THE MEDIEVAL STONE PULPITS OF SOUTH SOMERSET

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In an earlier article in these *Proceedings* (Vol. 94, ii, 71), I described the medieval stone pulpits of North Somersetshire. The object of the present paper is to complete the survey with an account of those in the southern part of the county.

The majority of the pulpits described below are fifteenth century in date. The practice of erecting pulpits in churches appears to have become widespread from about the middle of that century. Few pulpits earlier than this have survived, and these generally in abbey refectories such as the beautiful thirteenth century pulpitum of Beaulieu and the fourteenth century one of Shrewsbury.

The carving on some of the pulpits is of a high order, though none can compare with the glories of the fenestrated mid-15th century pulpit in Cirencester Parish Church.

I am indebted to Mr. Philip Rahtz for the excellent photographs, often taken in very difficult light; to Dr. D. T. Donovan for his advice on the geology of the stone used in the pulpits and to Dr. R. J. G. Savage for his help in assembling the whole.

Badgworth

The pulpit is richly carved, and of a Jacobean style, but it stands on a most remarkable base, which appears to be the greater part of a medieval stone pulpit. It has four panels, each with a depressed cinquefoil head, containing low relief figures of the four Latin doctors. The first, mitred and wearing a hood, is probably St. Ambrose; the second, robed in a gown without a hood, may be St. Augustine; the third, wearing a cardinal's hat and sitting at a desk, is clearly St. Jerome; the fourth, with a hood and with what may be the remains of a dove by his head, is evidently St. Gregory. The panels measure 13 inches by 26 inches. High above them is a moulded cornice about 6 inches deep. Modern steps partly cover the first figure. Remains of the original paint can still be seen. The stone is from the Doulting quarry. The pulpit is placed in front of the stoup: it stands on the site of the Rood stair opening, north of the chancel arch.

PLATE IX

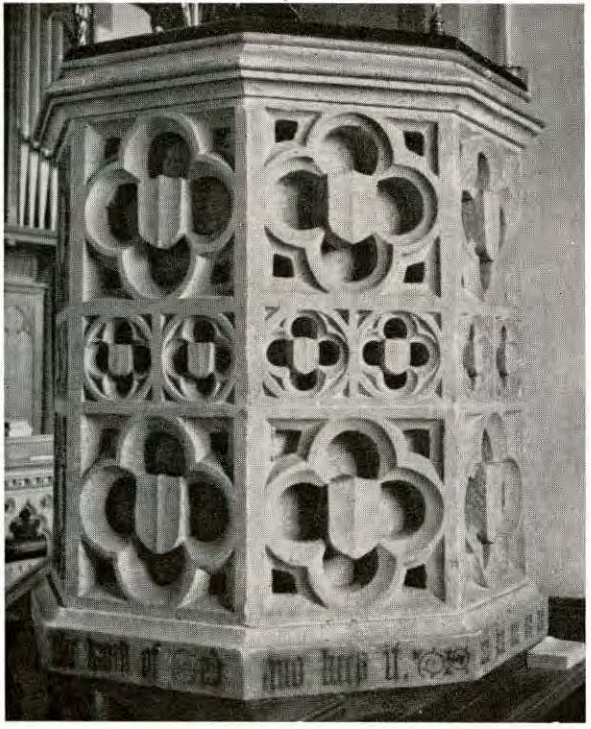


(a) BADGWORTH



(b) BALTONSBOROUGH

PLATE X



(a) CHEDDON FITZPAINE



(b) HOLTON

PLATE XI



(a) STOGUMBER



(b) STRATTON-ON-THE-FOSSE

PLATE XII



(a) West Camel



(b) Wyke Champflower

Baltonsborough

This pulpit is comparatively squat and is divided into eight panels ornamented by deeply cut-out arches, surmounted by a battlemented cresting, which surmounts a deep cavetto. The pulpit now stands at the end of the aisle, and adjoining the chancel arch. It is built of Ham Hill stone, and probably dates from the earlier half of the fifteenth century.

