a great-grandson of the 6th Duke of Bedford) purchased Mottisfont Abbey in 1934. Together with his wife Maud he refurbished the property inside and out, commissioning

Rex Whistler to decorate the drawing room and Norah Lindsay and Geoffrey Jellicoe to redesign parts of the garden.



Gilbert Russell by Orpen

*Emile de Bruijn, Registrar (Collections and Grants)*

# STOWE'S 'UNREAD' CHINESE GARDEN PAVILION

## The painted characters – frivolous decoration or meaningful text?

The 'reading' of works of art and other artefacts, and the characterisation of those artefacts as 'text', is a commonplace of post-structuralist theory and contemporary art history practice. It usually refers to the analysis of the underlying structure or meaning of objects or situations. It may seem surprising, therefore, to apply that definition of reading and text to the characters painted onto the Chinese House at Stowe in Buckinghamshire. The significance of the Chinese House as a decorative garden pavilion first created in the 1730s and significantly redecorated in the 1820s seems remote from the concerns of modern or post-modern critical discourse. Moreover, the characters painted on its



The Chinese House at Stowe, with painted decoration dating from the 1820s

exterior were thought to be almost the opposite of text: to be fake Chinese characters applied by a decorative painter ignorant of Chinese culture, frivolous decoration masquerading as text, and therefore to be non-text—or, even worse, disingenuous text.

As it turns out, however, the characters represent something akin to a post-structuralist paradox: they are meaningful as well as meaningless, simultaneously genuine, canonical text and purposefully unreadable decoration. Some

time ago, as I was looking at the illustrations in Sir William Chambers's 1757 book *Designs of Chinese Buildings*, it suddenly occurred to me that the characters shown in plate 18 were rather similar to some of the characters on the Chinese House. Further comparison confirmed that the Chambers illustration was indeed the source for the characters on the Chinese House, although they had been copied rather freely and jumbled up in the process.<sup>1</sup> In *Designs* Chambers claimed that plate 18 showed an authentic Chinese text, while admitting that he did not know its source or meaning. He had sent the fragment to the Jesuits in Rome—considered expert Sinologists because of their long-standing missionary work in China—but they couldn't identify it either, and only managed to produce an imperfect translation.

I subsequently showed the Chambers plate to Dr B J Mansvelt Beck, formerly attached to the Sinological Institute of Leiden University (and whose seminars on classical Chinese I attended in the early 1990s). As the characters had been rather mangled through being transcribed by a European hand and then engraved (in itself an interesting process of 'translation'), Dr Mansvelt Beck was only able to decipher the top four lines of the Chambers plate:

1. 以八千歲爲春  
Yi ba qian sui wei chun  
He considers eight thousand years to be merely a spring season
2. 之(?)九萬里而上  
Zhi(?) jiu wan li er shang  
He goes(?) ninety thousand miles and more
3. 茶烟琴韻書聲  
Cha yan qin yun shu sheng  
Tea fumes, tones of the zither, the sound of writing
4. 杏雨松風竹葉 / 華  
Xing yu song feng zhu ye/hua(?)  
Rain on the apricots, wind in the pine tree, leaves (blossom?) of the bamboo

The text consist of two pairs of lines (1-2 and 3-4) which both



Details of the Chinese characters painted onto the exterior corners of the Chinese House. During the restoration of the pavilion in the mid-1990s the characters shown on the left were found to be so worn that they were recreated on the basis of old photographs, but both panels include sequences of characters copied from William Chambers's book on Chinese architecture (outlined).

display the parallel sentence structure of traditional Chinese verse. The second pair of lines seems to describe the refined sensory experiences of a scholar-aesthete, although the exact context is not clear. The temporal and spatial hyperbole of the first pair of lines, however, made Dr Mansvelt Beck think of the *Zhuangzi*, an ancient Chinese text named after its author, a philosopher who is thought to have lived in the 4th century BC. The first of the so-called Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* includes the following:

[...] in the remotest past there was the great tree Qun, with eight thousand years for its spring and eight thousand for its autumn; [...]<sup>2</sup>

When the [bird called] Peng travels to the South Ocean, the wake it thrashes on the water is three thousand miles long, it mounts spiralling on the whirlwind ninety thousand miles high, and is gone six months before it is out of breath.<sup>3</sup>

Zhuangzi is here describing mythical beings of unimaginable size and age as part of a strategy of challenging the complacency of his audience. By soaring above and beyond normal physical and mental boundaries these creatures provide a context in which individual human concerns lose their importance.

