



Selly Manor &
Minworth Greaves



Selly Manor & Minworth Greaves

are two of the
oldest buildings
in Birmingham.

Both were moved to their
current site by George
Cadbury at the beginning
of the 20th century and they
offer a fascinating glimpse
into what life would have
been like hundreds of
years ago.

The history of Selly Manor

(also known as Smythes tenement, Selly Hill Farm, and the Rookery).

Over its 500 year history the building has had at least three different names, as well as two locations. It was originally built as a farm house and was known as Smythes

tenement. The earliest known mention of it was in 1476 when it was leased by William Jenette, who was lord of the manor of Selly, to John Othe'Field, a yeoman farmer.



Location



Selly Manor
was built here.

Selly Manor
now stands here.



By 1775

the house had a new name - Selly Hill Farm.

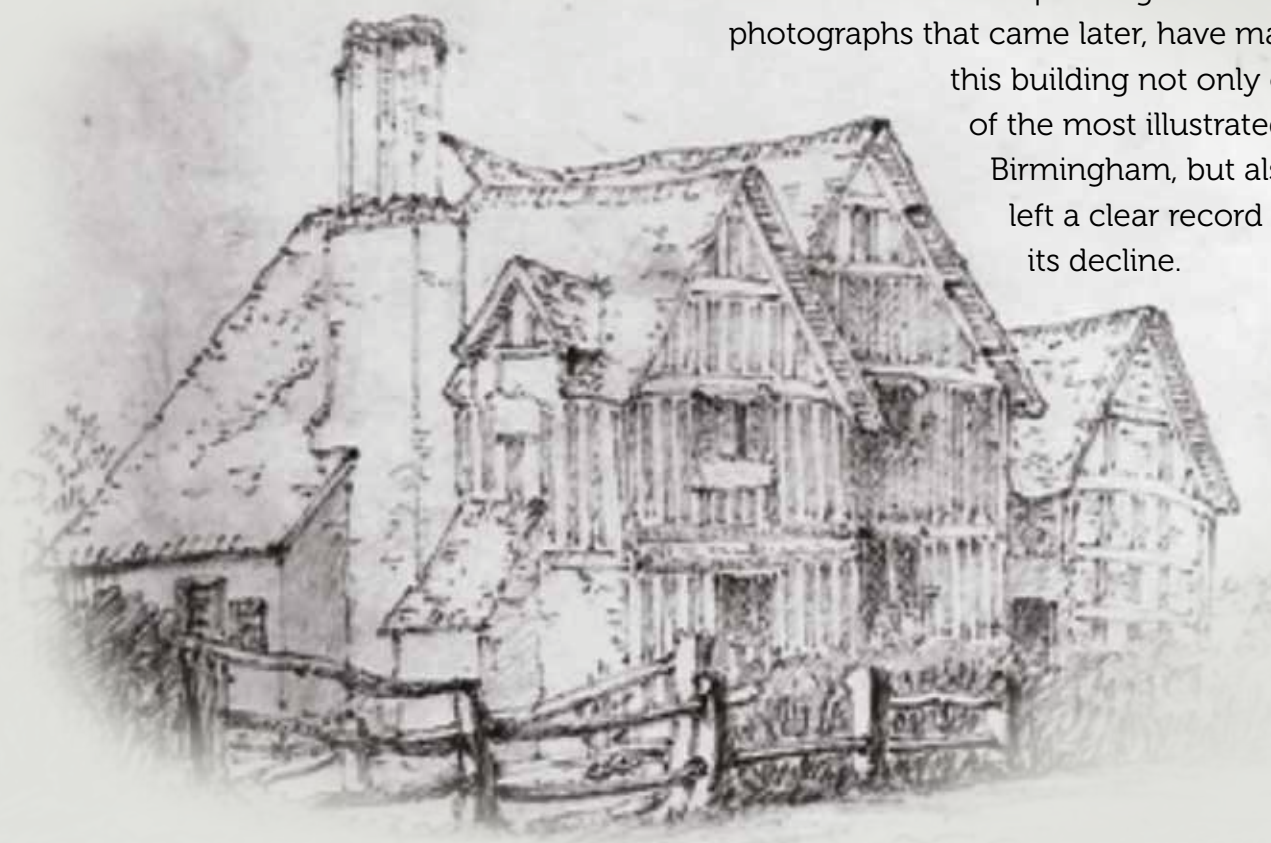
The old timber-framed house was no longer fashionable and an advert for its sale is brief. It describes it as a genteel and convenient dwelling, emphasises the location; the open and healthy air, and its proximity to Birmingham. Also the fact that it came with a quantity of good manure!

