

The Cathedral of St Pol de Léon

Saturday afternoon, 17 September

Our final visit was to the gothic cathedral in St Pol de Léon. The diocese had been established in the 6th century by St Pol, one of the seven founding saints of Christian Brittany, who is buried in front of the high altar. Born in Wales, Pol

arrived in Brittany via King March's court at Tintagel. He vanquished a dragon on the island of Batz, north of Roscoff, before reaching the mainland, and a series of tombs surrounding the choir depicts later bishops who all rest their feet on vanquished dragons. Saturday evening Mass was just about to start and so our visit was brief but we did see the choir stalls and misericords, similar to those we had seen at Tréguier. The six choir stalls at the extremity of the choir are thought to be the work of the Rhenish carver responsible for the stalls at Tréguier, Gerard Dru, who is also recorded in the St Pol accounts.

We were most fortunate to hear the cathedral organ, the work of the 17th century English organ builder, Robert Dallam. A recusant Catholic, Robert had moved to Brittany during the English Civil War, becoming organist at Quimper Cathedral and, with his sons, building organs in several Breton churches, including ones we had seen at St Thégonnec, Guimiliau and Quimper. The carving of the organ case at Guimiliau was outstanding and had been commented on by members of our group. Robert was following a family profession: his father, Thomas, was a celebrated organ builder during the reigns of Elizabeth and James I. He had built and delivered the jewel-encrusted organ, clock and automata paid for by the Levant Company and presented to the Sultan of Turkey by Elizabeth I in 1599, and had also built organs for several of the Oxford colleges. Following the Restoration, Robert returned to England, although one of his sons, another Thomas, continued to work in Brittany.

Before embarking on the ferry, there was time for a final delicious fish dinner, at L'Ecume de Jour in Roscoff, where we enjoyed their own smoked cod in a 16th century building overlooking the sea and furnished with Breton armoires and chests. This meal had been organised with his usual attention to detail by the tour leader, Chris Pickvance. The Society owes him many thanks for all his preparation in arranging a most varied and fascinating introduction to this very individual region of France, and not least for his constant and instantaneous translations. Our thanks are also due to Dr Sophie Duhem of Toulouse University who had most generously accepted Chris's invitation to accompany our visit. Descending from Nantes merchants and fisherman in the Icelandic trade from St Pol de Léon, her Breton credentials are impeccable. Her intensive research on carved beams and other woodwork in Breton churches made her an ideal guide for our tour. Her definitive book on the subject, *Les Sablières sculptées en Bretagne*, was published by the University of Rennes Press in 1997. We thank her very much for her scholarship and friendship.

Michael and Polly Legg

Dr Sophie Duhem has given a copy of her book to the Society; please contact the Secretary if you wish to borrow this.