

AN ARMADA CHEST.

In the "Country Life" issue of Feb. 16th, 1945, was an account of the Treasure Hunt in Tobormony Bay, with a picture of the large chest recovered from the wreck. A similar one—but on a smaller scale—has been in our family for many years and might possibly have come from the Church, where it would have been used to keep documents, etc., etc. The Bodleian Library possess one just slightly larger than ours (by 2 ins.) which is 2 ft. 2½ ins. long by 13½ ins. wide and 13 ins. high. The inside of the lid has movements almost identical with that at Oxford—all worked by turning in the lid to clamp the lid to the side ribs of the box. Inside on the left is a small receptacle with a spring catch. All the leaf moulding of steel is covered with scroll work and along the flat straight length in the centre are a number of spur-rows. These are evidently the trade mark of the maker—a John Braüch or Brock—a Flemish worker in London at this date, about 1588. There are several of these chests in the County but mostly in very bad repair—some being of large size. One of these has a rounded or domed lid and a canopy or covering inside of pierced brass work. Few of these chests can be opened, etc., as they are so damaged. John Bodley's chest has a bell—hung in its centre—which rings when the lock is turned; our chest looks as if it were once likewise fitted. The keyhole in front is a sham, while the opening for the key on the lid in the centre is hidden by a flat disc—held by a spring; the key is the original. The pattern work on the inside has several brass studs. The chest is of great weight. Evidently two pad-locks held the frontal clasps—as a "blind" to the whereabouts of the keyhole. Nearly all the steel-works are in motion when the key is turned.

A short description of the workings seems required. There are seven catches of a V or hook shape which fit underneath the rib which runs along the top of the box just within it. There are three and two on the sides and one at each end. These catches are held by slots fastened on to the flat steel rib which forms the framework of the various gadgets or leaf-work. When the key is turned they are moved and controlled by the straight piece in the centre, and work on a pin or bolt fitted on to the back of the raised leaves. The two catches on the back do not move as they slide automatically under the back rib. Unfortunately the two end catches have been broken off their spring, for there is a spring work to push each catch into position.

All the steel work is worked with patterns of some sort. The "round"—in the centre has a double circle line with dots and a thistle leaf engraved in its centre. The small box within had a key working a large spring—but it is broken. The whole chest is of great weight. There is a similar sized chest in Thwaite Church. These chests originated from one of the old German States and as Spain traded with them they were used on the Naval and Merchant ships. After the Armada many vessels were wrecked in the storm on our West Coasts. The chest was a recognised fitting of all the ships and became fairly common loot to the wreckers. Being of strange construction they became known as "Armada" chests—a name which has stuck to them and are looked upon as vertiable antiques.

A. Dew of Stowmarket kindly drew the plan.

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