From the evidence provided by the Inner Chapters, Zhuangzi seems to have been an extremely individualistic writer who was critical of logic and accepted ways of thinking, rejected public office and worldly success, and regarded life and death merely as stages in the endless cycle of nature and the universe. The writings attributed to him and collected in the *Zhuangzi* became one of the classics of what was later known as Daoism. This tradition in Chinese thought emphasises intuition, relativism and selflessness, and contrasts with the more society-oriented and moralist modes of thinking commonly known as Confucianism.

So how does this discovery inform our 'reading' of the Chinese House? The Daoist references painted onto its walls are only fragmentary, and were never understood by the artists who applied them, nor presumably by the Temple-Grenville family who commissioned the decoration. Nevertheless, the revelation that an English garden pavilion contains a hidden and unintended philosophical message is curiously appropriate from a Daoist point of view, as an example both of the limitations of human understanding and of the potential of nature to inspire and liberate the human mind. Moreover, the misreading of Chinese motifs is entirely typical of *chinoiserie*, or pseudo-Chinese decoration, and is interesting

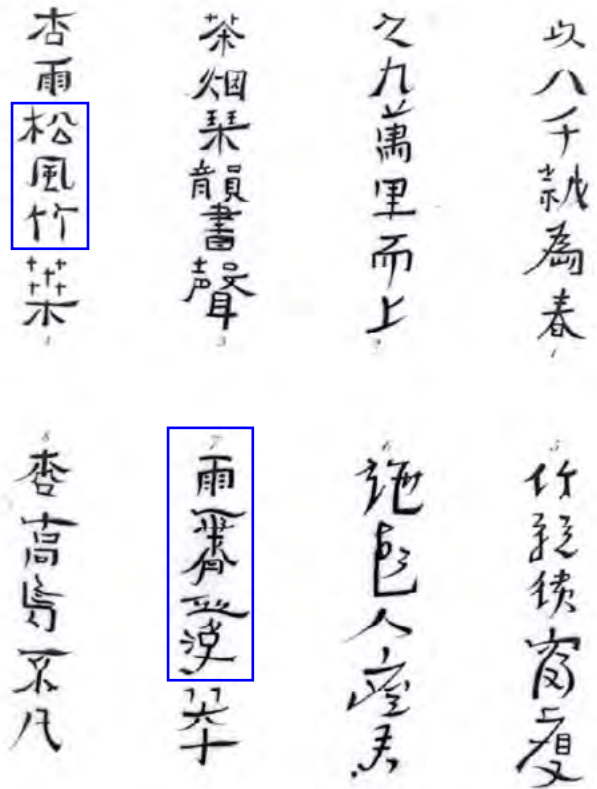


Plate 18 from Sir William Chambers's 'Designs of Chinese Buildings', 1757. Sections of line 4 (top left) and line 7 (bottom, second from left) were the sources for the sequences of characters on the Chinese House (page 9).

in how it reveals western (and here specifically British) modes of curiosity, wonder, appropriation and adaptation. Finally, the attraction of the unknown, the way something obscure or unfamiliar stimulates the imagination, is something Zhuangzi himself may well have appreciated.

*Emile de Bruijn, Registrar (Collections & Grants)*

<sup>1</sup> See Emile de Bruijn, 'Found in translation: the Chinese House at Stowe', *Apollo*, vol. 165, no. 544 (June 2007), pp. 52-59. For more details and sources about the Chinese House see inv. no. 91820 on [www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk).

<sup>2</sup> A.C. Graham (trans.), *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, Indianapolis and Cambridge, Hackett, 2001 (orig. publ. 1981), p. 44. In my quotes I have changed the romanisation from the Wade-Giles system used by Graham to the now more commonly used pinyin system.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 43.

## ACQUISITIONS



Tea canister or tea caddy?

## UPPARK, WEST SUSSEX

A pair of silver tea canisters by John Henry Vere and William Lutwyche, 1767, has been purchased at auction at Sotheby's in London for £10,000 including buyer's premium, funded by Uppark, by a contribution from a fund established by the late Simon Sainsbury, and from gifts and bequests to the National Trust. The canisters are unusual in having the shape of utilitarian tea containers while being made of silver and having been engraved with the Featherstonhaugh and Lethieullier family arms. The canisters were presumably commissioned by Sir Matthew Featherstonhaugh, 1st Bt. (1714-1774), and his wife Sarah, née Lethieullier (1722-1788).