In 1795 the house was sold again following the death of its owner. The land which had totalled 65 acres was divided into two and the status of the old house plummeted. By 1800, the house had been split into



Advertisement for sale of Selly Hill Farm, Aris's Birmingham Gazette 20 February 1775

two cottages, both were let to different tenants and the condition of Selly Hill Farm continued to decline. It now appeared fashionably picturesque, which made the house very appealing to artists. Amongst them, Alan Everitt and David Cox made frequent visits to the house from around 1840 onwards. Their paintings and the photographs that came later, have made this building not only one of the most illustrated in Birmingham, but also left a clear record of its decline.

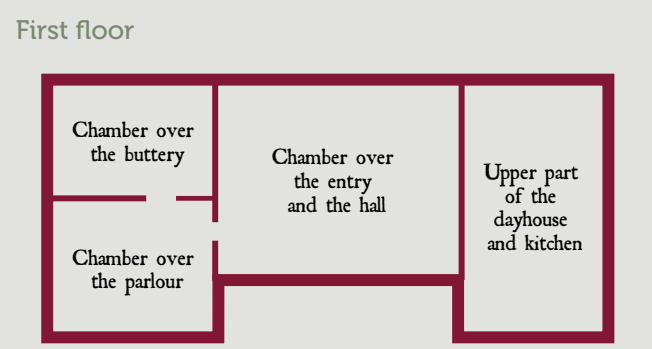
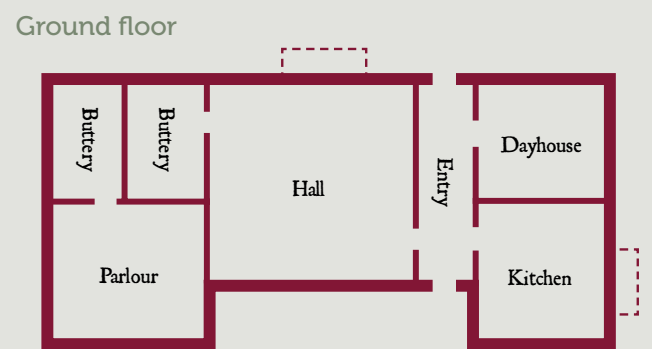


Pencil sketch of 'An old house at Selly...' by A E Everitt 4 April 1840

In 1561

attorney and bailiff John Setterford, his wife Phylis and her son William Pritchett rented the house.

The family prospered and acquired enough money to buy the house and some of the land that made up the manor of Selly. This family made extensive renovations to the house. They replaced the medieval hall, which formed the middle section of the house with the taller, brick structure that we have now.



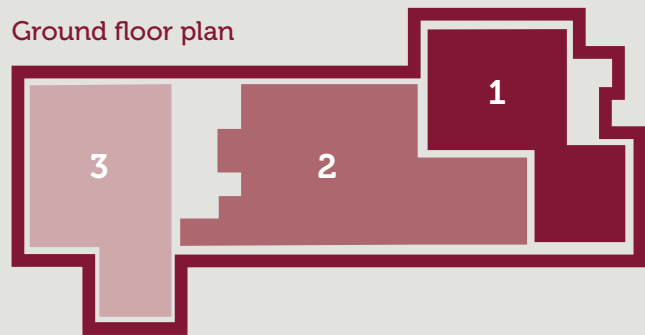
A full list of the contents of the house was drawn up in 1608 in order that they could be divided following the death of Phylis Setterford. From that list, historians believe that the layout is likely to have looked like the above diagram.

