

# Musée départemental Breton, Quimper

Wednesday afternoon, 14 September

Our visit to the Quimper Museum, housed in the 16th century bishop's palace, introduced us to a display of regional furniture and architectural relics that one might expect to find, with subtle differences according to their district of origin, throughout Brittany. Complete examples and surviving facades of coffers, dating back to the 16th century, provide a sense of evolution of the earliest types of furniture in the region.

Coffers with convex lids (*dorsen*) were intended for grain storage, while the flat lidded versions (*huges* or *huches*) were for clothes and linen. The 17th century examples often incorporate panelling in renaissance and gothic styles. Generally speaking, the smaller or low coffers for clothes and linen were between 4ft 2in (130cm) and 5ft (150cm); the grain or wheat coffers are often 5ft (150cm) high and up to 8ft (250cm) long.

Many of the other examples of regional furniture in the museum were made in the 19th century and included *armoires*, used as linen presses, elaborate *vaisseliers* or dressers with plate racks, *lits clos* or box beds and *bancs* or *bancs coffres* studded with brass nails: this was a common regional embellishment on most types of furniture made in the Bigouden district of south west Brittany. Individual chairs, even in the late 19th century, appear to be a regional rarity, with the emphasis on bench seats alongside tables or *la table huche*.

Our afternoon concluded with a visit to the tower, normally closed to the public. The stripe-carved newel post of the spiral staircase bore the arched supports of the domed roof. A wooden frieze in the small room at the top was decorated by a series of amusing carved figures and faces.

Our gratitude goes to Philippe le Stum, the museum director, who guided us round the collection. His recent publication, *Arts Populaires de Bretagne*, (Editions Ouest-France) is highly recommended.

*John Boram*