

# FITTINGS, FURNITURE AND DECORATION IN SOMERSET CHURCHES IN THE LATE 18TH CENTURY: THE EVIDENCE IN EDMUND RACK'S SURVEY OF SOMERSET

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## INTRODUCTION

Edmund Rack's Survey of Somerset, which was compiled between 1781 and his death early in 1787, was a product of his collaboration with the Revd John Collinson in preparing the first parish-by-parish history of the historic (pre-1974) county, published in 1791 as *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset*. Whereas Collinson's role was principally that of historian, Rack's main task was to make a survey of each parish as it was at the time, including a description of the parish church. In the event, Collinson used the information in the Survey in a highly selective way in preparing the text of the *History*, leaving much of it unpublished.

The major part of Rack's MS of the Survey survives in the Bristol Record Office<sup>1</sup> (the Somerset Heritage Centre has a set of photocopies)<sup>2</sup> and has recently been transcribed for publication.<sup>3</sup> It covers most of the historic county, but another part of the MS, in private hands, has not been accessible to the writer. Taunton and Frome were covered by other contributors to the *History*, and there are gaps in Rack's MS which may be attributed to loss of pages or to Rack's failure to complete his work before his death. Nevertheless, the surviving MS in the BRO covers the great majority of Somerset parishes, almost 400 of which include descriptions of parish churches

and a few dependent chapels. These descriptions are sometimes brief or fragmentary, but the great majority are highly informative.

Some of the information which Rack compiled in the Survey was contributed by various individuals through correspondence or answers to questionnaires, but it is evident from remarks in his correspondence with Collinson (also in the BRO)<sup>4</sup> that he travelled through the county during the course of his survey, and the vividness of his descriptions of visible features such as parish churches, and the artistic and other value judgements which he often made on the contents of those churches, confirm that he was writing from first-hand experience. Rack's descriptions are a highly revealing source of information about church interiors in Somerset in the Georgian period before the widespread changes brought about by 19th-century 'restoration', which was sometimes drastic and was determined by a mixture of structural necessity and changes in liturgical fashion. These interiors contained not only Georgian features *per se*, but other features dating from the medieval period and the 16th and 17th centuries, many of which also disappeared subsequently.

Although Rack's descriptions of parish churches include a range of structural and architectural features (some of which he misidentified as 'Saxon'), this paper concentrates upon a range of



*Fig. 1. Brockley Church, 1829, by J.C. Buckler, including gallery in north aisle*

typical fixtures, furniture and painted decoration of the period. In order to give a balanced view of the contents of Rack's descriptions of Georgian church interiors, those fixtures etc which are also referred to by Collinson and/or still survive today have not been excluded from this paper. The quotations (including Rack's capitalization and sometimes idiosyncratic spelling) are taken from the edited transcription of the Survey; and the illustrations, which have been taken from the Society's collections and date from the first half of the 19th century before widespread restoration had taken place, have been included to provide examples of some of the kinds of features which Rack described.

#### GALLERIES

These are mentioned in almost 60% of the descriptions of churches. In the great majority of those cases Rack refers to them as singers' galleries, but in a few instances galleries are

mentioned which seem to have accommodated part of the congregation, presumably for reasons of space or as alternative accommodation for those who did not rent pews. In some of the remaining descriptions Rack explicitly states that there was no singers' gallery (at Bathampton, Bradley, Chilton Trinity, Closworth, Maperton and Weston Bampfylde, for example), but the situation elsewhere is uncertain.

The majority of the galleries were sited at the west or 'lower' end of the nave, but some were placed elsewhere, such as in the south aisle of South Cadbury church. At Freshford there was a gallery the whole length of the south aisle, presumably to accommodate part of the congregation, for there was also a separate gallery for the singers. At Wincanton and Yeovil there was a singers' gallery above another gallery which ran across the west end of the church; and at Wellington a gallery 'runs quite across the church' but 'the part over the nave is appropriated to the singers'. At Bridgwater there was a west gallery for the singers, and also a gallery 'half the length

of the south ayle' and galleries on either side of the organ over the chancel screen. There were galleries at Crewkerne and Chard, presumably for congregational use, but in each case there is no mention of one for singers.

A number of the galleries were supported on posts or pillars, the various designs including Tuscan pillars at East Coker, fluted Tuscan pillars at Ilminster, square fluted pillars at Bridgwater and Wellington, fluted columns at Pensford and round pillars at Shapwick. There were 'round pillars, very antique and curiously carved' at North Petherton, 'very curiously carved antique pillars of wood' at Spaxton, 'antique pillars full of carving' at Ilchester, and 'small' pillars painted black and white at Wookey. In several churches, however, galleries were sited above chancel screens, as at Stringston where 'An old open world Gothic screen, much decayd, separates the chancel from the nave. Over it was a rood loft, now used as a gallery for the singers, the front of which is embellishd with old carving and gilding'.

The Stringston gallery was conceivably an authentic medieval rood loft (although Rack's description may mean that a rood loft had been *replaced* by a gallery for the singers), and Rack also describes the singers' gallery at Bradford on Tone as 'formerly a rood loft', but some galleries over chancel screens were later, as at Chedzoy where above the screen 'was a rood loft, now a gallery for the singers, on the front of which is the date 1670'. At West Buckland Rack refers to a chancel screen over which was 'an old singing loft now dissused, a new one being erected at the bottom of the church', which may indicate a sequence of development which occurred elsewhere, as Rack himself thought might have happened at Norton Fitzwarren where there was a west gallery for the singers, but over the 'antient' chancel screen 'is a gallery now closed up, but which was probably used heretofore by the singers'. At Pilton there were two galleries for the singers: one over a richly carved open screen separating the east end of the north aisle from the nave and another at the lower end of the nave.

Gallery fronts are commonly described by Rack as being panelled or of panelled wainscot, but other designs included a rail and banisters (Cameley), a rail and 'flat' banisters (Chew Stoke), 'an open bullastrade front' (Witham Friary) and 'a row of waved banisters' at Stoke Lane alias Stoke St Michael. At Poyntington 'The singers' gallery is fronted with small pannels and above them a light

railing and banisters painted blue', and at Walton the singers' gallery was 'gaudy, with a rail and banisters in front'. Additional features on some gallery fronts included 'carved ornaments at top and bottom' of the panelled front at Batcombe and 'a large watch in the front pannel' at Fiddington, the latter presumably a clock face.

In addition to the many references to panelled wainscot, Rack frequently mentions deal and occasionally mahogany (at East Coker), oak (Ditcheat, Midsomer Norton and Wincanton) and a yew rail and banisters (Cameley). At Wookey, however, where the singers' gallery was 'old and much decayed', the front of it was 'reed and plaister', and at East Pennard the singers' gallery was 'plaisterd in front and but mean'.

Rack quite frequently describes gallery fronts as painted. Blue was the most favoured colour, but other colours or colour schemes included stone (as at Minehead, Broomfield, Chard and Dulverton), white (Winsford), blue with white panels (Withiel Florey), blue with black panels (Compton Dundon), 'mottle colour' (Clatworthy), imitation marble (Croscombe, Binegar and Babcary), 'mahogony colour' (Barwick, Norton St Philip and Wilton), 'wainscot colour and well veind' (Combe Hay), 'brick colour' (Norton Fitzwarren), cream (at Ansford, where the pews, pulpit, communion table and rails were similarly treated) and whitewash (Ashcott). In some cases, however, the colour of a painted gallery was not specified; and at Pilton the singers' gallery was described as 'gaudy'. In a few instances (Ubley, Wincanton and Weston near Bath, for example) Rack states explicitly that the gallery was not painted.

Many of the singers' galleries were decorated with representational paintings, often featuring King David (in reference to the Psalms). On the front of the gallery at Durleigh there were 'six pannels in which are painted David playing on his harp, Abraham offering up Isaac, and the four Evangelists' and at Thurloxton the gallery 'is fronted with panneld wainscot painted deep blue, with two paintings, one of David playing on his harp, the other David writing in a book and an angel standing by him holding a palm branch in her hand'. At Castle Cary 'The front of this gallery is handsomly painted and in the middle of it is a painting of David playing on his harp'; at Evercreech 'in the center pannel is a coarse painting of David playing on his harp'; and at Ashcott there was 'a coarse painting of David playing on his harp, and two verses from the

Psalms'. There was another 'coarse painting' of David and his harp at Shapwick; and at Ditchat 'in the center pannel David thrums it on his harp in all the colours of the rainbow'. Rack describes the gallery at Stocklinch Magdalen as 'fronted with wainscot painted blue, and in the center sits David thrumming his harp', although later cleaning of the painting has revealed that David is here writing sheet music with a quill pen, with his harp close at hand.<sup>5</sup>

Variations elsewhere included four 'emblematical' paintings at North Cadbury; eight emblematical paintings 'poorly executed' at Goathurst; 'emblematical figures in wretched painting' at West Cranmore (where the gallery had been given to the church by Carew Strode, Esq.); and 'two pretty good emblematical paintings' at South Cadbury. On the front of the singers' gallery (over the chancel screen) at Withycombe was the Decalogue (Ten Commandments); at Ston Easton 'the whole front is covered with texts'; and at Norton St Philip the front was divided into six panels, in each of which 'appears a winged cherub's head peeping over a fringed mantle which hides the rest of the figures. Two of these mantles or curtains are crimson, the other four blue, the drapery tolerably executed but the heads in the signpost style.'