By 1861

...the house had been split into three cottages, and was known as the Rookery.

A census taken in 1861 shows that there were 21 people living in the old house, in what must have been incredibly overcrowded, cramped conditions.

Ground floor plan



First floor plan

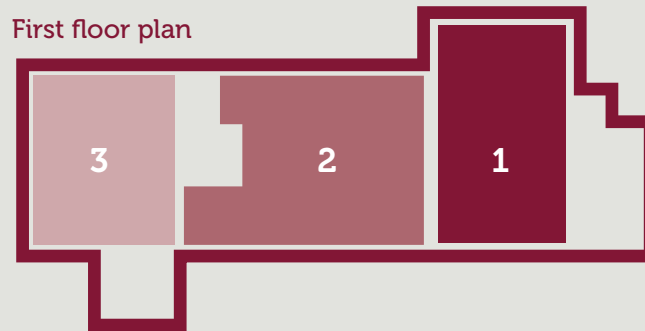


Diagram showing plan view of the cottages.

The first cottage...

was rented to **John Williams**

(35 - brass wire drawer), his wife Rachael (37) and their five children: Arthur (8), Rachel (6), Eliza (4), Jane (2) and John (9 months).

The middle cottage...

to **Thomas Thompson** carpenter

(84), his wife Charlotte (78) and their two grown-up sons - Gideon (31 - leather dresser) and Thomas (38 - carpenter).

The third cottage...

was occupied by **William Davis**, his large family and two lodgers.

The occupants of the house were; cow keeper/agricultural labourer William Davis (41), his wife Ann (41), his brother George (30 - agricultural labourer), 5 children - Mary (7), William (6), Elizabeth (4), Jane (2), George (1), and their lodgers Moses Rose (41 - agricultural labourer) and George Price (22 - agricultural labourer).



William Davis.
Image courtesy of the Battle family.



This picture was taken in the 1870/80s. The cottage on the left is where the Davis family all lived. It is possible that the lady with white hat was William Davis' wife, Ann. The cottage pictured is now the room that we call the kitchen.



Image taken in 1904 in its original location on Bournbrook Road.

The house continued to decline, and by the beginning of the 20th century it was a shadow of its former self.

The inside was divided into small, dark rooms. Damp crumbling plaster covered the inside walls and ivy threatened to pull down the roof.

George Cadbury

Chocolate manufacturer, educator and philanthropist bought the house at auction in 1907.

George Cadbury believed that education was essential for people to achieve their potential. As well as creating one of the world's most successful chocolate companies, George Cadbury was a newspaper owner and founder of Bournville. He also taught adult education for over fifty years - teaching hundreds of men to read and write. Selly Manor offered George the chance to have another way of educating people in his new village of Bournville. After he bought the house, he gave it to Bournville Village Trust on the understanding that its future would be assured.

