

PART II

PAPERS, ETC.

Stone Pulpits in North Somerset Churches

BY MRS. D. P. DOBSON, LITT.D.

IN North Somerset there are some twenty ancient stone pulpits. The majority are within the Mendip region and several have so marked a resemblance as to make it very probable that they were made in the same workshop. The features common to many are their octagonal shape, the rich decoration of their panels and string courses and the fact that they are frequently supported on a slender pedestal. The Tudor cresting, which is a frequent decoration on their cornices, seems to point to the last quarter of the fifteenth century as being about the time of their construction. Abbot Beere (1493-1524) is known to have rebuilt the nave of Meare church and to have restored St. Benignus, Glastonbury, so it is probable that the pulpits in these two churches were also due to him. The fact that the entrance to the pulpit is combined with that to the rood loft also suggests a fifteenth-century date for them. The exceptions are Shepton Mallet and Dinder, which obviously belong to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively. A number of the earlier pulpits are decorated with versions of the vine scroll, thereby differing from the stone pulpits of Gloucestershire, none of which has it. Such are Banwell, Bleadon, Brockley, with a scroll of vine leaves but no grapes, Compton Bishop, Hutton, Locking, Wick St. Lawrence, Kewstoke, Portishead, Shepton Mallet and Worle. Six are almost identical—Banwell, Compton Bishop, Bleadon, Hutton, Locking and Wick St. Lawrence.

The pulpit at Banwell may have been erected by Bishop Beckington, whose arms, according to Rutter, were formerly in the east window of the north aisle. Beckington was Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1443-65. The pulpit is octagonal in plan,

and each panel has a trifoliate head enclosing a quatrefoil with spandrels filled in with leaf ornament. The panels are divided by crocketed pedestals. Beneath the cornice is a continuous band of Tudor flower ornament and below it a band of four-leaved pierced ornament. At the top of each panel is a row of five sunk quatrefoils, and below the panels a continuous vine scroll with leaves and grapes. Below it is a repetition of the pierced quatrefoils and then on the chamfer is a modified version of the dogtooth-like pierced pattern from below the cornice. The pedestal is also octagonal, having a leaf moulding on the top of the chamfer, then panels divided by a transom, over a fine typical perpendicular base. The pulpit is fixed to the first pillar to the west of the chancel arch on the north side. It is approached by a stone staircase, though Rutter (1829) shows a wooden one which he says is on the base of the old stair. Only four and a half of the octagonal sides of the pulpit exist, but an additional lateral panel of a different design continues the pulpit towards the east, running east and west.

BLEADON. This is very much like Banwell, though the proportions are different and the general impression of it is more robust and less elegant. Again the four ancient panels have two cinquefoil headed arches with a quatrefoil above and between them. The spandrels are less richly carved and below the pulpit there is a vine trail stiffer and more conventionalized than that at Banwell. The pedestal is thicker and shorter and has simpler mouldings and no panels. The section joining the pulpit to the north wall of the church is new, as is, perhaps, the south-east panel. Four panels are undoubtedly ancient, as the tooling marks inside show. The pulpit stands to the west of the chancel arch on the north side. The rood stair starts from the back of the pulpit below the floor level, and there is an opening on to the rood loft above. (Pl. I.)

BROCKLEY. This is in some ways the most beautiful of all the North Somerset pulpits. The cornice surmounts a band of Tudor flower and below is an undercut moulding that suggests a modified form of dogtooth ornament. The panels are, as usual, divided by crocketed pillars, and on the chamfer below there is an unconventional and twisting vine pattern supported by the quatrefoil ornament above a ribbon-like design. This

pulpit is unique in the series in possessing a fine and elaborate stone canopy, placed above the entrance to the pulpit. This entrance is approached by a staircase in the wall and it stands west of the chancel arch on the north side. The rood stair starts from the back of the pulpit, and there is an opening above. (Pl. I.)

COMPTON BISHOP. This is again one of the Banwell family, even having a modern or restored panel continuing beyond the pulpit proper. For cornice it has again the Tudor cresting and then the pierced pattern above quatrefoils. The panes are divided into blind windows of two cinquefoil headed lights, but the space between is not filled, in this case, by the usual quatrefoil, but has instead a shield or other pattern. The only ornament below the pulpit on the chamfer is a naturalistic band of vine foliage. The slender octagonal pedestal is plain. It stands on the south side of the chancel arch and is approached by a stone stair with a modern wooden stair-rail. The top moulding has been cut with sections to simulate battlementing. It has four ancient and one new panel. (Pl. IV.)

