

UNDERSTANDING THE 1664 MOMPESSEON SETTLE AT EYAM

INTRODUCTION

This Undergraduate Research Opportunities Scheme (UROS) project entitled 'Understanding the 1664 Mompesson Settle at Eyam' examines the authenticity of a settle at Eyam Museum, Derbyshire.

- The settle is carved with the names of William and Catherine Mompesson and the date 1664.
- William Mompesson was the rector at St Lawrence Church in Eyam when the plague reached the village in 1665, he and former rector Thomas Stanley convinced the village to isolate to stop the disease spreading in the local area.
- Little is known about the settle and this research project aims to expand the understanding of the settle, to assess its authenticity and to provide more information to the museum and the public.

METHOD

These are the three key questions that needed to be answered:

1. How old is the settle – was it a contemporary piece made for the Mompesson family, or could it be a later commemorative piece?
2. What do the carved symbols on the settle mean?
3. How can visitor understanding of this piece be improved?

WHAT IS A SETTLE?

A settle is a wooden bench with a high back long enough to accommodate several people. This settle is made using a frame and panel construction out of solid oak



Figure 1. Settle in situ at Eyam Museum, showing all carving on the back rail.

RESULTS



Figure 2. View of side of settle with diamond decoration. Grapes inferring fertility and/or blood of Christ

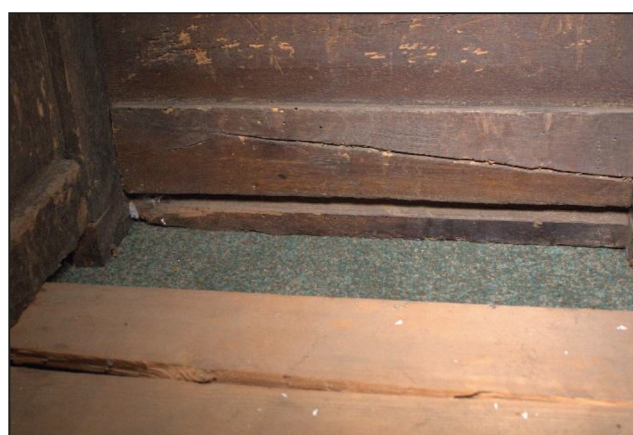


Figure 3. Leg Repair from inside seat box. Left corner is repaired, groove for board not cut, showing newer part and alteration.



Figure 4. Quaterfoil guilloche on seat box, St Andrews cross in the corners



Figure 5. Alterations on leg with new wooden nails



Figure 6. A wyvern which can represent pestilence. Year 1664 can just be seen

- The key questions were considered panel by panel and are answered fully in a report written for Eyam Museum.
- 1. Overall, the seat part of the settle appears to have more original older features than the back rail suggesting an amalgamation at some point, this is not obvious on first impression as it was done to a good quality.
 - While made using authentic jointing methods some alterations became obvious on close examination (fig.3&5)
 - Earlier damage required cutting off the lower ends of the leg posts and their repair. (fig.5)
 - New wooden nails indicate that the settle structure might have been disassembled and now seems to contain older and newer parts, while some pieces are missing. (fig.3)
 - Without destructive analytical techniques the date of wood cannot be identified reliably.
- 2. Overall the carving's meanings could be inferred from different aesthetic and cultural criteria, however the style of carvings does match that of 17th Century. The carvings may relate to:
 - The plague (fig.6), however, this was after the date on the settle. 1664 was the date of Mompesson's arrival at Eyam, but he was not greeted favourably
 - Relating to Mompesson's Christian beliefs (fig.2)
 - Celebrating Mompesson and his family, including his newly born child in 1664 (fig.6)
 - The reference to Saint Andrew which his church was called at Eakring after his time at Eyam (fig.4). This could imply the settle was made for or to commemorate Mompesson and his former wife Catherine.
- 3. This research can result in a better understanding for the public in the museum. Opinions can be formed from reading the evidence gathered as now there is much more information about the settle.

CONCLUSION

- The Mompesson Settle has lots of features in the way it is made and its carvings which can be inferred to help identify the authenticity of this settle. It is not possible to establish a reliable date for the manufacturing without analytical techniques.
- The key to better understanding of the settle is discovering the context of the carving of William and Catherine Mompesson's names and the date 1664. If a specific reason could be found then possibly all the pieces of the jigsaw could fit together.
- The 3D drawing I created to show the settle will help visitor understanding of the settle to go with the information collated

REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thanks to Henning Schulze for helping to identify the features of the settle.

I study BA Conservation of Cultural Heritage, in the school of humanities and heritage

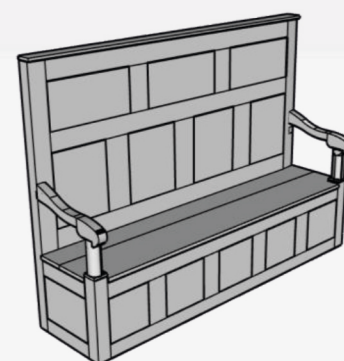


Figure 7. 3D model of the settle

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