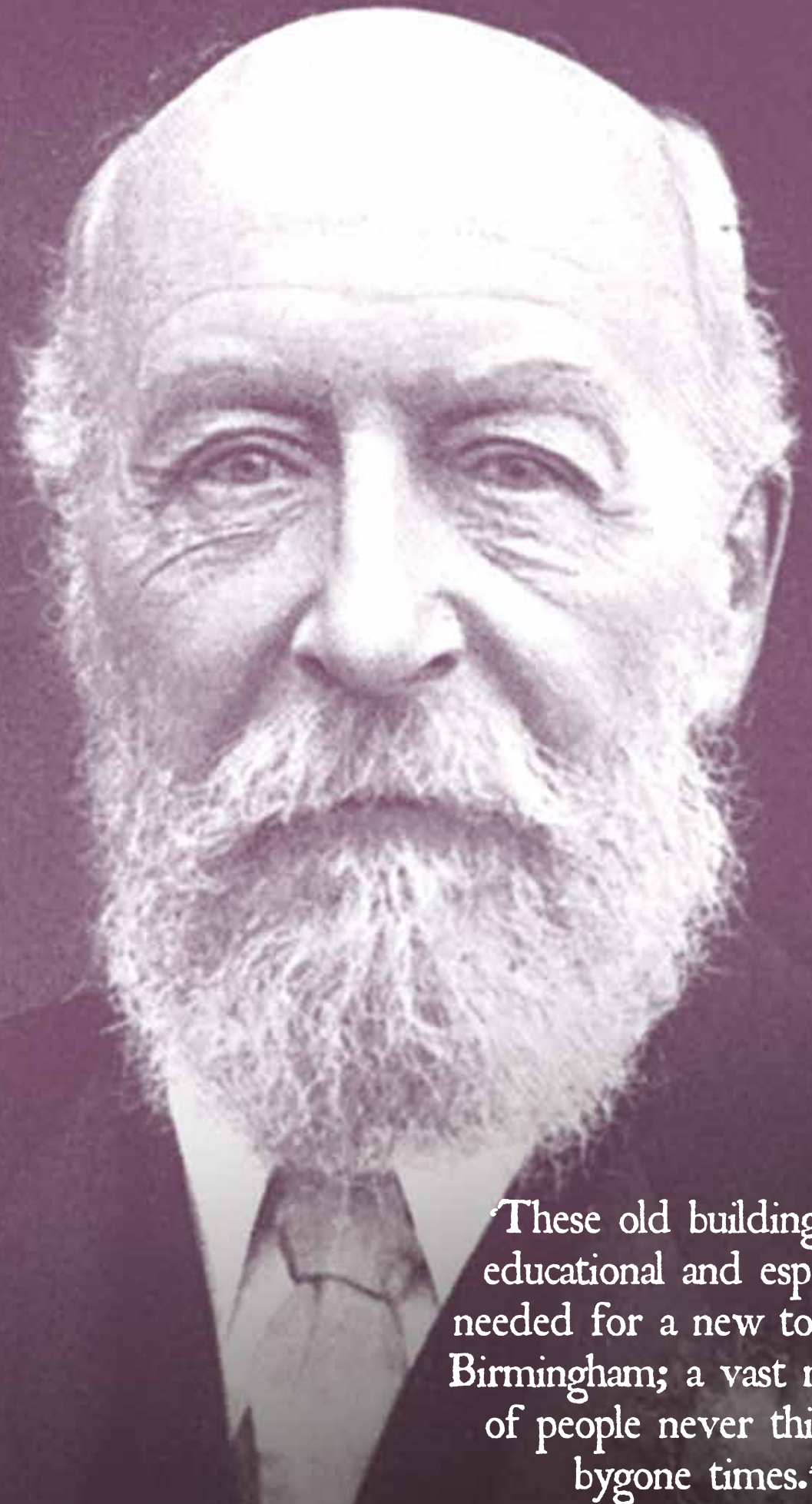
Where the house stood was a problem. It was past the old workhouse in an area that was described as 'unlovely'. It was felt that the building would have a safer future in a new location and work began on its

removal in 1909. Under the direction of architect William Alexander Harvey, the house was painstakingly dismantled. Each piece was numbered and documented in preparation for its reassembly in its new home at Bournville.

Work began rebuilding the house in 1913. Progress was slow due to the outbreak of war and the difficulty in obtaining building materials. Every care was taken to use as much of the original material as possible but inevitably some of the fabric of the old building didn't survive. Compromises were made, and outbuildings and lean-tos were not reconstructed, but finally, in 1916, the project was complete. As well as a new location, the house gained a new name: Selly Manor, and it opened the following year as a museum.



The house being re-erected in its current location.



'These old buildings are educational and especially needed for a new town like Birmingham; a vast majority of people never think of bygone times.'

George Cadbury

The History of Minworth Greaves

When architect William Alexander Harvey was planning the rebuilding of Selly Manor in Bournville he realised the need for suitable materials to repair the old house.

He scoured the Worcestershire and Warwickshire countryside in search of old buildings from which timbers, old glass and tiles could be bought and used for repairs.



