

# The Chateau de Kerjean, St Vouguay

Saturday afternoon, 17 September

The chateau is situated in the centre of northern Finistère, in the old diocese of Léon. It was completed by 1595 and has characteristics both of a traditional Breton manor and a French chateau. Its impressive stone buildings surround a large courtyard and reflect the architectural treatises of the period, as well as renaissance decoration. This style was to influence future buildings in Léon, including the beautiful church closes. The chateau was ransacked in 1793 and the widowed owner guillotined. The state purchased it in 1911 and the Friends of Kerjean were formed for the purpose of purchasing Breton furniture from within the locality to create a museum collection. This now houses, in the main, the larger pieces that farmers and wealthy peasants would have owned in the 16th to 18th centuries.

A particularly attractive piece was the large two-part oak joined press cupboard of c.1650 (Fig. 1) with two doors and flanking panels in its lower section, applied moulding running below the doors and, interestingly, three panels carved beneath. The doors had elaborate mouldings surrounding a carved floral cartouche and the outer panels had a guilloche



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

and four-petal flower head pattern. The upper section had a recessed cupboard with a central door between two panels, each with a carved floral cartouche, a mask with foliate hair and swirled petal flower heads, possibly representing the cycle of life. Turned columns supported the canopy and the piece stood on bun feet.

A 17th century free-standing box bed (*gwele kloz*) had two closed sides fitting into the corner of a room and two open sides with carved, pierced silhouette balusters and corner post (Fig. 2). Slim turned balusters with rings, together with finials and pendants, completed an attractive arrangement. A door was formed by cutting two of the silhouette balusters in half. Carved foliate arches decorated the upper and lower friezes, and beneath the lower, separated by a heavy applied moulding, were straight-sided fielded panels. The turned corner finials on the canopy would have been decorated with plumes. Typically Louis XIII Breton style, the bed was mostly chestnut, with some fruitwood, probably cherry. An oak bench chest at the end of the bed had simple Breton-style carved panels, with carved symmetrical tapered flutes, dog-tooth decoration and tulips. It was dated 1774.

In Brittany it was traditional for parents to have an armoire made for newly-weds. A most attractive 6ft high example (Fig. 3) was carved with flowers in vases and



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

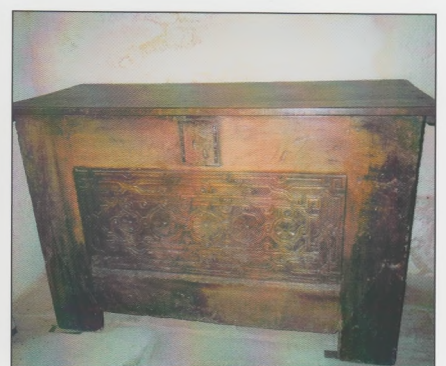


Fig. 10

turtledoves pecking at grapes (a symbol of love and union) between the carved fielded panels; it was inscribed on the doors '1751 JEAN KOMNES, MARI KOMNES'. A guardian angel, similar to examples to be found in local churches, was attached above the doors with a bishop below.

A large oak linen press (Fig. 4), of heavy joined construction, was some 8ft in height and width and 4ft deep. It had a pair of double panel 3ft doors between outer panels and was separated from its four lower panels by an applied moulding; the stiles and muntins were carved with leaf bands. The carved frieze centred with a mask included the letters IHS, the date 1675 and a swirled petal flower head at either end. The large escutcheons on the doors had leather backing. Polly suggested that this might be to prevent oxidisation between the iron and the oak. These presses provided dry storage for prosperous households in 17th century Léon.

The collection contained several interesting chests, the majority of which were quite large, with flat boarded lids. There were examples of one, two, three and four panelled chests, with varied carving and all with a single large lock plate. Some had purely gothic carved designs with concave diamonds, each enclosed by a circle (Fig. 5). One had a large cross of Saint Andrew on each of its panels and, unusually, the top of its styles were jowled (Fig. 6). One, dated 1588, had four upright panels and a wide centre muntin (Fig. 7) all carved with an array of interwoven ogee arches and stems with flower heads.

Another (Fig. 8) had four panels with vertical reeding and a centre muntin with a guilloche border enclosing a leaf band and was dated 1654; unusually, the framing still used a mason's mitre. A chest (Fig. 9) dated 1620 had four similar panels bordered by a guilloche design and masks with foliate hair, 'green man' style, carved on the muntins. One had a large single panel with a straightened guilloche surrounding a guilloche containing flower heads (Fig. 10).

Only the great kitchen gave any indication of how the rooms might have functioned, and there was a noticeable lack of guides and information in the rooms. However the chateau provided a wonderful setting for some very interesting furniture.