Some gallery fronts included heraldic arms. In the central panel of the 'painted wainscot' front at Whitelackington were the arms of the Speke family and at Milton Clevedon there were 'three large pannels of wainscot with three coats of arms in their centers, two of which belong the Strangway family'. At Milborne Port, in a black frame on the front of the gallery, was inscribed 'This Gallery was erected by S<sup>r</sup> Thomas Travell Kn<sup>t</sup> and James Medlycott Esq. in the year 1712', and on each side were heraldic arms (described by Rack); and there were also arms at Brompton Regis which Rack describes. At Spaxton the singers' gallery 'has the royal arms carved in wood, painted and gilded', and Bishops Hull also had 'the royal arms cut finely in wood and gilt' in the centre of the panels on the front of the 'ancient' gallery, but in the other panels 'are painted the four Evangelists in their usual characters'.

There are very occasional references to the seating arrangements within these galleries. At Keinton Mandeville 'the singers' gallery has three rows of seats'; at Wellington there was 'At the bottom of the nave a very handsome gallery, six seats deep'; and at Nether Stowey 'The singers'

gallery is eight rows of seats deep . . . each seat being 18 ft long'.

Some galleries dated from the previous century, as at Pitminster where at the lower end of the nave and north aisle was a gallery with a front which was 'curiously carved and dated 1622'. At Ilchester a gallery, part of which was 'divided from the rest for the singers', had 'a date cut in the front, 1607', and at Halse the singers' gallery 'was erected in 1696, and the benefactors have eternized their names on the pannels as long as those pannels shall last'. The gallery over the chancel screen at Chedzoy, dated 1670, has been mentioned above. Galleries continued to be erected in the 18th century: the 1712 gallery at Milborne Port has been mentioned above; at Pensford the 'very handsome wainscot gallery' at the west end of the nave was 'erected by Mr John Silke senior and Mr Thomas Hanney senior, churchwardens, in the year 1727'; and there were 'new' singers' galleries at Holton, Kilve, Marksbury and Runnington.

Very occasionally Rack notes an alternative arrangement for accommodating the singers. At Westbury, 'Here is no singers' gallery. They sit in the chancel at a bench like a school boy's writing desk'; at Huish Champflower 'The singers' seats are on the floor in the middle of the north side of [the] north ayle, and fronted with panneld deal'; and at Doultling, 'At the south end of the transept the singers have three rows of seats raised above the pews'.

The singers in churches of this period should not be thought of as robed choirs (which at parish level were a product of 19th-century liturgical changes) and there is evidence from churchwardens' accounts that they were often accompanied by a small band of wind and string instruments. Rack himself makes few comments about the music performed in Somerset churches, perhaps because he had little or no opportunity to hear it during the course of making the Survey, and as he himself was a Quaker, not an Anglican. He notes that at East Coker 'the singers here have a fine band of instruments and very fine voices as any in the county', but he makes more frequent references to organs. There was 'a very pretty toned organ' above the chancel screen at Dulverton; at East Brent, 'Between the nave and chancel there is an organ loft with a small organ and a gallery for the singers'; there was a small organ in the singers' gallery at Castle Cary; and at Bishops Lydeard there was at the west end of the nave 'a very good organ loft with neat panneld

front, and in it is a large handsome organ built in 1751'. At Bridgwater there was a west gallery for the singers, but the chancel was separated from the nave and aisles by 'a curious open work Gothic screen, over which is an organ loft with a large fine toned organ in the center and galleries to right and left. In the front of this gallery are the royal arms and 12 other coats in the pannels of wainscot, belonging to the families who subscribed to the organ'; and at North Petherton, 'At the west end of the nave is a singers' gallery . . . in which is a handsome organ, on the top of which is a figure of Fame blowing her trumpet'. Organs had a permanent visible presence which instrumental bands did not, and were therefore more likely to be recorded in the Survey.

In the chancel of Yeovil church Rack noted redundant 'seats for singing men and desks for singing books' and in the vestry 'the remains of two sets of organs which were destroyed in the times of sacrilege and rebellion in the last century' – an interesting observation by an 18th-century Quaker on 17th-century religious radicalism. Similarly Rack notes that at Castle Cary 'The marks of Cromwel's [*sic*] fury are very evident in this church. He demolishd the old organ and destroyed many of its ornaments.'

#### LIGHTS

Over the singers' gallery at Poyntington Rack noted 'a small branch of six sockets for candles', presumably to assist the singers to read their music. Brass chandeliers, usually hanging in the centre of the nave (for the benefit of the congregation as a whole) are mentioned in a number of other descriptions, and Rack occasionally provides dates and names of donors: at Bruton, for instance he mentions a pair given by Catharine Drew in 1695 and Richard Wood in 1743, respectively. Most dated examples recorded by Rack were 18th century.

#### CHANCEL SCREENS

These are referred to in almost a third of Rack's descriptions of churches. Almost half of the screens are described as 'Gothic', and of the rest, approximately a half are described as 'old' or 'ancient', although these terms are not clearly defined and may not in all cases indicate a

medieval origin. A screen at Babcary is described as 'of the 16 century', and the description of the screen at Bicknoller as 'one of those curious old workd and gilded screens which formerly used to support the rood loft' is clearly a reference to a medieval rood screen. Even when such terms are not used, some of Rack's descriptions are strongly suggestive of a medieval origin, as at Timberscombe where there was 'A palm branchd open screen, with small clusterd pillars supporting a heavy inrichd cornice' and at Minehead where 'The nave and ayle are seperated from the chancel by 11 small arches formed by the branching of the little pillars between them. These arches, pillars and cornice above are richly ornamented with curious carving and gilding'. As at Stringston, there may have been a surviving rood loft at Fitzhead where Rack records a 'Fine Gothick screen of five arches with rich gilte corniste [cornice]; rood loft over', and at Angersleigh where the chancel was divided from the nave by 'an old openwork Gothic screen over which is a cornice richly ornamented with carving and gilding. Over it is a rood loft.'

In a number of instances these screens survive at the present time to confirm Rack's analysis, as at Dunster where 'The chancel is separated from the nave and ayles by a fine open work Gothic screen divided into 14 arches by the branching of small clusterd pillars between them. These support a cornice embellishd with a profusion of ornamental carving, foliage, gilding, etc'. Another surviving example is at Norton Fitzwarren, where the carvings on the cornice must have appealed particularly to Rack's interest in farming (as Secretary of the Bath Agriculture Society): 'This skreen has a very curious cove cornice richly carved, gilded and ornamented with a row of the most antique figures of men and other animals. Among the rest are three oxen single drawing a very antique plow. One man holds the plow in a stooping posture and another lies over the fore part of the beam. Behind is a man sowing; behind him an alligator tearing out the bowels of a man.'

A few screens were evidently post-medieval, as indicated by the designs. Thus at Huntspill 'The chancel is seperated from the nave by a handsome partition of Irish oak, with three arches and a raised mitrd pediment supported by fluted pilasters, the whole elegant and finished in the Ionic order with a modaillion cornice'. At Kingston St Mary there was 'An ancient screen of three arches' between nave and chancel. 'These arches are supported

by flat fluted pilasters with Ionic capitals, and above them is a handsome cornice surmounted by a mitred pediment in the center, on the top of which are three urns'. Both descriptions imply a classical rather than a Gothic design. Another example is Rack's detailed description of the Jacobean features on the screen at Croscombe: 'The nave is parted from the chancel by a very grand open work screen 18ft high and consisting of three stories. The uppermost story is superbly ornamented with carvings, gilding, painting etc and supported by five very elegant small fluted pillars of the Ionic order, which rest on the lower story. On the top is a rich cornice terminated with pyramids, scrolls and pinnacles curiously carved; and in the center is the royal arms. This cornice bears two coats of arms' (Fig. 2).



*Fig. 2. Croscombe Church, 1844, by W.W. Wheatley, including Jacobean chancel screen, pulpit and sounding board*

A number of the screens described by Rack were painted. Blue was once again the favoured colour (on screens at Bickenhall, Castle Cary, East Quantoxhead, Halse, Hill Farrance, Mark, Marston Magna, St Audries and West Camel), but other colours included 'light dove colour' on a

screen between the south aisle and nave at Creech St Michael, 'red, blue and white compartments, the ribs of the arch gilded' at Norton sub Hamdon, 'mahogany colour' at Odcombe, 'blue, red and yellow' at Bishops Lydeard (perhaps only the cornice), blue and red at Monksilver, and 'to represent porphory' at Mudford; and there were 'ironwork ornaments painted blue and gilded' above the screen at Wellow. In a few cases the screens are described as painted but the colour is not specified. As may be judged from other features described later in this paper, Georgian church interiors could be quite colourful.

The condition of the screens described by Rack is sometimes mentioned. The screen at Halse was 'in very good preservation', that at Puriton was 'neatly painted' and there was a 'handsome' screen between the nave and south aisle at Creech St Michael, but the screen at Kilton was 'fracturd', that at Wiveliscombe was 'much decayd', and there was 'An old mutilated Gothic screen' at Greinton, 'the remains of a shabby open screen' at Wookey and 'a very ordinary open work screen and folding doors fitter for a stable than a church' at Westbury. Such critical comments do not, however, amount to a general indictment of the state of the screens in Somerset churches at this time.

#### PEWS AND BENCHES

In the great majority of his descriptions of parish churches Rack refers to the seating arrangements. Pews are mentioned in almost every instance, and it is apparent that these are references to box pews, since Rack distinguishes between pews and benches. At Ashill, for example, there were 'eight pews . . . the rest of the seats old oak backd benches', at Bickenhall there were three pews, 'the rest of the seats good old oak back benches', and at Aller, where there were three pews, the rest of the seats were 'very good oak backd benches erected 1637'. Benches almost invariably included backs in their construction, but at Godney chapel, in Meare, 'The seats are plain forms'.