Minworth Greaves in its original location.

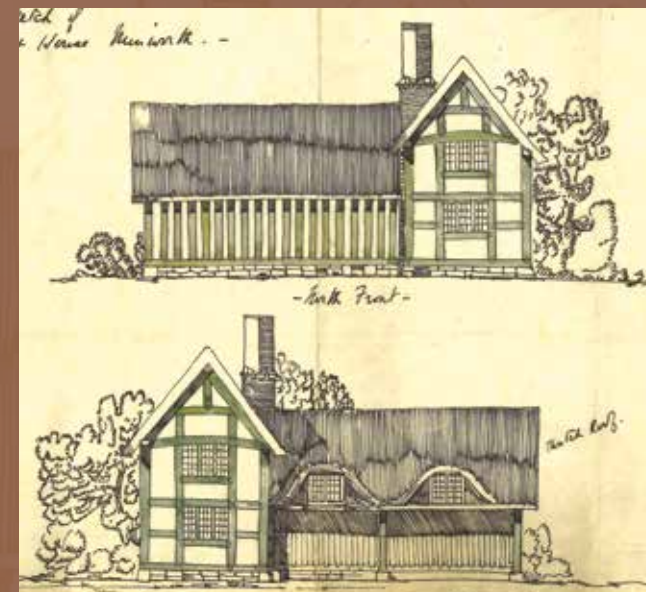
It was during this search that his attention was drawn to the skeletal remains of an old timber framed building on land belonging to the Birmingham Tame and Rea District Drainage Board, between the villages of Minworth and Curdworth, near Sutton Coldfield.

This building was comprised of a medieval hall house constructed using crucks.

This ancient method of construction uses a bent tree trunk split in half length-ways to form a pair of matching cruck blades, which are used as the main supporting timbers at either end of the building. The hall section of the building was possibly constructed



Minworth Greaves at the time it was purchased by Harvey, the bent oak timber known as crucks are clearly visible.



Architect William Alexander Harvey drew these proposals for reconstructing the entire building in 1914. Eventually just the medieval hall was rebuilt.

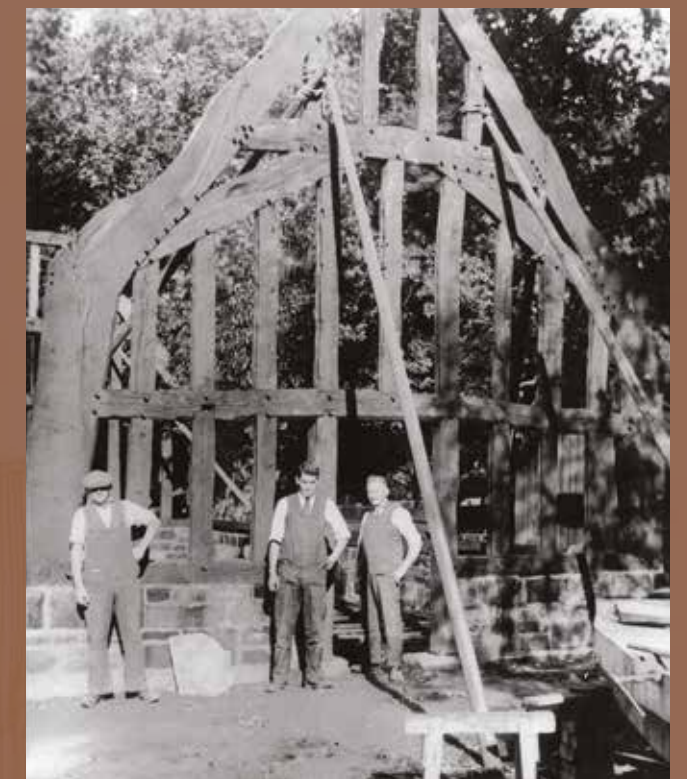
in the fourteenth century. Adjoining the medieval hall, at one end, was a later larger timber framed building possibly built in the sixteenth century.