HUTTON is very much like Banwell though it looks less repaired and has an irregularity which gives it a particular charm of its own. The panels have the usual cinquefoil-headed arches with a quatrefoil above and between them, but there is a starfish-like pattern in the spandrels. The cornice has the Tudor flower succeeded by the pierced pattern and the sunk quatrefoils, only four, instead of five to a panel. The vine trail on the chamfer is a continuous pattern with grapes, but there is an unusual adornment of leaves above the pedestal. It stands on the north side of the church just west of the vestry door. It is fixed to the wall and approached by a stair in the wall, which forms part of the stair to the rood loft. It has four and a half panels. (Pl. I.)

WICK ST. LAWRENCE is a handsome pulpit of the usual type with the usual ornamentation. The vine pattern is placed immediately below the panels, and is less stiff than that at Hutton. Again there is, on the chamfer, a course of sunk quatrefoils and then a plait, not deeply undercut. Directly above the panelled slender pedestal is a wide band of loose foliage of a design characteristic of the fifteenth century. It stands on the north side of the chancel arch. The modern

stone stair leading up to it starts in front of the lower door leading to the rood loft stair. (Pl. IV.)

KEWSTOKE. This pulpit resembles the Banwell series in some respects, though in others it is more like that at Worle. It is not elegant, and though octagonal in plan gives a rectangular impression. It has a thicker pediment than the last group, and the actual pulpit does not meet the pedestal with a chamfered line. It suggests a farmhouse version of a Chippendale chair. It has no moulding above the Tudor cresting cornice, which is followed by a pierced interlaced pattern and sunk quatrefoils, five to each panel. The panels are divided into two trefoil headed compartments. On the lower part of these are foliated and crocketed canopies. Each panel is divided into two by moulded perpendicular pillars, and the main panels are also divided by plain pillars, also crocketed at the top. Below the pulpit is a narrow band of vine trail and below it the base and pedestal are plain. The pulpit stands on the north side of the church below the first window to the west of the chancel arch. It has four and a half panels. (Pl. III.)

WORLE. This neighbouring pulpit is like Kewstoke in its general proportions. It also has only a narrow cornice moulding above its Tudor cresting. Below that it has a course of pateræ in the form of four-leaved flowers above the panels which are of the Banwell type with two cinquefoil-headed arches with a quatrefoil above and between them, and foliated spandrels. Pillars with crockets divide the main panels and there is a vine trail below it. It is supported on a short central pedestal obviously insufficient to take its weight, now strengthened by modern stone pillars and one wooden strut. This pulpit is on the south side of the church well to the west of the chancel arch. It is approached by stone steps starting from the chancel steps. It has four panels. (Pl. II.)

LOCKING is another pulpit with some resemblance to the Banwell group without their elegance. This is partly due to the cornice which is small and plain and does not extend far beyond the line of the main part of the pulpit. The vine scroll is directly below the cornice and is stiff and conventional in design and execution. Below is the quatrefoil band, above the panels with blind two light compartments with trefoil-headed arches and a quatrefoil head and foliated spandrels.

The panels are divided by crocketed pillars. There is no sculptured ornament below but a space painted with a scroll beneath each panel and a plain thick pedestal. The pulpit has its mouldings picked out in paint. It stands to the west of the chancel arch on the south side. It is approached by a stone stair beginning in front of the chancel steps.

CHEDDAR. This painted stone pulpit is one of the most splendid of the series belonging to the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. It was once an ambo to the screen and was then fixed high up on a pillar on the north side of the chancel arch. Beneath a wide cornice there is a broad cavetto ornamented with pateræ of an unusual character, as they take the form of a series of detached birds and beasts. Although the pulpit is octagonal it is not panelled. It is divided by a series of crocketed pillars into narrow arches surmounted by crocketed canopies. Beneath there is a band of pierced quatrefoils, then a cavetto containing a series of detached leaves, and on the chamfer are demi-angels holding shields. These surmount the pedestal, which is ornamented with flutings each with a trefoil head. The pulpit is attached to the north side of the first pillar of the nave arcade to the west of the chancel arch. It is on the south side of the church. It has new stone steps with an iron rail. The colours in which it is painted are a deep pink, green with gilding, and a faint blue in a few places. (Pl. II.)