At Wookey, where there were 14 pews, the rest of the seats were 'of very good deal, all backd', and at Foxcote, where there were four pews, the rest of the seats were 'of deal with good backs', which indicates that the alternative seating to box pews was not necessarily old or of oak. Very occasionally Rack refers to benches with doors, as, for example, at North Petherton ('The rest



*Fig. 3. St Audries Church, West Quantoxhead, 1845, by S.G. Tovey, including ribbed wagon roof, rood screen, box pews and bench seats, pulpit with sounding board, reading desk and (possibly) clerk's desk*

of the seats are backd oak benches with doors'), Limington ('the rest of the seats ancient backd oak benches with doors opening into the middle alley') and Widcombe ('The rest of the seats are very good, being backd with panneld deal and having end-doors into them'). Such seats were evidently distinct from box pews which, as shown by surviving examples and by 19th-century illustrations and faculty plans, were often high-backed, square or rectangular, with seats facing or at right-angles to each other, although another factor in the distinction between pews and other seating may have been that pews were *private* seats.

At Priddy there were 'no pews, the seats being all old', at Westbury there were 'no pews, all the seats being very old backd oak benches', and there may also have been no pews at Angersleigh and Witham Friary where Rack only refers to benches. These instances were very exceptional, however. A substantial number of churches had a mixture

of pews and benches, but in the majority of the churches described by Rack the seating apparently consisted entirely of pews. This was explicitly the case at, for instance, Nettlecombe and Sampford Brett where in each case 'The whole church is neatly pewd', at Ditcheat where 'This church is well pewed throughout', at Brompton Regis where 'The whole church is pewd containing 60 pews' and at Yarlington, Doultling, Ston Easton, Wick Champflower, Pawlett, Elworthy and Wilton; but there were also many other churches where the absence of benches is implied, as for example at Bridgwater where there were 192 pews, Ilminster (65), Minehead (100), and Dunster (48), no benches being mentioned in these cases. The number of pews in some apparently bench-less churches was so small, however, that it seems likely that Rack merely omitted to mention other seating in these instances. For example, only one pew is recorded at both Great Elm and Stoke Pero and three at Bradley and Chiselborough. Rack may also have failed to mention other seating in some churches which had a larger number of pews than this, and some descriptions do not mention seating of any kind, which was undoubtedly an omission.

Carved bench-ends are another feature which Rack refers to, as at Broomfield where the benches had 'antique carving at the ends' and at Stogursey and Creech St Michael where in both cases there were 'old oak benches with carved ends next the alleys'. At South Brent Rack states that 'On the ends of the old beech benches next the middle passage are a variety of curious antique carvings which seem to have been intended as a satire on monkish superstition', and he goes on to describe these well-known satirical bench-ends in detail, including 'a fox hangd by geese . . . a monkey at prayers, with an owl perchd on a branch over his head . . . another monkey in an erect posture holding a halberd . . . a fox, erect, in canonicals holding a crossier with a mitre on his head . . . a young fox, chaind, with a bag of money in his right paw'. At Chedzoy Rack refers to 'old backd oak benches with the ends curiously carved, most in different devices', some of which he describes; and at Crowcombe 'are some of the most ancient carved oak seats in England. They were erected in 1534, and on the ends are a great many antique figures curiously carved, and some arms' (also described). Other examples of carved bench-ends recorded in the Survey were at Ilchester (where the ends had 'arms and grotesque carving'), Buckland St Mary, Charlton Mackrell, Combe Florey,

Creech St Michael, Hinton Blewett, Hillfarrance, Lydeard St Lawrence, Milverton, Northover, Stogursey, Trull and West Bagborough. At Halse, Rack refers to 'very good oak benches with carved backs'.

The (box) pews described by Rack varied considerably. At Stogursey, for example, there were 30 pews, 'mostly of panneld wainscot and deal, some large and good, others small and ordinary', and in the case of Creech St Michael, 'Of the pews there are scarcely two alike either in size, form or materials, being most made up of new and old stuff mixd so that they form a motley appearance'. Of the 38 pews in Wedmore church, 23 were 'of panneld deal newly erected. The rest are many of them old and some very ordinary', and of the 192 pews at Bridgwater, 'many . . . are large and good, but mostly of old panneld wainscot and some small and ordinary'. References to pews constructed of panelled wainscot or deal occur frequently, and there are occasional references to oak, as, for example, at Over Stowey where the ten pews were a mixture of 'pannell oak and deal', at Norton St Philip where 15 of the 48 pews were of deal, 'the rest of oak and very ordinary', and at Dunster where some of the 48 pews were 'of fine panneld oak'.

Pews also varied in terms of whether, and how, they were painted. Bathford, for example, had '14 pews mostly good and painted', at Stanton Prior there were 18 pews, 'all new painted', and at Saltford there were 20 pews, 'some deal and others painted'. The pews at Clutton were 'newly' painted and those at Norton Malreward were 'neatly' painted. Stone seems to have been the favoured colour and was recorded on pews at Milton Clevedon, Bathampton, Stoke St Mary, Nettlecombe, Batcombe and Sampford Brett, whilst at Brockley most of the pews were painted a light stone colour with brown mouldings. At Ansford the church was 'new pewd with 28 pews of panneld deal painted cream colour', and at Chew Magna all the 64 pews were painted 'wainscot colour, with mahogany colourd mouldings at the top'. The 24 'handsome' pews at Bathealton were 'painted like mahogany' and similarly at Barwick some of the pews were 'very good, painted mahogany colour'. Some of the pews at Huish Episcopi were 'pretty good and painted green', and at Combe Hay there were eight pews, 'all very neat, being newly painted wainscot colour and well veind'. Some benches were also painted: those (and the pews) at South Cadbury 'are newly

painted of a neat light stone colour with the tops staid like mahogony' and those at St Audries were 'good backd benches painted stone colour'.

In contrast to the painted pews, the 53 pews at Carhampton were 'mostly of panneld deal, not painted', at Cutcombe most of the 16 pews were of 'pannell wainscot but not painted', and at Minehead there were 100 pews, 'some large and good, mostly panneld deal or oak, not painted'. Other examples of unpainted pews were recorded at Luccombe, Exford, Wootton Courtney and Weston near Bath.

Some pews were lined. At Henstridge there were 30 pews, 'many of which are very good and some lind with green cloth' and at Wellington there were 69 pews, 'many of which are lined and most very good'. At Chard there were '20 good and about 50 ordinary pews, mostly old black beach, but some are painted, others of deal and lind' and in Milverton church there were 30 pews, 'some of which are very good, being panneld wainscot, lind and painted'.

The ages of pews also varied. At Misterton there were 16 pews, 'some new panneld deal and very good'; at Barton St David, 'Most of the seats are new'; and at Paulton there were '27 new pews very neatly painted'. At Ashbrittle there were 41 pews, 'all new and of panneld deal, not painted' and there were new pews at Ansford and Stratton on the Fosse; whilst at South Petherton there were 56 pews, 'some of which are new'; and of the 15 pews at Preston Plucknett, 'many . . . are large, handsome and almost new'. At Wanstrow there were '24 pews of panneld deal and oak, very neat and not many years old'; at Compton Martin, 'Here are 45 good pews, all of deal and not painted, being erected near 40 years ago'; but of the 78 pews at Midsomer Norton, 'about 30 . . . are good, the rest old and but indifferent'.

Pews were often privately owned or rented during this period, although Rack only mentions this system exceptionally: at Crewkerne there were 'about 100 pews, some few of which are of panneld deal and very good, but in general they are small and very ordinary. Every one has the name of the person to whom it belongs written upon it.' Rack did, however, refer to a number of outstanding individual pews, as at Stringston where 'In the ayle is a very good and handsome pew belonging to the St Albyn family', and at East Cranmore where 'In the south ayle is a large handsome pew belonging to the Miss Jones'. At North Curry one of the pews was 'very antique



and stately, with an elegant pavilion over it 10ft high. The sides are open work, forming small Gothic arches, above which is a very richly gilded and carved cornice. This pew belonged formerly to the Bullor family, now to Mr Collins of Hatch.' At Newton St Loe 'is a stately canopied pew belonging the Langton family'; one of four pews at Shapwick 'is very antique, being embellishd on the top with gilded urns and balls'; and of the four pews at Cothelstone 'two in the ayle are ancient and stately, having a handsome cornice standing on open arches on the top.' These two pews had presumably belonged to the Stawells. At Pylle 'The north ayle belongs Mr Portman, who has one good large pew in it', and at North Cadbury there was a large 'handsome' mahogany pew belonging to F. Newman, Esq. Unusually, Rack notes that the Gwyn pew at Combe Florey included 'a carpet, the kneeling pesses also coverd with carpeting, and the six cushions have very handsome needle workd covers, on each of which are the arms'.

Rack also recorded, in the chancel at Kingweston, 'one of the ancient chairs belonging formerly to the abbot. It is of oak, tolerably sound, very simple in its construction, and plain, except the back which is solid board, and has some curious carving'. Another unusual feature was at Bridgwater where 'In front of the organ loft are six pews inclosed with a very antique and curious open archd screen on which is a profusion of fine ancient carving. The spot thus inclosed is called the Mayor's Ayle and will hold the whole corporation'. This Civic Pew has been repositioned since Rack saw it.