Harvey had actually found an old building in Droitwich which had sufficient timbers to repair Selly Manor, but having inspected the structure at Minworth, Harvey felt there were enough remains to create a second building in Bournville. In 1914 Harvey purchased the timbers at Minworth for £25 and arranged to have them moved to Bournville for safe storage until a time when they could be re-erected.

With the rebuilding of Selly Manor not completed until 1916, and the cost and difficulty of such projects during the First World War, the reconstruction of the Minworth building was delayed. In 1921, shortly before he died, George Cadbury wrote to his son Laurence asking him to oversee the scheme and giving him £2000 for its completion.

Harvey was asked to put together a proposal for the building's reconstruction, something he had begun in 1914. However due to the expense and a concern that the entire Minworth structure should not dominate Selly Manor, it was decided only to reconstruct the oldest section – the medieval hall. The final building was completed in 1931 and was essentially a recreation of a hall house using the crucks at either end, and with an additional bay making it longer than the original.

The building became known as Minworth Greaves. Its recreation shows what a one room hall house may have looked like around 700 years ago. Originally it would have had a central fire, beaten earth floor and small narrow windows with no glass. When Minworth Greaves was rebuilt, a sleeping platform was installed above the entrance.



The rebuilding of Minworth Greaves took place from 1930.

Minworth Greaves



A painting of the interior of Minworth Greaves in 1932 by Oliver Baker.



Interior of Minworth Greaves circa 1940.



Minworth Greaves today.



Laurence Cadbury

The Laurence Cadbury Collection

Selly Manor is a beautiful house, but what makes it extra special is its collection of furniture and domestic objects, which were mainly collected by Laurence Cadbury.

Laurence began collecting furniture as a young man whilst studying for his degree at Cambridge, and it was the beginning of a lifelong passion. Laurence's enthusiasm for collecting was shared with artist and antique dealer, Oliver Baker. The two men travelled across the country looking for items to furnish Selly Manor and bring the old house to life.

The items collected by Laurence and his father are now known as the Laurence Cadbury Collection and they offer an intriguing insight about the objects that would have been seen and used daily by people living in houses like Selly Manor. This publication features some of the highlights of the collection.



Laurence Cadbury's rooms at Trinity College, Cambridge, showing his early collection in about 1910.

Furniture

Dole Cupboard



This small oak food cupboard dates from 1500 – 1550. It was designed with perforated holes in the front panels to allow air to circulate around the food stored inside. This cupboard has evidence of old nails on the inside of the holes that would have supported a haircloth, which allowed the air in, but kept insects and rodents out.

Dole cupboards were found in churches or kept within a great house. At a time when the wealthy increased their social status by laying on great banquets for their guests, food that was left over was placed in these cupboards and then 'doled out' to the poor.

Crooke Hall Table

Perhaps the pride and joy of the collection of the Laurence Cadbury Collection is this 18 foot long seventeenth century dining table. It was discovered in a derelict house called Crooke Hall in South Lancashire. Crooke Hall was built by Peter and Elizabeth Catterall in 1608. In the nineteenth century, it suffered subsidence, after years of decline it was eventually demolished in 1937.

The table however, found a home in Minworth Greaves. Above the central legs on the table are the initials PC and TC. These initials probably refer to Peter Catterall and his eldest son Thomas.

The table is inscribed with the date 163- (unfortunately, the last digit is missing) and declares that it is 'An Arelome to this Hovs For Ever'. Clearly, it was hoped that the table would remain in Crooke Hall forever.



Edmund Prys Bed



This bed has a wooden tester, or roof, from which the bed hangings are suspended. Both the tester and bed hangings were intended to keep out cold draughts. As rooms were frequently shared, the hangings also provided a degree of privacy.

The panelled headboard bears the initials EP, and the date 1592. It is thought that the bed belonged to Edmund Prys (born 1544 – died 1623), who is believed to have been involved in checking the bible for publication before it was translated into Welsh for the first time. Prys is also remembered for his version of the Psalms, which appeared with the Book of Common Prayer in 1621. These were versions of the Psalms in Welsh designed to be set to music, and were the only Welsh hymns available during the seventeenth century.

