

A SOMERSET SPICE CABINET

The quaintly-named 'Yea's Cottage', situated deep in the narrow, twisting lanes of Somerset, provided this example of an unusually interesting early spice cupboard (fig. 22). The opportunity to photograph and record this for the Society came about in the first instance through the valuable liaison & help of the Exeter office of Knight, Frank, agents for the sale of the property and, subsequently, a cordial invitation to view from the owner. In both cases I would like to record the thanks of the Society.

The property being empty, and the situation of the built-in cupboard being in a darkish corner, close to a large inglenook fireplace, it wasn't the easiest example to photograph on a hurried visit in early March. However, the result shows the cupboard reasonably clearly. The door itself is oak, retaining its original butterfly hinges, and is set within an applied elm border, quite broad, and lightly carved. The carving has a cursive stem and leaf design, very simply executed, but echoing a quite fascinating plaster frieze in the room, which sports a monkey, a bunch of grapes and a dragon's head, these together forming a repeated pattern with meanders of leaves and tendrils.

The same frieze pattern occurs above an upstairs fireplace - the lintel here, dated 1674, but installed upside-down so that the monkey stands on its head! The family initials of Robert Yea (carved in the customary triangular format on the spice cupboard) are also found here, together with a coat of arms depicting The Butchers Guild of Exeter. (1.)

Finally, a similar example of this stem and leaf design is found on the carved frieze of a fine Somerset oak refectory table dated 1673, but here showing unusual cross-hatching of the leaves (2). Is there an echo here, perhaps, of the cross-hatched roundel at the centre of the cupboard door? As so often in such cases, we are left again with a speculative thought.

1. PENOYRE, J & J. *Decorative Plasterwork in the Houses of Somerset, 1500 - 1700*. Pub. Somerset C.C. 1994

2. *OAK FURNITURE FROM GLOUCESTER AND SOMERSET*. Exhibition catalogue, Bristol Museum, 1976 Fig. 29

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Fig. 22 Somerset spice cupboard 22" high, dated 1673