

Viscri

15 September

After a lovely country breakfast at no. 15, Gerhilde led us to her and her sister Caroline's mother, Sarah Dootz's, house in the village where the living room was still as it had been when they were young.

Their grandparents and parents had slept together in two tiers of the typical Saxon bed, separated only by the bedding drawer!

The walls were lined with a disparate collection of painted cupboards, cabinets and chests - only in a wealthy house would furniture match - including a 1922 low-back

Sarah Dootz's bed, Viscri



Hollowed-log cattle troughs, Viscri



settle and an X-framed folding cradle with hemp lining.

The house was 18th century with an earlier cellar, and the ceiling beams, here painted white, displayed holes to locate the tops of distaffs as well as applied battens along their sides to place bars between the beams from which to hang such things as meat or cloth. Viscri is a village which specialised in embroidery and there were good examples here, plus colourfully woven strip rugs and other personal touches such as family photographs and drying herbs.

After visiting Manfred the pig, we proceeded up the peartree-lined streets to the fortified citadel which included the church and a three-storey museum which opened in 2006, containing everyday objects, all found in and donated from the village. These included a number of ark-chests very similar to those at Bradeni. Simona explained the wooden emblems which were used, for example, to signify funerals where attendance was compulsory and which were very precisely and co-operatively organized.

Gerhilde talked to us in the charming narrow, galleried church with its naively painted panels dating to 1794. It was still maintained as a working Lutheran church, although there were now only 13 Saxons in the village (25 years ago there had been over 200), as opposed to over 200 Gypsies and 70-80 Romanians, who all live together in uneasy harmony.

Although much of the building is now 15th century, it dates back to the pre-Saxon era and the font is formed from a Romanesque stone column and capital. The UNESCO World Heritage listing of 1999 did not bring funding, but has encouraged tourists and hence some money by that means. Gerhilde (the wonderful one-man band) played us a piece on the organ and then rushed to ring the midday bell. We moved on to peruse genuine local (Gypsy) craft stalls and head for lunch.

Christopher Claxton Stevens & Diana Halliwell

Cattle, horses, goats and geese being driven out of the village to pasture, Viscri