PORTISHEAD is a little farther afield than most of the other pulpits, but a close enough relative to be included here. It is simpler than those already described. Below a well-marked cornice there is a narrow band of vine scroll pattern in rather low relief. Each of the octagonal sides is divided into two cinquefoil-headed arches with no further decoration. Beneath them is a band of ornament composed of a row of four-leaved flowers used as pateræ. The chamfer is moulded but not decorated. This pulpit has a chamfered silhouette and the series of fine mouldings on the chamfer are restrained but handsome. It stands free of the south wall. (Pl. III.)

NAILSEA. This pedestal pulpit is not related to the Banwell group but is a plain and pleasant example. The cornice has a series of mouldings and below them the panels are divided into two parts by trefoil-headed arches, again with a quatrefoil between them. The spandrels are plain. The panels are

divided by crocketed pillars. There are two shields on each panel. Two bear coats of arms. The chamfer is decorated by recessed openings and below it is a row of a modified form of Tudor cresting. The pedestal is slender and ornamented only with moulding. This pulpit stands against the north wall of the nave and is approached from the rood loft stair. (Pl. I.)

WESTBURY-SUB-MENDIP has a simple stone pulpit. Below the moulded cornice is a cavetto ornamented with four-leaved flowers or roses, three to each side of the pulpit. Each panel is divided into two compartments, headed by a trefoil-headed arch. There is no further ornament, but the deep cutting of the panels gives a satisfying effect to the whole. The pulpit is supported by modern masonry, but still retains an ancient corbel, in place of a pedestal. This is in the form of a bearded male head. It stands just west of the chancel arch on the north side of the church. It is approached by four new stone steps. It has four panels, that on the south side is new. (Pl. IV.)

MEARE. This is again of simple design. It has a good cornice moulding and below it a cavetto adorned with four-leaved flowers. The panels are divided into two blind windows with cinquefoil-headed arches with foliate ornament in the spandrels. Crocketed pillars divide the panels. This pulpit stands on a modern stone base. It is on the south side of the church fixed to the west side of the chancel arch between it and the eastmost respond of the south aisle. It has a short stair beginning from the chancel steps. (Pl. III.)

PRIDDY. This extraordinary stone pulpit has only two sides, each decorated by a blind window but of different designs. That facing west is more elaborate in its decoration than that facing north. The top of this pulpit is quite eight feet above the floor. It is approached by four steps, the lowest of which is about two feet six inches from the floor, so that to mount to it is not very easy. The pulpit is fixed to the east pier of the one-bay south chapel. The stair is on the west side of the chancel arch on the south side of the church. The pulpit is not used today, its place being taken by a modern reading desk on the north side made up of pieces of oak with Jacobean carving. (Pl. IV.)

LOXTON is the only pulpit in the district which has its main panels pierced. It has a wide cornice surmounting a band of

wide-spaced four-leaved flowers. The panels are divided by massive crocketed pillars, the tops of which extend to the cornice. The lower part of the four panels are divided into blind windows of two lights each, with quatrefoil heads. Each panel is surmounted by a handsome crocketed canopy. The pulpit is supported by a corbel representing a man in a curious attitude. It appears to be carved from a single stone. It stands on the north side of the church, to the west of the chancel arch, from which it is separated by a door into the north chapel, which is directly below the opening on to the original rood screen. The opening to the remaining rood stair is just west of the pulpit, which is approached independently by a modern stone stair with a wooden rail supported by iron stanchions. (Pl. II.)

SHEPTON MALLET. This is a magnificent pulpit. It is octagonal and has a battlemented cresting. Below this and supporting it are a series of corbels; then, after a simple moulding, comes a horizontal band of deeply undercut foliage of a fifteenth-century type. The sides of the pulpit are divided in an unusual way, as every other panel comes at the angle between the two adjoining sides. These panels are divided by pillars crocketed in their upper half, and are ornamented with cinquefoil-headed arches surmounted by crocketed canopies. Beneath the arches the panels are filled with designs of fruit and leaves issuing from vases or cornucopiæ, all of a distinctly Renaissance type. Below the pulpit is a band of quatrefoil openings continued as a support to the wooden panel which fills in the gap between the pulpit and the nearest pillar. There are plain mouldings on the chamfered support leading to a plain octagonal pedestal. The pulpit is on the north side of the church, attached to the thirteenth-century pier. (Pl. II.)