A pair of Sèvres vases from Uppark, which had been stolen from a warehouse following the fire at the house in 2004, has been recovered in the USA. The ormolu-mounted vases are painted in colours with Danaë (after Correggio's painting in the Borghese Gallery, Rome) and with the Venus of Urbino (after Titian's painting in the Uffizi, Florence) and date to c. 1780. They originally came to Uppark in the time of Sir Harry Featherstonhaugh, 2nd Bt. (1754-1846), an associate of the Prince of Wales (later George IV) who shared the latter's Francophile tastes.

*Emile de Bruijn, Registrar (Collections and Grants)*

# A MORTLAKE TAPESTRY AFTER TITIAN

## The importance of The Supper at Emmaus at Hardwick

Amongst the wonderful collection of tapestries at Hardwick Hall is a relatively unheralded gem. Pinned up on the ceiling of the Chapel is a Mortlake tapestry, *The Supper at Emmaus* (see illustration, right). It is one of a number of Mortlake tapestries, including the sets of *Hero and Leander* and *The Hunters' Chase* (the latter now at Chatsworth), probably first purchased by Christiana Bruce or her son William Cavendish, 3rd Earl of Devonshire, in the 1640s. It was, however, in the 1840s that the reforming 6th Duke placed the tapestry in its rather unorthodox location on the ceiling of the Chapel, and it has remained there ever since.

Although the tapestry is much damaged—the erosion of large areas has removed most of the lights and highlights—the composition as a whole still works remarkably well. We can clearly read the scene: three men sit for dinner on a terrace waited on by two attendants, with a hilly landscape in the distance. The subject is the Supper at Emmaus, based on a painting by Titian, which at the time when the tapestry was woven was part of the collection of Charles I (see illustration below).

The Supper at Emmaus is not to be confused with the Last Supper (as it was by the 6th Duke in his *Handbook* of 1844). The Last Supper took place before Christ's death, whereas the Supper at Emmaus is one of the occasions when Jesus appeared after his resurrection. The story, found only in the Gospel of St. Luke, relates that two followers of Jesus, one called Cleopas, the other unnamed but usually considered to be Luke, were walking to Emmaus from Jerusalem when they were joined by a stranger. On reaching Emmaus, still not knowing



*'The Supper at Emmaus', Mortlake tapestry after a painting by Titian, c. 1630-1640. Wool and silk. The National Trust, Hardwick Hall*

who the stranger was, Cleopas and Luke asked him to have supper with them. It was only when he blessed and broke the bread that the pair recognised their companion as Jesus; this explains the amazement depicted by the artist, particularly on the face of the man on the left-hand side of the table.

Titian's painting conveys the intense spirituality of the biblical story. Jesus, the central figure facing us, has just broken a roll of bread; he holds it in one hand while raising his other hand in blessing. This blessing of the bread is central to St. Luke's story, but it is also a reference to the sacra-

ment of the Eucharist, a subject which would have been particularly suitable for an altarpiece painting, or indeed an altarpiece tapestry. Although its position on the ceiling is unorthodox, the Mortlake *Supper at Emmaus* is certainly in the right room at Hardwick. The decanter of wine and glasses of water and wine on the table also refer to the sacrament, and it is perhaps not going too far to suggest that the broken roll is symbolic of Jesus's open wound suffered on the cross. As for the two other main characters, I would suggest that the man in the friar's robe with his hands clasped together in prayer and spiritual absorption is St. Luke. This figure, a disciple and an evangelist, has a serene knowingness, whereas the other man, who must be Cleopas, is truly overwhelmed by the revelation of Christ's presence.

Titian also invests his composition with elements of a tavern genre scene. On this level we are simply witnessing a grace before a meal, which is about to be served by the boy who brings in the main dish of chicken on a pewter or silver platter. A burly tavern owner, perhaps a rather coarse character in comparison with the sweet and well-bred boy with the jaunty feather in his cap, also stands by. Under the table there is a fight between a dog and cat over a bone, a standard genre element which introduces some light relief, although we should not entirely discount it as possible religious symbolism.

The Mortlake tapestry is relatively faithful to Titian's painting. It includes the landscape background with buildings on the hilltops and the group of small figures walking along the path in the distance—presumably an allusion to the previous episode in the story where Jesus joins the walkers on the road. The painting dates from the 1530s, Titian's early to mid career, and the paint handling is very precise, with a deeply focused still-life quality. It must, therefore, have been quite a task to weave a version of such a painterly work of art, and yet it is extremely successful. Many of Titian's wonderful still-life passages are brilliantly replicated; instances are the highlights and reflections on the glasses and the folds of the tablecloth.