Nonsuch Chest



Dating from between 1530 and 1630, this type of chest is often referred to as a Nonsuch Chest. Nonsuch chests take their name from Henry VIII's palace of Nonsuch, which was near Cheam in Surrey.

Although the palace no longer exists, it gave its name to this type of chest, which uses marquetry to depict fine buildings.

Chests like this were made in large numbers in the sixteenth century, and imported from Germany. Immigrant German workers who settled in London and Norwich also made such pieces of furniture, and it is likely that this is the origin of the Selly Manor Nonsuch Chest.

Grotesque Chest

Vines, grapes, dragons, human figures and green men are subjects and motifs used in many early carvings. However to see them converge to form one decoration is much rarer.

This chest, probably dating from the late sixteenth century, depicts the

profile carvings of a lady and man. Their appearance, him with hat and long beard, her with a basic coif on her head, suggest they are of yeoman class and probably husband and wife. The chest may have been made to celebrate a special occasion such as their marriage.



Westmorland Press Cupboard

This press cupboard was made in Westmorland, an old county of Cumbria. It has the date 1694 carved in a stylised manner, which is a feature of Cumbrian furniture carving.

Along the frieze and two recessed doors are knotwork motifs. This pattern is also frequently found on Cumbrian furniture, and is thought to be inspired by stone Celtic crosses. Another interesting feature can be found in the knotwork designs; the centre of which forms heartshaped containing the features of a face; another characteristic that is frequently found on other items of a similar date from Cumbria.



Lion and Unicorn Chair

This armchair was bought by Laurence Cadbury from Harrods Department Store in 1910, and has been subjected to numerous repairs and changes.

Laurence Cadbury wrote in his notebook that it "appears to be a more or less made up chair". By this he means that there has been considerable restoration.

The chair dates from 1680 – 1700 and a lion and unicorn sit prominently on the crest. These symbols were introduced to the royal coat of arms at the accession of James I. The lion represented England, and the unicorn represented Scotland.



Fireplace Objects

Bedchamber Fireback



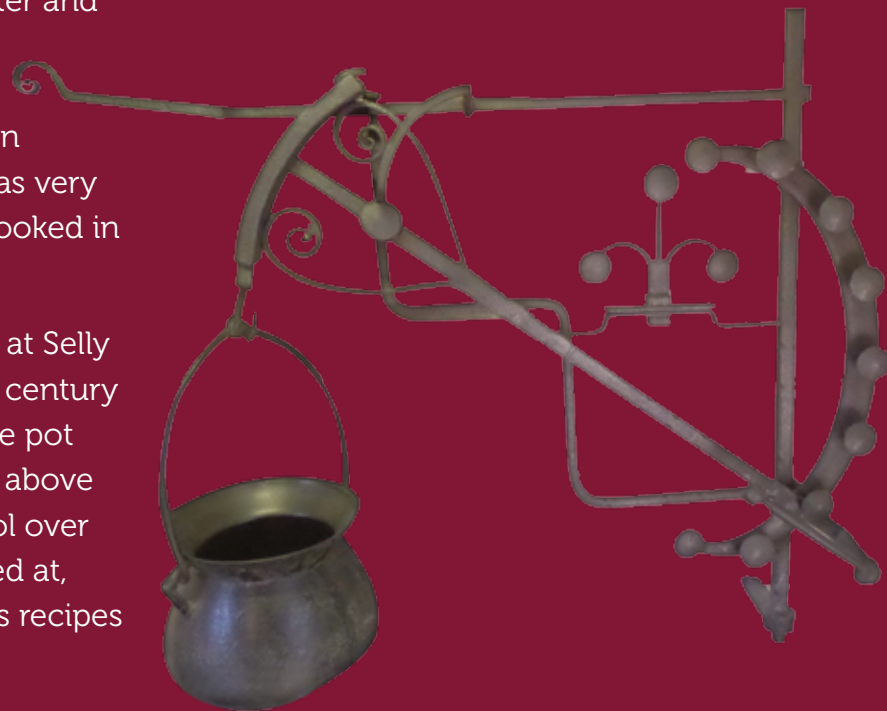
Made from cast iron, a fireback sat behind the fire to reflect heat back out into the room, which might otherwise be lost up the chimney. It also protected the fireplace itself from the intense heat of the fire.