The redundant seats and desks for singers in the chancel at Yeovil have been mentioned above, and similar features are mentioned at St Benedict's church in Glastonbury where 'In the chancel are benches and stalls or desks for chanters which is probable once sat here', and at North Cadbury where the chancel 'contains 14 ancient stalls or armd (elbowd) seats with turn up bottoms'. At Pylle the chancel 'is seated round', which may refer to seating around the communion table, possibly according to the Commonwealth arrangement as mentioned below.

The condition of the seating described by Rack varied considerably. At Queen Camel most of the 56 pews were 'very handsome', whereas at Treborough 'There is nothing in this church worth notice but five new deal pews – the rest of the pews are old and ordinary, and the floor all clay in them'. At Luxborough one of the pews in

the chancel was 'filld with lumber', and at Meare there were 40 pews, 'but many of them in the ayles are filld with dirt and lumber'. At Ilminster 'The number of pews is 65, most of them are panneld deal and very good' and the 16 pews at Downhead were 'very neat and good, being of panneld wainscot, natural colour and well boarded at bottom', but at Charlton Mackrell there were 'nine pews, several of which are much decayd', and at Doultling 'the boarded flooring, and wainscot of many of the pews is in a state of decay'. At Clatworthy the seating included 'old oak backd benches much worm eaten', and at Evercreech, where there were four pews, 'The rest of the seats are back[ed] and shut in, but many of them, in the north ayle especially, are in a state of decay and the boarded floor below them very much rotted and broken up'.

#### PULPITS

Pulpits are another of the standard features mentioned by Rack, and sounding boards and reading desks were frequently associated with them. The pulpit and reading desk, rather than the communion table, were the principal focus of attention during church services in this period.

The great majority of pulpits were constructed of wood, but with some diversity of type of wood and design. Pulpits are frequently described as being of panelled wainscot (eg at Buckland St Mary: 'The pulpit is very neat, being of fine panneld wainscot'), the panelling sometimes being further described as 'small' (eg at Enmore, Goathurst, Ilminster, Spaxton, Stogursey) or 'narrow' (Stocklinch Magdalen). The phrase 'old archd panneld wainscot' (Jacobean?) occurs in Exton and Halse. A few pulpits are described as being of oak, as at Blackford ('ancient, of old small panneld oak'), Culbone ('semicircular, of panneld oak'), Pitminster ('fine old oak neatly carved'), and East Cranmore ('The pews and pulpit are remarkably neat, being of very fine veind panneld Irish oak'). Deal is occasionally mentioned, as at Holton and Thorne Coffin where the pulpits are described as being of 'pannell deal'; and at Kilmington the pulpit, reading desk, communion table and rail were all 'of mahogany and remarkably neat'.

In some cases more elaborate treatment is referred to, such as the 'fine old carvd and archd wainscot' at North Petherton, and the pulpit

at Somerton is described as 'ancient but very good, and exhibits some very fine carving'. At Castle Cary the pulpit was 'old, much carvd'; at Kingston St Mary it was 'of fine panneld wainscot, embellishd with elegant festoons'; and at Lilstock it was 'small and ancient, with arms in one of the pannels'. The pulpit at Thurloxton 'is of old panneld wainscot with much carving. In the upper pannel are three figures of Faith, Hope and Charity with their emblems, in very antique style and painted red and blue'; and that at Long Sutton 'is an antique, very curious, having 12 niches for the 12 apostles with the usual Gothic ornaments carvd and gilded over them'. At Croscombe 'The pulpit is octagonal, panneld and very richly ornamented with ancient carving, gilding and painting; between the pannels are pilasters curiously carvd with Corinthian capitals. On the front of it is a date in gilt figures 1616'. At Hinton St George 'The pulpit is very antique but neat, being of small archd panneld wainscot with little pillars curiously carved between the arches' and at Otterhampton the pulpit is described as 'a half round, curiously carved and gilded'. In Cothelstone church 'The pulpit is of small panneld oak with carved and painted ornaments in each pannel', and the well-known late-medieval pulpit at Trull is described as 'half a pentagon, each side being a nich with Gothic ornaments and filld with a statue, the whole wood. Above and between these are 14 smaller statues carvd'.

A minority of pulpits were recorded as being of stone, as at Ashcott where the pulpit was 'ornamented with Gothic carvings', Baltonsborough ('stone panneld'), Dinder ('ornamented with ancient carving'), Ditchat ('ornamented with Gothic work'), Glastonbury St Benedict ('with old Gothic ornaments') and Greinton ('with carvd golloshes, very antique'). The 'golloshes' were presumably guilloche mouldings, with a braided pattern. Stone pulpits were also recorded at Meare ('small and ... full of long narrow Gothic arches'), West Cranmore ('of old stone, very low'), West Lydford ('ornamented with some grotesqe carvings'), Shapwick ('with small narrow Gothic arches in the pannels'), Wick Champflower ('curiously carvd so as to represent wood') and Westbury.

Many pulpits, whether of stone or wood, were described by Rack as 'old', 'antique' or 'ancient'. South Barrow church, for example, 'contains nothing remarkable, except an antique pulpit' and at Pilton 'the pulpit is very ancient, urn shaped at

the bottom, and richly embellishd with ornamental carving, gilding and painting', whilst at Ashill the pulpit was 'of old panneld wainscot finely carved' and that at Porlock was 'of old panneld oak'. Other examples were found at Bicknoller ('very ancient Gothic'), Crewkerne ('quite an antique, haveing small narrow pannels filled with Gothic ornaments, gilt, on a blue ground'), Chew Magna ('ancient, curiously carved'), Kingweston ('of stone and very ancient'), Broadway ('ancient and mean, but embellishd with some very antique carving') and Puckington ('very old and mean'). Some pulpits described in this way may have been medieval, but it is evident that Rack also regarded Jacobean pulpits as 'ancient', 'old' or 'antique', as at Tellisford ('The pulpit is very ancient, small and ordinary but has some curious antique carving, and a date cut in the wood 1608'), Middlezoy ('The pulpit is antique, being in small archd panels carvd . . . and dated 1606'), Othery ('Pulpit antique, dated 1616') and Hillfarrance ('The pulpit is small and old, small panneld, with Gothic [*sic*] carving and a date 1621'). In contrast to these earlier pulpits, only a few are described as 'new' (Bathealton, Holton and Walton) or 'modern' (Westonzoyland and Wheathill), and some are not defined in terms of age.

Rack's opinion of the quality and condition of pulpits varied considerably. The pulpit at East Lyng, for example, 'is very neat, being of finely carved wainscot', that at South Stoke 'is a very pretty one' and that at Nether Stowey 'is lofty and very handsome, being of very fine panneld wainscot', whilst the pulpit at Carhampton 'is of fine old wainscot, neatly carved and panneld' and at Ansford 'remarkably neat, having two cherubs' wings carved on the sides'. In contrast, the pulpit at North Wootton 'is of old panneld and carved oak, very ordinary' and that at Seaborough 'is old and ordinary, being of worm eaten panneld wainscot', whilst the pulpit at Sutton Mallet was 'wretchedly mean' and that at nearby Stawell 'very antique and tumbling to peices'. The overall picture painted by Rack in his descriptions of pulpits is not, however, one of general decay.

The location of a pulpit within its church is occasionally given. At Milborne Port 'The pulpit stands on the south side of that arch [of the central tower] which opens into the nave and is of exceeding fine panneld wainscot'. At both Odcombe and Barrington the pulpit and reading desk were located 'in the belfry' (ie in the space beneath the central tower), whilst at West

Buckland the pulpit was placed 'against the center pillar on the north side of the nave' and at Halse it was positioned under the south end of the cornice of the chancel screen.

Many of the pulpits were painted. Individual colours included blue (Bickenhall, Castle Cary, East Quantoxhead, Edington, Heathfield, Mudford and Skilgate), brown (Ashill, Broomfield, Chard, Charlton Mackrell, Huish Episcopi and Ilton), stone colour (Brockley, Burnham, Chiselborough, Lufton, Stoke St Mary, Wiveliscombe, Thurlbear and Timberscombe), light stone colour (Crech St Michael, High Ham and Wookey), white stone colour (Chewton Mendip), yellow stone colour (West Camel), mahogany colour (Barwick, Bathealton, Norton St Philip, Pawlett and Thorne Coffin), green (East Lyng), blue pearl colour (North and South Brewham), imitation marble (Bicknoller, Binegar and Stockland Bristol), olive (Kingsbury Episcopi), light olive (Preston Plucknett) and deep olive green (Chedzoy, Durston and Stogursey). At Combe Hay the pulpit, pews and gallery front were all 'newly painted wainscot colour and well veind'.

More elaborate colour schemes were recorded at, for example, Hardington Mandeville, where the pulpit was 'very gaudy, being of small archd pannels, carved and painted red, yellow and blue', Monksilver, where it was 'very old, full of carving and small pannels painted blue and red', and Seavington St Mary where the pulpit was 'a quarter round placed in a nich in the wall, the front four broad tub staves painted red and white with red oaker and whitewash'. Further examples were recorded at Chew Magna, where the colour scheme was a mixture of brown and white, Middlezoy (green and crimson), Shepton Beauchamp ('long pannels painted blue and the beads of them red') and Low Ham ('an azure ground richly flowerd and embroiderd with gilding'). A particularly elaborate scheme occurred at Chapel Allerton where there was 'an antique pulpit of wainscot with 12 pannels in which are painted the 12 apostles', and at Limington the pulpit was described as 'antique, being small panneld with ornamental paintings in each pannel'. In a few cases Rack failed to specify the colour of a painted pulpit, and at Poyntington and Wincanton the pulpits were described as unpainted.