While the Mortlake *Supper at Emmaus* is very much a woven picture, it is not just painting that is replicated in wool. The tapestry's border, a wonderful Renaissance architectural design of exceptional



Titian, *'The Supper at Emmaus', c. 1530s. Oil on canvas, 169 x 244 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris*



Josias English (active 1649–56, d. 1718) after Titian, *The Supper at Emmaus*, c. 1640–1650. Etching, 21.8 mm x 27.8 mm. British Museum, London

beauty with scrolls, medallions and enchanting angels' heads, is an imitation of a carved and gilded wooden frame. The high quality of the border design indicates that it was the work of the painter Francis Cleyn, the chief designer at Mortlake. Cleyn was renowned for his exquisite borders, and the infill blue effect seen on this tapestry and also on the borders of Lyme Park's *Hero and Leander* tapestries seems to have been something of a trademark.

As a designer Cleyn revelled in the interplay of design, imitation and medium, and Titian's painting offered him the perfect opportunity. Jesus, Cleopas and Luke are eating off a linen or damask tablecloth which covers a table-carpet. Where Titian imitates wool textile design in paint, the tapestry imitates Titian's imitation of wool textile in wool textile! Titian's *The Supper at Emmaus* was therefore not only a good choice as far as the subject matter was concerned, but also as a vehicle to display the Mortlake weavers' and designer's technical virtuosity and their interest in the interaction of design and medium.

By the early 17th century Titian's painting was in the collection of the Duke of Mantua, and it was bought by Charles I in 1627 as part of his purchase of a large part of that collection. Along with other paintings such as Titian's *Venus del Pardo* and *Allegory of the Marques del Vasto*, *The Supper at Emmaus* was one of the greatest works in the Royal Collection. We do not know who suggested that the Mortlake works should weave a copy, but it may have been Charles I himself. After Charles I was executed the painting was auctioned in London in the Commonwealth Sale. It became part of the collection of the French entrepreneur and art collector Everhard Jabach, and then the collection of Louis XIV. It is now on display in the Louvre.

Other Mortlake versions of *The Supper at Emmaus* are known, including one at St. George's Chapel, Windsor. However, for two tapestries of the same subject and design both made in the same workshop, they are remarkably different. This is especially true of the palette: the version at Windsor is dominated by a rather muddy brown, whereas despite the extensive deterioration of the Hardwick version it retains a blue and golden clarity. The faces, too, particularly that of Jesus, look very different, indicating that a different cartoon might have been used. The obvious explanation for this could be that the Windsor version is later in date—and so it is. The Windsor version bears the arms and viscount's coronet of the Royalist sympathiser Sir John Mordaunt who was made a viscount by Charles II in March

1659. This dates the tapestry to the 1660s when both the quality of the weaving and the dyes were slipping at Mortlake. By contrast, the Hardwick version probably dates from the 1640s like other Mortlake tapestries belonging to the Cavendish family, such as the sets of *Hero and Leander* at Hardwick and the *Hunters' Chase* at Chatsworth. The colouring and quality of the Hardwick *Supper at Emmaus* may even suggest an earlier date in the 1630s, Mortlake's great period. A further version of *The Supper of Emmaus* from this time is at St. John's College, Oxford. It bears the mark of Sir Francis Crane, the first director of Mortlake, who died in 1636.

Tapestries woven as direct copies of paintings are relatively rare. One of the earliest known examples is a set of tapestries made in the 15th century after Ambrogio Lorenzetti's famous frescoes of *Good and Bad Government* in the Palazzo Pubbico, Siena. Certainly the most famous is the tapestry made for Francis I of France after Leonardo's *Last Supper* in the convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. Weaving directly after paintings does, however, seem to have been a minor speciality at Mortlake; there, tapestry portraits after Van Dyck were woven of Sir Francis Crane, the Royalist diplomat and poet Endymion Porter, and Van Dyck himself. However, the closest analogy to Hardwick's *The Supper at Emmaus* is a now lost tapestry after Titian's *Diana and Callisto*, of which there was a copy in the Royal Collection (the original painting now belongs to the Duke of Sutherland, and is on display at the National Gallery of Scotland). This famous lost tapestry was bought by Charles I in 1636 for £504 and valued at the Commonwealth Sale at £420.