The design of this fireback shows Jupiter, the Roman king of gods with a lightning bolt in hand, riding his chariot pulled by two eagles as they travel across the heavens. The print on which the fireback was based is from a series titled *The Seven Planets*. The prints were published by Johann Sadeler in 1585, and then used as the design for firebacks over a century later.

Chimney Crane

Pots, and later on, kettles, were an essential item, but when full of food or water and placed in a fire they were heavy and hot to handle. A chimney crane was used to move the pot in and out of the fireplace, which was very useful when placing food to be cooked in the pot or when serving.

The wrought iron chimney crane at Selly Manor dates from the eighteenth century and has the added benefit that the pot could be held at different heights above the fire. This gave far more control over what temperature the food cooked at, which became more important as recipes became more complex.



Spit Jack



The job of turning the spit, which cooked the meat over the fire, was long, arduous and boring. It could take several hours to roast the meat and being so close to the fire was hot and tiring work. This spit jack was a contraption which made it much easier.

Spit jacks were in use from the end of the sixteenth century onwards; the Selly Manor example is dated 1722. Essentially they were labour saving devices; the rope is attached to a weight, which is looped over a wooden centre piece. As the handle is turned, the rope winds around the centre piece until it reaches the top. Then the governor (which governs how the weight fell) at the top of the jack would be knocked into action, and the weight would drop slowly. The action of the falling weight turned the centre piece and the metal shaft that goes through it. This turned the wheel that the chain is attached to, and the chain in turn drove the spit.

Smoke Jack

Smoke jacks were introduced in the 18th century and were designed to provide an alternative method of turning the spit.

The whole mechanism would be fixed inside the chimney. The upward draught of hot air from the burning fire would rise up and turn the fan-shaped vanes. As the vanes were turned they would turn a vertical iron shaft. The shaft was linked to a cog which drove a horizontal shaft and a pulley, which finally turned the spit itself.



Decorative Objects



Tapestry

Greek mythology was a very popular subject for tapestries during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, and the tapestry at Selly Manor is thought to depict part of the story of Achilles, a tale from Homer's Iliad.

This section of tapestry is very different from how it would have looked originally. It was part of a larger tapestry, a piece of which is now at Packwood House in Warwickshire, owned by the National Trust. Sadly, the colours have faded significantly from their original splendour due to light damage, and the borders and right side have been removed at some point during its life.

Lantern Clock

The Selly Manor lantern clock is made of brass and designed to be wall mounted. It was made by Thomas Huttly of Coggeshall, Essex in 1680. The dial is engraved with thistle heads, and the fret on top of the clock is engraved with a dolphin motif. Both of these designs were fashionable in the sixteenth century and used by many other clock makers.

An interesting element of the lantern clock is that it only has an hour hand. Each slender hour mark is arranged around the wide chapter ring with further marks representing the fifteen minute intervals, intersected by engraved half hour marks which mimic the design of the hand.



Peter Du Cane Hatchment

Hatchments were made upon the death of a member of the gentry, nobility, or in rarer cases, wealthy individuals. They would be displayed over the front door of the house of the deceased until the

burial service. At this point, the hatchment would be removed and hung on the wall of the church. They show all of the heraldic components that the deceased is entitled to use; in essence, their heraldic achievement.

The hatchment displayed here was made to commemorate Peter Du Cane of Braxted, Essex who died in 1823. The arms of Du Cane are shown on the left of the shield and his wife's on the right. Du Cane was survived by his wife, to show this, the background is split into black and white; white behind her coat of arms and black behind his. The motto Resurgam was a common one and meant 'I will arise'.







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