Pulpit cushions and cloths are often referred to and described. Crimson and green were the most favoured colours. Brockley, for example, had a fringed crimson velvet cushion and cloth,

Chilcompton had a crimson cushion and cloth which were both fringed and tasselled, at Ilton there was a green velvet cushion and cloth 'fringed yellow', South Stoke had a green cushion and cloth 'laced and tasseled', Poyntington had a green cloth and cushion which was fringed and tasselled with silk, and at Doulting both pulpit and reading desk had green cloths and cushions, fringed and tasselled with yellow silk. Other colours included red, scarlet, blue, olive, purple, grey and, in one case, black (at West Buckland, which had a tasselled black velvet cushion). Very occasionally the colours had faded with age: at Farrington Gurney the pulpit had a cloth and cushion 'that once were crimson' and Northover had 'an old fringed cloth and cushion which appear once to have been blue, or green'.

#### SOUNDING BOARDS

Sounding boards are referred to on 34 occasions, and their absence noted on another twelve. Where he gives an indication of age, Rack usually regards them as old ('antique' at Shapwick, 'very antique' at Ilminster, 'small but very ancient' at Meare, for example), and in a few instances they carried a date: 1614 at Pitminster, 1618 at Puriton and 1634 at Blackford. At Walton, in contrast, 'the pulpit and sounding board are new and very neat'.

A number of the sounding boards are described as being of wainscot. At Goathurst, for example, both pulpit and sounding board were of 'small panneld wainscot curiously carved', they were of 'fine old panneld wainscot' at Yeovil and of 'fine old wainscot carved and panneld' at West Monkton, whilst at Crech St Michael the pulpit, sounding board and reading desk were 'of old wainscot full of small archd pannels and carved ornaments'. Very occasionally there is a reference to oak: at Charlinch both pulpit and sounding board were 'very handsome, being of fine panneld oak', and at Lullington both were 'of old panneld and carved oak, very ancient'.

A few of the sounding boards are described as painted, as, for instance, at Crech St Michael and Wookey where light stone colour was applied. North Cheriton had 'a square sounding board gaudily painted', and the 'heavy and gaudy sounding board' at Batcombe was presumably also painted. At Kingsbury Episcopi both the pulpit and sounding board were 'very curious and antique, being embellishd with excellent



*Fig. 4 Worle Church, 1829, by J.C. Buckler, including box pews, pulpit, pulpit cushion, sounding board, altar rail and ribbed wagon roof*

carving and neatly painted olive colour'; at Pilton the sounding board, like the pulpit, was 'richly embellishd with ornamental carving, gilding and painting'; whilst Monksilver, which had a 'very old' pulpit 'full of carving and small panels painted blue and red', had 'a sounding board the same'.

Some sounding boards were quite ornate. Cutcombe, for instance, had 'a large handsome sounding board on the top of which stands an angel blowing his trumpet', and at Wellington 'On the pyramid above the sounding board stands a Fame blowing her trumpet'. At Chew Magna the sounding board was (like the pulpit) 'curiously carved and painted brown and white' and its top was 'ornamented with pyramids, balls and coronets'. Wilton had a 'handsome sounding board with five gilded urns', and on the sounding board at East Pennard 'is a dove gilded on the centre, and four flaming urns at the angles'. Chilton Cantelo had an 'embattled' sounding board, whilst that at Croscombe is described as being in the same style as the pulpit, richly ornamented, and with

a 'madelion' (medallion or modillion?) cornice surmounted by heraldic arms.

#### READING DESKS

Reading desks are mentioned on 45 occasions, and one clerk's pew. Approximately half the desks were described as being of panelled wainscot, often further described as 'neat' (Nynehead, Wanstrow), 'very neat' (Milton Clevedon, Yarlinton), 'fine' (Over Stowey, Keinton Mandeville, Wellington, South Petherton), 'good' (Penselwood), 'very good . . . and neat' (Combe St Nicholas), 'small' (Brompton Ralph, Sutton Montis and Wiveliscombe, presumably in reference to the size of the panels), 'large' (Minehead) or 'plain' (Abbas Combe). In a few other instances the wood is described as 'pannell oak' (Doulting), 'old oak' (Shapwick) 'old panneld oak' (Broomfield), 'curious panneld oak' (Weston), and 'excellent panneld oak' (Bishops Hull); and at Kilmington the reading desk was 'of mahogany'.

The woodwork of some of the reading desks is described as carved, and there is occasional evidence of ornate treatment: at Bridgwater, for example, both pulpit and reading desk 'are very ancient and curiously carved in small Gothic archd work'; at Westonzoyland the reading desk was 'antique with a canopy over it'; and at Chedzoy 'the reading desk is a curious antique, in small archd pannels, with a canopy over it on four pillars, the whole curiously carved'.

Where Rack gives an indication of the age of the reading desk, this is usually 'old' and occasionally 'very old', 'ancient', 'very ancient' or 'antique'. In the chancel of Marston Magna church, for example, 'is a very antique oak reading desk with the following inscription on its front: Orate p[ro] anima D[omi]ni Joh[ann]is Rowswell vicarii' (evidently pre-Reformation); and at Yeovil Rack refers to 'a very antique brass reading desk, 6ft high', also bearing an inscription in Latin. In contrast, at Minehead the reading desk was 'new' and at Pawlett it was 'modern'.

In a few instances Rack refers to a painted finish: brown at Broomfield and Chard, stone colour at Burnham and Wiveliscombe, light stone colour at Creech St Michael, mahogany colour at Barwick and Wilton, and 'painted' (colour unspecified) at Dundry. In one instance (Wincanton) Rack states that the reading desk (like the pulpit, galleries and pews) was not painted.



*Fig. 5 Compton Martin Church, 1835 by J. Buckler, including box pews, ribbed chancel vault, pulpit and sounding board, reading desk, screen, communion table and rail, the latter possibly enclosing the table*

Several reading desks were described as equipped with a cushion and/or a cloth. At Crewkerne, for instance, both pulpit and reading desk had velvet cushions and cloths, fringed and tasselled; at Henstridge they had blue cloths and cushions, fringed and tasselled; and at Bishops Hull they had 'red velvet cushions, tasseld, and cloths fringed yellow'. At Doulling the pulpit and desk had green cloths and cushions, fringed and tasselled with yellow silk, and at Batcombe both had a crimson velvet cloth, fringed, but only the pulpit had a cushion.

On a few occasions Rack identifies the location of the reading desk: at Barrington and Odcombe the pulpit and reading desk were both placed in the 'belfry' (beneath the central tower); at Wiveliscombe the reading desk 'is placed in the middle passage and nearly blocks it up'; and at Angersleigh the reading desk and the clerk's 'pew' were both in the chancel.

The Angersleigh description seems to be the only specific reference to a clerk's desk, although

parish clerks undoubtedly played a significant part in the life of parish churches during this period. Rack himself, in one of his letters to Collinson, mentioned that his expenses during a visit to a group of parishes, for the purposes of his Survey, had included payments (for an unstated reason) to several parish clerks, and his description of Compton Martin church in the Survey (fig. 5) includes an epitaph to a blind parish clerk whose duties had for many years included beating time for the music during services:

'Under the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bell lieth the remains of John Badman who was clerk of this Parish 46 years 33 of which he lost the blessed sence of Light He died the 25 of March 1778 aged 81.

Near this place forty years I meet  
 Beating of Time with Hand and feet  
 But all my strength and all my pain  
 Of Time the victory near could gain  
 For Time hath congkord by the hand of Death  
 And lay me sleeping there within the Earth

Though now we hope since Time hath him  
 outrun  
 That He will live with Christ when Time is  
 done.'

#### COMMUNION TABLES

These are frequently described, but sometimes only mentioned incidentally (as at Puckington: 'Over the communion table is a black mural monument . . .'). When not referred to at all, they would undoubtedly have been present. In this period parishioners took communion on only a very few occasions each year, which may explain the neglect of some of the communion tables described by Rack – although these were not in fact typical.

Where the materials of which the tables were constructed are referred to, the most common was oak, but also occasionally beech, mahogany, deal or elm or a combination of woods, as, for example, at Ashill where the communion table was 'mahogany on a very old oak frame curiously carved', and at Timberscombe where it consisted of beech on an oak frame. Very unusually, at Widcombe and Lyncombe the communion table 'is stone, in the form of an altar': this was possibly a surviving medieval altar, although altars had been replaced by communion tables at the Reformation and did not return to fashion until the 19th century under the influence of Anglo-Catholicism. Exceptionally Norton St Philip had a table of grey marble, and that at Broomfield (material not specified) was 'altar shaped'.

In some instances Rack provides information about elaboration in design. At Minehead, for example, the oak table had a 'frame full of antique carving', and at Chew Magna the table 'is a curious antique, being richly carved and legs swelling out in the middle, 3ft round'. In a few instances Rack supplies dimensions, as, for example, at Combe St Nicholas where the oak table was 6ft long by 2½ft, and at Huish Episcopi where it was 2ins thick, 7ft long, 2ft 9ins wide, 3ft high. At Brockley the table 'is a very curious one, being one intire piece of elm 4ft by 4ft 6ins and 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>ins thick'.

Where Rack gives an indication of age, communion tables are frequently described as 'old' or 'very old', or made of 'old oak' or occasionally old beech; and a date, 1634, is given for the table at Kingweston. Rack describes some communion tables as 'ordinary' or 'very ordinary',

and the condition of some others was evidently poor. Those at Upton and Podimore Milton were 'fit only for the fire', that at Withypool was 'worth about 4d', and that at Northover was 'very old and dislocated, being in value 2d'. The table at Sandford Orcas was 'old and wormeaten', and that at Seaborough was 'very ancient and almost devoured by worms'. More frequently, however, Rack is complimentary, using such terms as 'neat', 'good', 'pretty good' or 'very good'. At Stoke St Mary, for example, the table was 'a good one, being of oak, 6ft long and near three wide'.