DINDER. This is the latest in the series, and belongs to the seventeenth century, when stone pulpits were rare, and oak was in fashion. It is octagonal and has a spreading cornice ornamented on the chamfer. Below is a narrow deeply cut band of foliage dividing egg-like forms. Then comes a wide band of scroll ornament and foliage of Renaissance type, then a further cornice apparently supported by small corbels, and then a plain band bearing the words written in a contracted style, 'Blessed are they that heare the word of God

M.D.K.B.B.L.T.' These letters are screwed into the corner. Below, the main panels are sunk and each adorned by two paterae, placed one above the other. These are in the form of roses and daisies, roses confined in a triangle, a single fleur-de-lis, and the date 1621. The pulpit is supported by a new stone base and is approached by four stone steps. It stands on the south side of the church attached to the west side of the chancel arch. It has four sides. (Pl. III.)

SAINT BENIGNUS, GLASTONBURY. This pedestal pulpit was drawn and described by Francis T. Dollman in 1849 when it was a simple form of the North Somerset type. Since then it has been so radically 'renovated' as the caretaker describes it, that it is difficult to believe that much of the original structure remains.

The church was restored by Abbot Beere, (1493-1524), and his initials remain in the church. This probably gives the date for the original erection of the pulpit. It still stands on the south side of the church, and adjoining the chancel arch. It is octagonal, with four complete and two half sides.

Proceedings, lxxii (1926), i, liv, and xlviii (1902), i, 27.

Dollman, *Ancient Pulpits*, plate 18.

APPENDIX

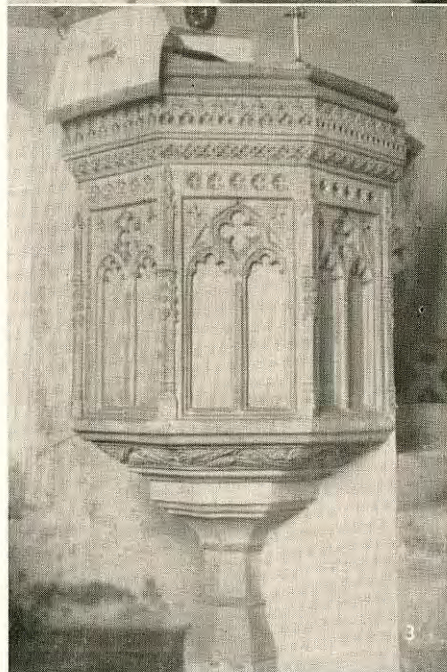
BY F. S. WALLIS, PH.D., F.G.S.

Through the courtesy of Mrs. D. P. Dobson, Litt.D., I was given the opportunity of examining the stone used in the construction of the pulpits which she has described in this paper.

During this investigation, and especially in the early stages, all possible sources were considered, but it soon became evident that for the area under consideration only the Doulting, Dundry and Bath stones were used.

The *Doulting* stone of Inferior Oolite age and quarried at Doulting, near Shepton Mallet, is a rich cream-coloured stone. It is a shelly limestone of even but rather coarse grain. The rock is oolitic and may be distinguished from Dundry stone by the looser texture, a more obvious shelly appearance and a richer cream colour.

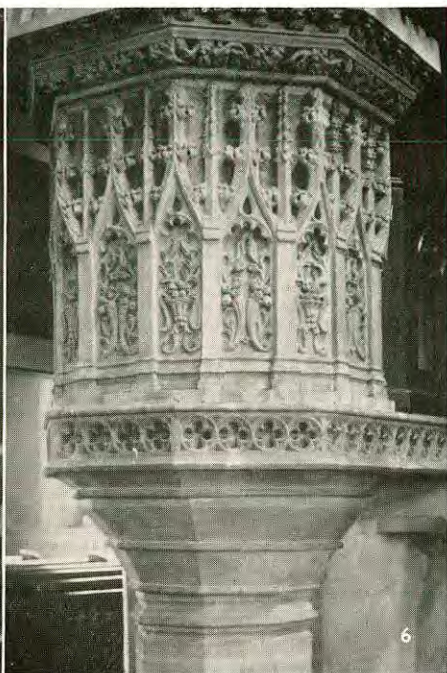
In the area now being dealt with it was the stone most