Cheddon Fitzpaine

This is an unusual pulpit. The cornice is moulded, and below it the panels are divided into three sections, the top and bottom rather more than twice the height of that in the middle. These panels are filled by a deeply cut quatrefoil pattern, with a blank shield in the centre. The middle small panels have each two quatrefoil ornaments, surrounded by a plain circle and again containing a plain shield. The base has a simple cavetto above a plain support, and on it is painted in Victorian Gothic lettering "Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it" followed by a scroll and five geometrical patterns. It stands on a very elegant pedestal consisting of five sides of an octagon matching the font, on the south side of the chancel. It is made of Ham Hill stone.

Charlcombe

This pulpit (not illustrated) is a plain cylindrical tub, topped by a chamfered moulding. It is made of Bath stone and is on the south side of the Church between the chancel and the nave.

Holton

This pulpit has four panels, three alike and one plainer. These are divided into two storeys, separated by a cross bar. The upper row has a four-leaved pattern above trefoils, the corners are filled in with lightly carved foliage. The lower panels repeat the base pattern of the upper. The whole is surmounted by a chamfered moulding, ornamented by four-leaved flowers. The base also has a plain moulding. There are remains of red paint, and the stone is a fine-grained freestone, with ferruginous veins, not certainly identifiable. The southernmost panel is of a different, coarser-grained stone, and may well be a later replacement. Its position is just in the nave.

Stogumber

The magnificent stone pulpit dates from the fifteenth century and is an early example. The moulded cornice is followed by a

chamfer, very richly foliated with roses. Below, a bead surmounts the panels which are separated by shafts terminating in crocketed pinnacles. The trefoil-headed panels have foliage in the corners and are plain at the stepped bases.

As to the stone, Dr. Donovan writes "this one is complicated. The pulpit rests on an octagonal base, which is made of Doulting stone. The next section above this (the basal part of the pulpit proper) is a whitish, fine-grained sandstone of Triassic age, such as can be obtained in west Somerset. Higher again, the panels of the pulpit are of a yellowish-white shelly limestone which I cannot with certainty indentify: an origin in the Oolites of east or south Somerset is possible. Lastly, the pinnacle nearest the chancel on the north side is of Bath stone, perhaps a replacement or a later insertion. Were the three sections all made at different times, or did the masons use any pieces of freestone which happened to be at hand?" Pevsner (*South and West Somerset* (1958) p. 298) thinks the pulpit was locally made by the masons who carved the south aisle.

Stratton-on-the-Fosse

This is a simple four-sided pulpit. It has a good cornice moulding and a cavetto and bead moulding below it. Each side is divided into two long panels with trefoil heads. The pulpit stands on a moulded base above a plain support. It is made of Bath stone.

West Camel

This pulpit is on the south side of the church, really at the beginning of the south transept. It has eight trefoil-headed panels. Above them are two roll mouldings with a cavetto between them, ornamented with square-leaved flowers alternating with the letters A and S. In the post-Reformation period a small window was inserted to light the pulpit in a very picturesque manner, at the junction of the tower and chancel; this window must have been very necessary before the chancel arch was widened. It contains nice fragments of fifteenth century glass. The pulpit is made of Doulting stone.

Wyke Champflower

This is a magnificent mid-seventeenth century stone pulpit, one of the very few pulpits of this period erected between the Reformation and the Gothic revival. The chamfer at the top is adorned by a foliated pattern of leaves springing upwards. This is followed by a plain band above a deeply recessed moulding of egg forms interlaced

with foliage. Below that is a wide panel very richly decorated with a flowing pattern of foliage, cornucopiae and shells. Next there is a semicircular band above very small billets, and below them a narrow band of foliage. The two outstanding supports have low relief decoration of an elaborate scroll pattern, and between them are recessed slabs with a wide central panel formed of vertical mouldings. The whole is finished by a further shallow cavetted moulding on a moulded base.

Of the material Dr. Donovan writes "another puzzle. This imposing pulpit is of a fine-grained off-white oolitic freestone, of good quality, which I cannot certainly indentify. I do not think it is Bath stone; Portland stone is a possibility. It is certainly not local stone. Mr. H. V. F. Burrow, with whom I examined it, who is well versed in English architecture, thought it about mid-seventeenth century in age, i.e. a little later than the church. Moreover in examining the construction very carefully we eventually decided it had been reduced from its original height and that it must have been brought from elsewhere and made to fit this small church. The cutting down has been done at the level of the tops of the projecting panels of strap work, but is very difficult to detect".