Rack frequently refers to the covering of communion tables. The table at Pawlett, for instance, was covered with silk and that at Whitelackington with 'old silk brocaded with silver tissue'. The table at East Lyng was covered with a blue cloth and that at Dunster had a flowered velvet cloth, fringed. There was a crimson cloth, laced and fringed with white at Luxborough; an 'olive coloured shagg cloth' at Withycombe; 'old crimson hair shag' at Lamyat; 'a blue hair shagg cloth, fringed' at Brushford; a brown cloth at Westbury; and a purple cloth fringed with gold at Queen Camel. Chilcompton had a scarlet plush cloth, fringed with orange coloured silk; Farrington Gurney a salmon-coloured cloth, fringed; High Littleton a 'good green cloth fringed'; and Midsomer Norton a 'neat sea green cloth, laced'. Poyntington had 'a green sagathy, fringed with yellow silk'; West Pennard 'an antique cloth of velvet ground, embroidered and tissue'; and Meare a 'handsome carpet cloth'.

Rack was occasionally critical of the condition of such cloths: at Stowey, for example, the communion table had 'the remains of a green cloth which the moths have nearly demolishd', West Cranmore had 'an old blue cloth almost devoured by moths', Stanton Prior had a green cloth 'almod [sic] distroyd by moths', and at Bawdrip there was a green cloth, fringed yellow, which was 'wormeaten'. Some of the cloths were evidently old, and at Combe St Nicholas the table was 'coverd with a green cloth with a yellow silk fringe dated 1703' – although this date may refer to the table itself.

Unusually, the communion table at Milborne Port had a green cloth 'and over that a green oyl cloth', the table at Kilmersdon was 'coverd with a very ancient leather covering richly flower[ed] with embossd work in cloth and gold', and that at Wincanton had 'a leather cover, blue with a Glory in the middle and adornd with gilding'. Very

occasionally the table is described as painted or stained: that at Binegar was 'old and painted brick colour', that at Brompton Regis was painted blue, the table at Woolavington was of stained oak, and that at Wookey was 'of staid oak with a very old carved frame'.

#### COMMUNION RAILS

Rack also refers frequently to the rails associated with communion tables. The table at Thurlbear was 'fronted with a rail and bannisters', and in a number of other churches the communion table is described as having a rail and banisters 'before it' (Bishops Hull, Hillfarrance, Kilmington, Lydeard St Lawrence, Shapwick, Staplegrove, Tolland, Westbury, Wilton) or 'in front' (Combe Florey, Ilminster, Nynehead, Pawlett, Halse, West Bagborough, Wellington). There are several other instances, however, in which the communion table was evidently enclosed on three sides, and conceivably on all four sides – an arrangement surviving from the Commonwealth in which the table was placed centrally in the chancel. The table at Enmore was 'quite surrounded with a rail and bannisters', and the term 'surrounded' is also used with regard to East Cranmore, Huish Episcopi, North Petherton, Doultling, Downhead and Brushford. Similarly the table at Wedmore was 'incompassd with a neat rail and bannisters', Skilgate was 'incompassd' with an oak rail and banisters, and at Chard, 'round it [the table] is a neat railing'. By far the most common term used, however, is 'inclosed'. This is more ambiguous but may suggest enclosure on three, or even four, sides. This arrangement is more certain at East Coker where the communion table was 'inclosed with a neat circular rail and small bannisters' and at Montacute where 'a circular mahogany railing incloses the communion table'.

Where indicated (a minority of cases), the materials of which rails and banisters were made included mahogany (Barwick, for example, had 'an elegant mahogany railing') and oak (as at Sampford Brett, which had a 'substantial oak rail and bannisters'). Some of the banisters are described as turned: Merriott, for example, had 'neat turnd oak bannisters' and Huntspill had 'a low rail and banisters of oak, neatly turned'. Pilton, however, is described as having a 'handsome railing and wreathd bannisters', Huish Champflower had 'twisted' banisters, St

Decuman's had a 'carved' rail and banisters and Penselwood had 'flat' banisters.

In a few instances the communion rail is described as painted. At Spaxton, for example, 'A blue rail and bannisters inclose the communion table', and blue was also used at Castle Cary, East and West Coker, Sutton Mallet and St Benedict's at Glastonbury. At Pawlett, Preston Plucknett and Staplegrove the rails were mahogany colour, whilst that at Chard was painted white, that at Penselwood was stone colour, and at Ansford the table, rails and some other features were painted 'cream colour'. The colour of the 'painted railing' at Norton Malreward, however, was not defined.

A few communion rails were quite ornate or inscribed. At Chelwood there was 'a rail and banister, ornamented on the top with six gilt urns' and at Stanton Prior there was 'A neat bulastrade railing (on which stand four ancient gilt urns)'. At Bridgwater the communion table, which was 'antique and curiously carved', was enclosed with 'an elegant iron Chinese railing embelishd with gilded stars, and topped [*sic*] with mahogany'. Along the top of the rail at Kilmersdon was inscribed in gold letters 'Thus was the thankfulness of the well-dispos'd expressed for staving the Great Plague 1625'; and at Wookey there was a rail and banisters 'on which the date is carvd 1635'. The latter would have been a 'Laudian' rail (resulting from Archbishop Laud's campaign to encourage seemliness and reverence for the table), as presumably were many others.

The condition of communion rails varied. At Priddy there was 'a low old decayd railing', and at Charlton Adam, although the communion table was 'good', the railing was 'rotten and coming down'. South Petherton, however, had 'an excellent oak railing and turnd bannisters'.

Rack occasionally provides further detail of the settings of communion tables and rails. In the chancel at South Petherton there were '14 railed kneeling matted seats for the communicants', at Podimore Milton 'the chancel is benchd round', at Sutton Montis 'The chancel, within the rails, is wainscoted 4ft high', and at Ditcheat 'The chancel is wainscoted 4ft high and seated with benches round. A wainscot partition, topd desk fashion for books, incloses these benches'. Rack also mentions, at East Brent, 'a very large silver tankard for the communion, the gift of the Revd Mr Markwick about 40 years since'.

Rack also mentions a 'canopy' over the communion table on a number of occasions,

these evidently being ornamental ceilings, some perhaps medieval. At Skilgate, for example, the roof was open to the tiles 'except a canopy over the communion table'; at Butleigh the roof was likewise open to the tiles 'except for a ceiling canopy over the communion table'; over the table at Mudford there was 'a canopy of painted clouds in the sky'; and over that at Charlinch 'in the ceiling is an azure canopy with golden stars and four cherubs holding armorial shields at their breasts'.

### ALTAR PIECES

These are frequently referred to, but varied in design, although in many cases there are recurring themes such as the Creed, Commandments and Lord's Prayer and representations of Moses and Aaron. Thus at Cucklington, for instance, 'In the altar piece are the Decalogue, Creed and Lord's Prayer', at Pensford 'a handsome wainscot altar piece is placed over the communion table, containing the Commandments, Creed and Lord's Prayer', at Minehead 'The altar piece contains the Decalogue, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, with two miserable daubings of Moses and Aaron', and at West Pennard 'Over it [the communion table] are the Decalogue, the Creed and Lord's Prayer with two paintings of Moses and Aaron, the faces of which have good expression'. Rack was often very free with his aesthetic opinions, as has been seen above.

Inscriptions or paintings were very occasionally applied directly to the east wall of the chancel, as at Kingston Seymour where 'The altar piece is [a] wretched daubing on the wall of Moses and Aaron with the two tables of the Commandments', at Baltonsborough where 'Over the communion table are the Creed and Lord's Prayer and Decalogue written on the wall', and at Pilton where 'over it [the communion table] on four tables painted on the wall are the Creed, the Decalogue and Lord's Prayer, with two horrid daubings of Moses and Aaron'. At Henstridge, however, 'Over the communion table are the Creed, Lord's Prayer and Decalogue on wainscot frames'; at Brislington 'To right and left of the communion table in two large frames near 12ft high and elegantly gilded are written the Commandments'; and at Kingweston 'Over the [communion] table in two large frames are ordinary paintings of Moses and Aaron holding the Decalogue'. Such frames were evidently the

simplest in a gradation of complexity in the design of altar pieces. A slightly more elaborate feature is described at, for instance, Ston Easton ('an altar piece of wainscot with a neat moulding and mitred pediment, containing the Commandments') and at Publow where 'Over the communion table are placed, written on four black frames with gilt mouldings, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and the Commandments. Over them is a neat cornice terminated by urns with flaming hearts, gilt.'