STONE PULPITS

- 1. Brockley
- 3. Bleadon

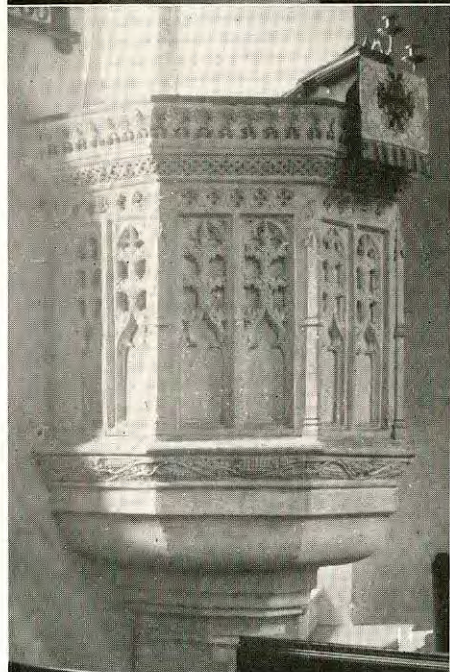
- 2. Nailsea
- 4. Hutton



STONE PULPITS

5. Cheddar
7. Loxton

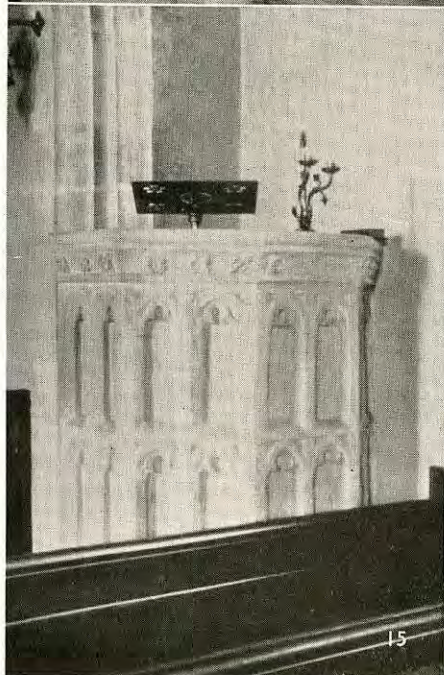
6. Shepton Mallet
8. Worle



STONE PULPITS

9. Portishead
11. Kewstoke

10. Meare
12. Dinder



STONE PULPITS

13. Wick St. Lawrence

15. Westbury-sub-Mendip

14. Compton Bishop

16. Priddy

favoured by the medieval masons, and this in spite of the fact that it is not so readily carved as the Bath stone. The following pulpits are made of Douling stone :

<i>Banwell.</i>	Additions and new steps are also made of Douling stone.
<i>Brockley.</i>	
<i>Cheddar.</i>	Heavily painted.
<i>Hutton.</i>	
<i>Kewstoke.</i>	Partially re-scraped and cracks filled in with cement.
<i>Loxton.</i>	Scanty relics of a brown-coloured paint gives a superficial appearance of iron staining.
<i>Meare.</i>	
<i>Priddy.</i>	
<i>Shepton Mallet.</i>	
<i>Westbury-sub-Mendip.</i>	Covered with a cement wash and one side re-built in Bath stone.
<i>Wick St. Lawrence.</i>	Pulpit steps of Ham Hill stone.
<i>Worle.</i>	

The *Bath stone* is a light cream in colour, uniformly oolitic and a slightly shelly limestone. It is of Great Oolite age and is extensively quarried and mined in the Bath and Corsham areas. This is the most obviously oolitic of all the local Jurassic rocks :

<i>Bleadon.</i>	Heavily painted with a greyish white paint.
<i>Compton Bishop.</i>	Painted but since scraped. Additional side and base of Douling stone.
<i>Glastonbury, St. Johns.</i>	(not ancient D.P.D.)
<i>Glastonbury, St. Benedicts.</i>	
<i>Locking.</i>	Painted and extensively renovated with plaster work.
<i>Portishead.</i>	Recently cleaned and scraped.

The *Dundry stone* is an oolitic shelly limestone of Inferior Oolite age. It is pale brown in colour, and less uniformly oolitic than the Douling and Bath stones.

The following pulpit should be included in this group :

Nailsea.

It would thus appear from the spasmodic geographical grouping of the pulpits made from these types of stone that there is no direct relationship between the stone used and the locality. Thus whilst at Glastonbury Bath stone was used, Doultong stone was used at Meare. Similarly whilst Bath stone was used at Compton Bishop, Doultong was favoured at Loxton.

It is possible that a comparative analysis of the stone used and the approximate date of construction would yield results that might indicate the area of activities of any particular group of masons.