The Mortlake workshop's versions of Titian, although exceptional because of their sheer cost and beauty, were very much part of the connoisseurial culture at the Stuart court of copying in other media the works of great masters, particularly those in the Royal Collection. Charles I, for example, owned full-size copies by Rubens of *Diana and Actaeon* and *Diana and Callisto*, and numerous miniature versions of all his great paintings. Indeed, the collection of the National Trust at Knole includes copies of *Diana and Callisto* and *Diana and Actaeon* made in the Stuart period.

Very much in the same spirit of the dissemination of famous works in varying media is a print of *The Supper at Emmaus* made by Josias English (see illustration above left). English's etching is inscribed 'Titian Inven & Pinx' (Titian invented and painted the design) and 'Josias English fecit de Mortlake' (Josias English made the print at Mortlake). That English's etching is signed as being made at Mortlake is not coincidental, for English was based at Mortlake and was one of the painters, perhaps indeed a cartoon painter, working under Francis Cleyn (English, also known as Engels, may have been a Flemish immigrant, as were so many of the Mortlake weavers). English also etched a wonderful series of pagan gods after Cleyn. He may have turned to printmaking owing to the downturn in business at Mortlake during the Civil War.

Although Titian's *The Supper at Emmaus* left England for good in the 1650s (it now hangs opposite the *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre), during its short stay here it produced a considerable progeny: various full-size and miniature painted copies were made, along with English's unique etching and the Mortlake tapestry versions at St. John's College, Oxford and St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. None are more beautiful nor more important, however, than *The Supper at Emmaus* on the Chapel ceiling at Hardwick Hall.

Jamie Mulherron, Freelance Art Historian

## NO MORE ‘WORRYING NOISES’ FOR VISITORS

### The reopening of two spectacular staircases at Blickling Hall



NTP/L NADIA MACKENZIE

As the Guide Book says: ‘Nobody forgets their first sight of Blickling’. Blickling Hall, Norfolk was built in the 1620s on the remains of an earlier house of the 14th century. What we see now is largely the result of the work of two generations of craftsmen carpenters, Robert Lyminge in the 17th century, and Thomas and William Ivory in the 18th.

When Robert Lyminge built the house for Sir Henry Hobart he put the Main Staircase in the east wing. It was built of oak and rose anti-clockwise round an open well with three flights separated by quarter landings. In the 1760s Thomas and William Ivory, a father and son team of highly skilled carpenter/joiners, made a number of alterations to the house for John Hobart, 2nd Earl of Buckinghamshire. They generally kept scrupulously to the style of the Jacobean house. The Main Staircase was moved to the middle of the former Great Hall, and was made symmetrical by the addition of two further flights, handed copies of the original, rising clockwise from the first landing.

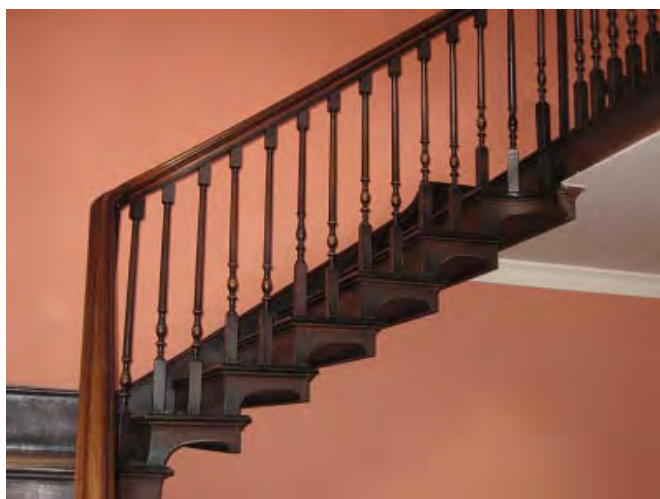
The Ivories also built a new staircase for the family, known now as the Brown Staircase, in a new brick stair tower. This staircase rises clockwise round a nearly square open central well. The treads are ogee shaped, similar to the shape of the treads of a Georgian cantilevered stone staircase, and it is significant that the structural form is also

similar to the structure of an 18th-century stone staircase. However, the treads and risers are built only about 100mm into the supporting walls, not nearly enough depth to support a load, so to define this staircase as cantilevered is strictly speaking incorrect. In fact, the loads are transferred from tread to tread down the flight: each tread is loaded on its back edge by the tread above and supported on its front edge by the tread below, putting the tread in torsion, which is restrained by the wall. The load at the bottom of each flight is taken into the wall by the landing or the quarter landing.

