

# The churches of St Thégonnec and Guimiliau, and the Eco-Musée des Monts d'Arrée

Wednesday morning, 14 September

Our first visit was to the church of St Thégonnec, which provided a particularly good example of the 'parish enclosure' typical of the area. One enters via an 18th century triumphal arch, with the 17th century church straight ahead and the ossuary to the left. In the centre stands a Calvary (1610), elaborately carved with figures of the then townspeople around the base. The whole group of structures is in the local Kersanton stone (a magmatic rock related to granite) which is cut under water, when it is soft and easily carved; on exposure to air the stone hardens, and indeed showed little sign of erosion.

The custom locally is to bury the dead, and later to re-site the bones in an ossuary. This is a practice common in areas where there is pressure on land use or danger of grave desecration: historically, Vikings raided this coast. The Calvary is not just ornamental, but the focus for various church rituals, including the Mass, which sometimes takes place outdoors.

The church structure is basically plain and simple apart from the elaborately decorative spire (a common feature hereabouts). However, the interior was startling in its amazing 18th century rococo plasterwork. Covering the whole width of the altar wall and the pulpit, colourful, gilded, florid in detail and in excellent condition, it could



Detail of the carved oak baptismery in St Guimiliau church

have been oppressive. In reality the effect was joyous. We understood that a recent fire had necessitated some restoration work and that effort had been made to use 'tasteful, subdued' colours!

The nearby church of St Guimiliau is 17th century with a 16th century belfry. Also in Kersanton stone, and on a similar but smaller parish enclosure plan, it has an even more elaborate Calvary. The porch has a classical structure, but with elaborate carving round the arch, and the porch interior is decorated with statues of the 12 Apostles, Christ flanked by Adam and Eve, and a frieze evoking scenes of everyday life plus some grotesques. Originally the porch statues and Calvary were coloured.

The altarpieces of the interior are 17th century, and again dominate that end of the church. The barrel-vaulted roof had carved heads at the beam intersections, and in what appeared to be an older section of the church, a horizontal wooden roof-beam showed some interesting carving.

Our last, all-too-brief morning visit was to the Eco-Musée des Monts d'Arée, set within a park landscaped with a variety of wild-life environments. For us, the main interest was in the cluster of farm buildings round the over-shot working watermill (complete with rare functional grain-shaker). Among them was an extensive collection of box beds, some armoires with characteristic Breton carving, a few farm and dairy implements, and three enormous grain chests. One of these, dated 1788, was decorated with six rounded panels above tall plain fielded panels.

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