

Caquetoire chair

An unexpected find in Puddletown church was this 'caquetoire' (gossiping) chair. Whereas Scottish chairs of this type are wide, heavily built and usually date from the 17th century, this chair conformed to the French type which is first recorded in 1570. It is narrow-backed, lightly built, with slender, swelling, plain turned legs, and the arms are jointed to both the back and front of the uprights. The Scottish chairs have the same arm joint, but there is also a Salisbury type of caquetoire chair in which the arms join the fronts of the uprights only.

The chair at Puddletown, made of walnut, was in good condition, but had lost the turned supports at the angle in the arms, and the top of the crest. The main decorative panel had looped interlace with flowers and foliage and the crest had two animals (talbots?) in relief. We were to see simpler looped interlace at Leweston church on the 1616 bench ends. The front stretcher and arms had fine channel moulding and the seat rails and top rail of the back had a design of rectangles. There was some discussion about whether the crest was original since the back showed saw marks, unlike the planed surfaces elsewhere, and did not project beyond the width of the back of the chair as is usual on English panel back chairs. However, the crests on French caquetoire chairs do not project beyond the width. The chair appears French or strongly French-influenced and late 16th century.

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