An example of a more ornate altar piece is described at Bishops Lydeard where there was 'a grand altar piece of crimson velvet with a rich gilt border and center ornament. On each side is a large round Ionic column, 14ft high, with vine branches twining round them. These support a rich cornice and pediment, on the top of which are three large urns embellished with cherubs festoons etc, the whole 22ft high.' The design of this and many other altar pieces was clearly influenced by classical or baroque forms. At Wellington, for example, 'The altar piece (over which stand Moses and Aaron in wood) is of fine Irish oak, with a neat moulding, and a raised mitred pediment in the center, 14ft high, supported by two fluted columns of the Ionic order. On the top are three elegant urns begirt with festoons of flowers.' Similarly at Bathealton 'The altar piece is elegantly beautiful, consisting of an enriched cornice and capital supported by four fluted round Corinthian pillars, the edges and tops of the foliage in the capitals gilt. Between these are three arched panels. In the center one a most elegant oval glory is wrought on crimson velvet in gold and silver tissue by Mrs Webber. The side panels contain texts of scripture.' A particularly elaborate design is described at Yeovil where 'In the east end of the chancel is a very elegant and superb altar piece. In a rich arched portico, divided into square compartments with cherubs and roses, gilt, is a transparent Glory incircled with clouds. In a recess underneath is written in large gold letters the 23 verse of Corinthians, chapter 11. On each side, to support the portico, are four handsome fluted pillars with Corinthian capitals and a rich entablature. These eight pillars stand on two square pedestals 4ft high, 4 deep and 4½ ft wide. The pillars are 3ft round at the base and 9 high to the bottom of the capitals. On the top two flaming urns.'

Other interesting designs included 'a neat altar piece' at Compton Dando 'of excellent wainscot with Ionic fluted columns supporting a pediment, on the top of which stand two flaming hearts and



between them a gilt pelican sitting on her nest and peircing her breast with her beak', and 'a handsome altar peice' at Broomfield 'in which is a globe in the clouds with serpents twining around it, and on the top a lamb bearing the cross and ensign. Above is a handsome mitred pediment and on each side are festoons, fruit, foliage etc.'

In addition to the numerous paintings of Moses and Aaron, there were other painted subjects. At Goathurst 'is an altar peice containing two old paintings, in gilded frames, of the Lord's Supper and the raising of the cross after our Saviour was nailed upon it. These peices are not well executed.' At Huntspill 'a very elegant altar peice of Irish oak' included, in the centre, 'a tolerable painting of St Peter causing the lame man to walk, Acts 3 ch. v. 6, 7', and at South Cadbury another 'very elegant altar peice' included 'a very good painting (3ft 6ins by 4ft 6ins) of Our Saviour on the cross.'

Several paintings were the work of Richard Phelps (1710–85) of Dunster. At Dunster itself 'The altar peice is a good painting of the crucifixion, 24ft by 12, by Mr Phelps of this town. The outlines of the principal figures are bold, the attitudes striking, though not in all respects quite natural; and there is great expression in some of the countenances. Underneath this peice is a painting of a panneld wainscot well executed.' Further afield, at Dulverton, 'The chancel is wainscoted 6ft high within the rails, and has a handsome altar peice 3ft by 5 in a gilt frame painted by Mr Phelps of Dunster. The subject is the Lord's Supper and tolerably executed. To right and left are four tablets containing the Decalogue, the Creed and Lord's Prayer.' At Stogursey there was 'a handsome altar peice of panneld wainscot terminated by a cornice and seven wax tapers' to which Phelps also contributed. 'This altar peice is divided into three compartments by fluted pilasters of the Ionic order. The center one contains the Commandments in letters of gold on two large tables with an azure ground. On the right are two smaller frames, the one containg [*sic*] the Apostles' Creed, the other a painting of the wise men presenting gifts to the child Jesus, by Mr Phelps of Dunster. On the left are two other frames, on one the Lord's Prayer, the other is a painting of the Last Supper by Mr Phelps. Over this altar peice is a superb screen highly embellishd with carving, painting and gilding, with rich Gothic ornaments at its base.'

At Bridgwater 'The altar peice is an admirable painting of Raphael's [*sic*]. The subject is Our Saviour just taken from the cross. The painting

is 8ft wide and 13 high, in a very elegant gilded and carved frame surrounded by very elegant emblematical figures in plaister of Paris on a dove colourd and blue ground. On each side this painting are very handsome clusterd pillars in stucco with Corinthian capitals terminated by two superb flaming urn[s] girt with gilded foliage.' Rack then describes the painting in some detail: 'Our Saviour lies with his head in the lap of the beloved disciple John who is finely represented in the inexpressible anguish of silent greif, covering his face with his hands. On the left hand the Virgin Mary lies in a fainting fit with her head in the lap of the wife of Cephas, who hangs over her with the mingled expression of greif, fear and tender affection. In the back ground is Mary Magdalen standing with her right hand thrown back, her left raised equal with her head and her eyes exalted. The attitude is fine and strictly proper. Her countenance expresses every suitable passion, and tells us she is breathing forth an address to God on the occasion.'

A few altar pieces are described as being of, or including, plasterwork, as at Stoke Trister where 'The altar peice is of plaister work, neat, with a handsome cornice and mitred pediment supported by two semicircular pilasters of the Tuscan order. The center contain the Decalogue.' At Bruton 'The altar peice is a very stately one, 21ft by 22, divided into three compartments. In the center one, two semi-columns support a superb mitred pediment of the Corinthian order. The right and left compartments are enrichd with foliage finely executed in stucco, over which is a rich cornice supported by two flat plain pilasters with Corinthian capitals. In the center is a circular tablet on which are the letter[s?] IHS surrounded by a glory. Underneath is a covered urn of burning incense and to right and left cornucopias filled with the usual emblems of plenty.' At Barwick Rack describes 'a handsome altar peice of white stucco. Under a mitrd pediment, on which are three urns, is an elegant festoon, which falling on each side, incloses an Agnus Dei standing on a burning globe and holding a cross, the lower end of which is grasped by the jaws of a serpent at the bottom.'

Rack occasionally identifies the donor of an altar piece. At Bridgwater the altar piece 'was given by the Hon. Ann Paulet, Member for this borough'; and at Wincanton the altar piece 'is a very handsome one, though unfinishd, and given by Nathaniel Ireson, architect, of this town. The

center is a blank tablet, over which is a neat cornice and mitered pediment supported by two mock marble columns of the Ionic order 3½ ft round at the base and 9½ ft high.' At Timberscombe the altar piece 'was given by Richard Elsworth of Bickhams, Esq., who died August 5, 1714, aged 22 years, and lies buried here'; and at Wilton Rack describes 'a rich and elegant altar peice' presented by Benjamin, later Sir Benjamin, Hammet, MP for Taunton: 'On each side are two fluted Corinthian pilasters, elegantly gilded, with entablature and a mitered medallion pediment on which are three elegant fluted urns, flaming. The middle part is a gild frame of scarlet cloth about 7ft square, in the center of which is a very fine painting of Our Saviour blessing the bread and wine. This painting is glazed and in a gilded frame 20ft by 15ft.'

#### TEXTS AND PAINTED DECORATION ON WALLS

In addition to the texts and painted features associated with altar pieces, such features are also referred to elsewhere in some of the churches described by Rack. Some examples are Compton Dundon where 'The walls of this church are plentifully besprinkld with texts of Scripture'; Writhlington where 'The walls of this church abounds [*sic*] with texts of Scripture in oval painted frames surrounded with coarse foliage'; Norton St Philip where 'The walls are decorated with many texts of Scripture in painted circular frames surrounded by gaudy foliage of every colour under heaven'; and Shapwick where the walls were 'piously decorated with the Decalogue, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and many texts of Scripture in coarse oval paintings, with two miserable daubings of Moses and Aaron'. At Ubley, however, 'There is a hatchment bearing the royal arms, but no texts of Scripture on the walls', and in a few other churches the walls are merely described as whitewashed. Very unusually, at Montacute 'The north isle is painted black'. This was a Phelips chapel.

Although texts were a characteristic feature of church interiors in the post-Reformation period, a particularly striking set of wall paintings is described by Rack at Wedmore where 'The whole wall above [the north arcade] contains the most remarkable historical events of Our Saviour's life in eight paintings very indifferently executed, one excepted. In the opposite wall over [the south

arcade] are eight other historical paintings of Scripture subjects. Over the arch which divides the nave from the bellfry [ie the bottom stage of the central tower] is a large painting of the crucifixion, but indifferently executed.' The dates of these paintings are not indicated.

In a number of churches the pillars of nave arcades were whitewashed or coloured. At Carhampton, Cutcombe and several other churches the pillars were whitewashed, and at Holwell they were whitewashed but the capitals, in the form of cherubs' wings, were painted yellow. At Dunster the pillars were painted to represent 'porphory' (porphyry) and in several other churches to represent marble, including 'Sienna marble' at Castle Cary and 'black and white marble' at Chewton Mendip, whilst at Crowcombe they were 'painted marble colour and the capitals gilt'. The pillars at East Pennard were painted 'stone colour' and those at Wiveliscombe and Lydeard St Lawrence 'sand colour', whilst at Selworthy and North Petherton they were painted yellow and at Batcombe 'a yellowish stone colour'. Exceptionally, the arches as well as the pillars of the nave arcades were painted at Wilton (to resemble marble) and at Ditcheat (stone colour); whilst at Wilton the chancel arch, and at Stogursey the side arches of the crossing, were painted, in both cases to represent porphyry.

#### PAINTED DECORATION ON ROOFS

In almost 90% of his descriptions of church interiors Rack refers to the appearance of the roofs. Almost without exception he estimates the heights of the roofs and distinguishes between those which were 'ceiled' (plastered on the underside) and those with exposed tiles or 'leads'. At Holford, for example, where the chancel and nave were 'of one pace' (which seems to have meant of equal height), 'the latter [was] arched and ceild, the former open to the tyles, 17ft high'.