Timber ‘cantilevered’ staircases are very rare. This staircase is an exceptional piece of beautiful and very unusual joinery, and should be celebrated. The detailing of both the softwood structure and the oak cladding shows just how well the Ivories understood their craft.

The Main Staircase was closed to the public some years ago, when it was said that it made worrying noises when people walked up it and was possibly unsafe. At the same time the Brown Staircase was made part of the public route through the house. It was decided that this staircase was not strong enough to take the additional loading of the general public, so a timber frame was installed in the well with supporting bearers under the treads and landings.

In 2008 Richard Hill asked me to look at both stairs to see if the Main Staircase could be reopened to the public and if the unsightly



*The top flight of the Brown Staircase*

timber frame could be removed from the well of the Brown Staircase. A number of schemes for strengthening the Brown Staircase had been proposed over about 15 years, all involving the introduction of steel beams in some form. Luckily none had been followed; they were all quite expensive, and they were based on a misunderstanding of how this staircase actually works.

Rough calculations carried out on both staircases showed that both should be structurally sound—rough because they were based on guesses of the arrangement and measurements of the timber

structures, most of which could not be seen. Also unknown were the possible ravages of rot and beetle over several hundred years. So with some uncertainty about both the calculations and the condition it was decided that the stairs should be load-tested. This was done in January 2010.

The Main Staircase was loaded with 5 tonnes of sand in bags, first on the left-hand original staircase and then on the right-hand 18th-century copy. This represented a live load of 1.5 kN/m<sup>2</sup>; this was felt to be a sufficient weight, equivalent to about 150 people on the staircase—more than enough to represent the choir singing carols at Christmas. The deflections were measured by clock micrometers clamped to scaffolding, and the greatest deflection was 5.4mm.

The Brown Staircase was then loaded with sand in bags to 4 kN/m<sup>2</sup>, a much higher loading than the Main Staircase as this is classified as an escape staircase. It carried the load with no signs of distress, and a maximum deflection of just over 8mm.

An attack of deathwatch beetle in the Main Staircase was treated, and the Great Hall was redecorated; the staircase was opened to the public at Christmas. The bottom tread of the Brown Staircase had broken on a glue line and had had to be propped for the load test. This has now been repaired, and the horrible timber frame has been removed from the stairwell. A little strengthening of the handrail was needed. When the current redecorating and relighting is completed the beautiful staircase will be ready for 2012.

*Sam Price, Structural Engineer,  
Member of the National Trust's Architectural Panel*

## RARE FLINTLOCK PISTOLS RETURN TO DUNSTER

A rare pair of early flintlock pistols has been acquired at auction for Dunster Castle (see announcement on page 1). Dating from between 1660 and 1670, the pistols are almost certainly one pair of those mentioned in the castle Inventory of 1705 among 'The Fire Armes, Swords, Etc' as '2 paires of pistolls'. They were probably part of the equipment obtained by Colonel Francis Luttrell (1659-1690) when he formed an armoury and his own militia regiment at the castle in the late 1670s.

In 1685, Luttrell's regiment joined the Somerset militia and helped repel the rebellious forces of the Duke of Monmouth. In 1688 Francis Luttrell joined the Glorious Revolution when the Prince of Orange landed at Torbay; he managed to raise a regiment in three days, partly owing to his own organisational abilities and partly because of the presence of a substantial armoury at Dunster.

English military pistols from this period are extremely rare; few have survived, and even fewer in such remarkably good condition as these. The pistols are plain, long-barrelled military holster pistols, over 21 inches (54cm) in length, and are fitted with a peculiar form of 17th-century flintlock known today as an English lock. The mechanisms incorporate large hook-shaped safety catches. Although unsigned, both pistols have an as yet unidentified maker's mark on the barrels, a crowned 'S'.

The Armoury at Dunster remained intact until the early 1970s, just before the National Trust acquired the castle.



At this time the bulk of the Armoury, mainly muskets from the same period as the pistols, was sold by Sir Walter Luttrell, MC (1919-2007) to a private collector, Dr Robert Rabett. The pistols in question were included in this sale and remained in Dr Rabett's possession until his recent death. His collection was put up for auction, and the pistols were purchased by the Trust.

The pistols formed part of the 'English Silver Treasures from the Kremlin' exhibition at Sotheby's in 1991, being representative of the various goods, including arms and armour, that were traded with Russia during the 17th century.

*Brian Godwin, National Trust Firearms Adviser*

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