

## Sizergh Castle, near Kendal, Cumbria



Sizergh Castle stands in the former county of Westmorland, not far from the popular beauty spots of the Lake District National Park. Built by the Strickland family in the fourteenth-century, the castle was transformed during the next two hundred years into a fortified manor house. Remarkably, a descendant of the original twelfth-century Norman landowner still lives at Sizergh and cares for the family archives, though the castle was presented to the National Trust in 1950.

The Inlaid Chamber, a principal second-floor tower bedroom, was created between 1573 and 1582 as the culmination of the programme of interior decoration initiated by Walter Strickland (1516-69). His widow Alice, who married Sir Thomas Boynton in 1573, was responsible for the installation of the elaborate plasterwork ceiling and frieze, sumptuous wood panelling and windows featuring heraldic stained glass. This celebrated room is a jewel of Elizabethan workmanship and a rare survival of its kind.

All is not what it seems, however. The Inlaid Chamber has not, contrary to appearances, been at Sizergh throughout its whole existence. In 1891, during an exceptionally tough economic period, all the panelling from the Inlaid Chamber was put up for sale. The South Kensington Museum, now V&A, bought the panelling and five years later the four heraldic roundels and a walnut bed bearing the Strickland arms. Subsequently for over a century, the Museum's first ever British 'period room' could be studied and enjoyed by Londoners and visitors to London. In addition, the Hornyold-Strickland family kindly lent the Museum a wooden form or bench dated 1562 for display in the period room from 1973 to 1999.

When in the late 1990s, the Museum secured Heritage Lottery Fund assistance to redevelop the complete run of its British Galleries, an opportunity arose for the first time in decades to give serious consideration to the National Trust's request for the Inlaid Chamber to return to Sizergh on long-term loan. Following fifty years of patient petitioning by the Hornyold-Strickland family and much groundwork by the National Trust, the panelling and stained glass roundels returned home to Sizergh in 1999.

## Contents of the Inlaid Chamber

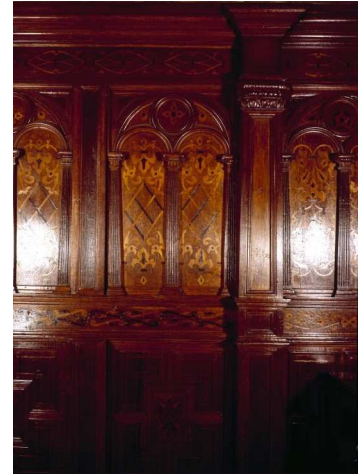
The modelled plasterwork ceiling and frieze were always part of Sizergh's Inlaid Chamber from their creation in the late sixteenth century; the V&A having had casts made for its period room re-creation. The Strickland and Boynton arms feature on the ceiling between ribbed pendants, flowers, goats and chained stags. The frieze comprises a repeated floral pattern with demi-figures.



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The wood panelling (museum number 3-1891) was re-installed at Sizergh by Peter Hall & Sons of Staveley near Kendal. Two panels not displayed in the V&A scheme had already been lent to Sizergh from 1973. The panelling is of oak inlaid with floral and geometric patterns in pale poplar and dark bog-oak. The striking scheme includes arcading and pilasters with Ionic capitals. The maker is not known. He may have been an itinerant German or Flemish craftsman but it is equally likely that he was a skilled joiner working in the northern counties who based his designs on various Renaissance print sources.

Three of the re-instated stained and painted glass roundels (museum numbers 87, 87b & 87c-1896) are late sixteenth century while the fourth roundel (87a-1896) was probably made about fifty years later. The arms depicted are those of Strickland, D'Eyncourt, Beetham, Roos and Parr. In a Joseph Nash lithograph which shows the room as it was in 1849, the roundels are set in the upper lights of the sixteenth-century mullion-and-transom window above early eighteenth-century leaded crown glass lozenges. When the roundels were removed for sale in 1896, the window was glazed with sheets of plain glass and four mid-twentieth century stained glass shields. The new leaded window provides clear glass external protection for the historic roundels.



Museum no: 3-1891

The walnut bed (museum number 86-1896) bears a walnut shield dated 1568 carved with the arms of Strickland, Deincourt, Neville, and Ward, and surmounted by the Strickland crest. When the V&A lent the bed to Sizergh in 1978, Lieut.-Cdr. Thomas Hornyold-Strickland traced its history in the family archives. While an inventory of 1770 did not show the bed in use, the 1785 inventory describes it as being in the Inlaid Chamber, having been reconfigured and repaired with oak in 1779 by Abraham Story, the estate's joiner and cabinet maker. Red moreen (wool yarn with a stamped waved finish) hangings of the early nineteenth-century now dress the bed.

### The Sizergh Toilet Service



There is one more link between the V&A and Sizergh Castle. In its Silver Galleries, the V&A displays a handsome silver toilet service bequeathed in 1968 by Mrs Hannah Gubbay). Possibly made by the talented London goldsmith Robert Smythier in about 1680, it is chased with then highly-fashionable chinoiserie decoration. The service is said to have been presented to the Strickland family by King Charles II, during whose reign Sir Thomas Strickland (1621-94) was Keeper of the Privy Purse while his wife served Queen Catherine of Braganza.

museum number M.21 to P-1968

## References

'Westmorland, Cumberland, Durham and Northumberland, illustrated: from original drawings by Thomas Allom, George Pickering, &c.; with descriptions by T. Rose', [1835?]. Plate 1 is an engraving of the interior of Sizergh by watercolour painter Thomas Allom.

Joseph Nash, 'The mansions of England in the olden time', 4<sup>th</sup> series no. 9, 1849, pl. II.  
Lithograph by Joseph Nash showing a view of the Inlaid Chamber.

H. Clifford Smith, 'The panelled rooms. IV, The inlaid room from Sizergh Castle', V&A, 1915, revised ed., 1928.  
A survey and history of the Inlaid Chamber.

Cornelius Nicholson, 'The annals of Kendal: being a historical and descriptive account of Kendal and the neighbourhood: with biographical sketches of many eminent personages connected with the town', 1861, p.105

Michael Waistell Taylor, 'The old manorial halls of Westmorland & Cumberland', 1892, p.191-192.

Mark Girouard, Comment, *Country Life*, 9 May 1991, p.63

Advocated the return of the Inlaid Chamber to Sizergh, suggesting that the V&A could display the Haynes Grange Room in its place.

Jeremy Musson, 'Back home to its Castle', *Country Life*, 22 June 2000, p.154-157.

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[www.vam.ac.uk/collections/furniture/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/furniture/index.html)

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