Rack's descriptions of church roofs include the terms 'chevron' (referring to the inverted V shape formed by the rafters), 'sloping' and 'flat' (the latter presumably in reference to a flat ceiling or a slightly sloping aisle roof), but in many cases the roofs are described as arched or coved. The latter terms evidently refer to wagon roofs, which in many cases had projecting ribs and also carved bosses at the intersections and sometimes ornate cornices: at Broomfield, for instance, the nave

and aisle roofs were 'both archd and ceiled, the ceiling divided into square compartments by the projecting ribs of the arches, which are ornamented with roses and cherubs holding armorial shields at the intersections and along the bottom'. These decorative features were often painted. For the ribs, the most frequent colour was blue, and other colours included brown, yellow and, more rarely, red, salmon, olive, stone or lead colour. Bosses and other features might be painted or gilded, and on the plaster panels of the chancel roof at Selworthy were painted 'the sun, moon and stars in an azure sky interspersed with light clouds'. At Puckington the chancel roof, which was arched and ceiled (but apparently without ribs), 'the ceiling [was] painted with cherubs blowing trumpets and texts expressive of praise'. At Orchard Portman the nave roof, which was 'coved and ceild' but apparently not ribbed, was 'embellishd with a patchwork sky containing a sun, stars and planets, cherubs and other ornaments', and the ceiling of the south aisle, which belonged to the Portmans, was 'a sky partly clouded, with stars in the intervals and the arms painted in the center'.

Rack very occasionally refers to plaster decoration, as at Mells where the nave roof was 'most elegantly ornamented with stucco and plaisterer's work in a style extremely beautiful'.

Canopies (ornamental ceillures) over communion tables have been mentioned above, but they occasionally occurred elsewhere: at West Camel 'In the nave roof there is a canopy, painted, gilded and carved, over the entrance to the chancel' (possibly in association with a rood in the medieval period) and at Croscombe 'That part of it [the nave roof] next the chancel is painted, a blue sky sprinkld with golden stars'.

#### GLAZING

In his descriptions of almost 30 churches Rack mentions painted glass. The references are sometimes quite brief (at Chedzoy, for example, where 'In several of the windows of the transept are small remains of painted glass'), but occasionally Rack provides more detail, as, for instance, at Meare: 'The east window of the north ayle is of very fine ancient painted glass, in which are several historical groups of very fine figures, but much obscured by dirt. The principal are the administration of baptism, the sacrament and extreme unction. There is some painted glass

in several other windows, but much defaced by time.' Much of this glass seems to have been early in date, as is sometimes indicated by the use of the terms 'old' or 'ancient', and sometimes implied by the subject-matter of the painting or by the decayed or fragmentary state of the glass. Rack was clearly aware of the effects of religious iconoclasm in the past, as at East Brent where there was 'a great deal of old painted glass which is much injurd by time and the republican fury of the last century', and at Crowcombe where 'The font . . . and the painted glass in the windows bear evident marks of the hot intolerant zeal of the fanatics of the last century'. As a man of the Enlightenment, Rack was unsympathetic towards zealotry.

In more than 70 of his church descriptions Rack mentions windows of crown glass (high quality glazing produced by cutting pieces from a large glass disc). This was quite frequently 'wired without', presumably for protection. Much, or all, of this glass had probably been inserted during the Georgian period, and it seems to have been unpainted, which must have made the church interiors better lit than was later the case after the widespread introduction of Victorian stained glass.

#### TYMPANA

Although Rack does not use the term tympanum (which in the context of this paper refers to the infill of the upper part of a chancel arch), this feature is mentioned in a number of his descriptions, although it is now a great rarity in Somerset. At Durleigh, for instance, 'The upper part of the arch between the nave and chancel is boarded up, and on the west side is the Decalogue supported by rude paintings of Moses and Aaron, some cherubs, urns and the royal arms'; and at Norton sub Hamdon, 'Over it [the chancel screen] are the remains of a rood loft, and on the upper part of the great arch (which is filled up) is an old decayed painting of the Resurrection'. Again, at Kingsbury Episcopi, 'Above this screen [the chancel screen] the arch is filld up with a handsome painting of the royal arms with St Peter and St Paul in distemper'; and above the screen at Wiveliscombe 'the upper part of the arch which divides the nave from the chancel is walled up . . . Over the top of the skreen which parts the nave from the chancel are the Creed, Decalogue, Lord's Prayer, Moses and Aaron, and royal arms.'



*Fig. 6 Kewstoke Church, 1829, by J.C. Buckler, including pews and benches, pulpit, pulpit cushion, sounding board, reading desk and (possibly) clerk's desk. The outstanding feature is the tympanum, which fills the upper part of the chancel arch*

At East Pennard 'The upper part of the arch between the chancel and body of the church is filled up with a wall 10ft deep from the roof and has several pendant ornaments at the bottom. On the side next the chancel is a miserable representation in bas relief, of Abraham offering his son Isaac. On the side next the nave, in the center are the royal arms. Above them is Justice with her insignia. On the north side Adam and Eve, and the serpent creeping down the tree of knowledge, with an apple in his mouth. On the south side stands a horrid figure intended for Moses with the Decalogue open before him.'

Other examples of tympana included Over Stowey ('The upper part of the [chancel] arch is walled up'); Long Sutton ('The upper part of the arch is boarded up and has the royal arms, Decalogue etc upon it'); Westbury ('From the top of [the chancel screen] it's boarded up to the chancel roof which is 16ft high'); and Nettlecombe where 'The upper part of the arch which admits from the nave to the chancel is filled up with a

painting of the two tables of the Commandments and of Moses and Aaron, the royal arms etc by Mr Phelps, junior. On the side next the chancel is a painting of the Ascension by Richard Phelps, senior, 1739.' At Old Cleeve Rack refers to a 'large' chancel arch, 'the upper part of which is boarded and on the nave side are the Commandments and royal arms'; whilst at Withypool, 'Between the nave and chancel a partition comes down from the roof to within 7ft of the floor'; and above the chancel screen at Huish Champflower 'the upper part of the arch is filled up with the Decalogue and royal arms.'

In several other churches Rack refers to texts and/or paintings above the chancel screen which may have completely filled the chancel arch, although this is not certain. At Wootton Courtney, for instance, there were 'the Decalogue and two coarse paintings of Moses and Aaron', and at Bishops Lydeard there were 'two bad figures of Moses and Aaron, the Commandments, Creed, etc, with the royal arms, and another escutcheon'.

Other examples include Litton, where 'At the entrance of the chancel and above the Gothic railing are two fine old full length portraits of Moses and Aaron in their sacerdotal vestments, and the Commandments, Creed and Lord's Prayer in pannels between them', and also Brushford, Doulling and Buckland St Mary.

Interestingly, at North Stoke 'The chancel is a distinct room, being divided from the nave by a wall in which is a door and two windows'. Also very unusual was the tympanum in the *tower* arch at Meare: 'The whole upper part of the great arch that divides the nave from the belfry is filld up with an ancient emblematical painting, in the top of which is a cross triumphant in the clouds surrounded by the celestial choir sounding instruments of music. In the lower part is Peter with the keys, Moses with the two tables and rod, Aaron in his vestments, David playing on his harp, Hope with her anchor, Justice with the sword, with several other figures. In the center is a cherub holding open the New Testament, and at the bottom are some gorgonic figures in wrath and anguish.'

## FONTS

Rack frequently refers to these as 'old' or 'antique', as, for example, at Corfe where 'At the entrance of the belfry is a very antique stone font, round, which is of Saxon [*sic*] architecture', and at Ruishton where Rack mentions 'a very antique Gothic font lind with lead and supported by five Gothic pillars'. At Wellington, however, 'Under the singers' gallery is a curious new font of white marble in the form of a bason, with a handsome mahogany cover on the top of which is an acorn, gilt. This font stands on a slender pedestal of black, white and grey marble, with curious brass supporters of scrol work fixd in the base.'

The shape of fonts is often described as 'octangular', as at Merriott ('an octangular stone font, plated on the top with brass'), but some were round, such as that at Thurlbear ('a very ancient round font cut out of one solid stone, perfectly plain'), and a number were 'bushel shaped', as, for example, at Oake ('a large stone font in the form of a bushel, placed on a clumsey pedestal') and Tolland ('an ancient bushel shaped font on a round pillar and square pedestal'). Several were bucket shaped, as at Halse ('an antique font shaped like a bucket on a round pedestal'), Goathill ('a

stone font in the shape of a hoopd bucket') and Lullington ('very large, the top being 3ft diameter. Its form is that of a bucket and it appears to be very ancient.'). A few were basin shaped, as at Kilmington ('a bason shaped stone font, on a small neat pillar pedestal') and Bathampton ('A neat stone font, bason shaped on a stone pedestal'); and at Brompton Ralph there was 'An old cup shapd font'.

In a few instances Rack describes the font as painted or whitewashed, as at Compton Dundon (painted yellow), Williton (red and yellow), Monksilver ('marble colour, with a Gothick cover in the form of an extinguisher knobbd and painted blue'), Downhead and Lullington (whitewashed). The font at Ashill was on a stone pedestal painted blue.

Rack occasionally describes font covers. At Bathampton, for instance, the font had 'a flat mahogany cover' and at Alford it had 'a very singular cover, being an open work cone with Gothic ornaments carvd and gilded at the top'. The font at Meare had 'a dome shapd wood cover painted blue' and that at Podimore Milton had 'an extinguisher shapd cover' (presumably a tall cone). At Evercreech 'is a large old font of stone with a handsome urn shaped wood cover on the top of which is a gilded dove', and at East Pennard 'at the lower end of the north ayle is a large antique stone font lind with lead, and has a sceleton cover'.

Rack seldom describes the mouldings in detail, but in the case of Ashill the font was 'ornamented with arms, roses and foliage', at Queen Camel there was 'a curious old stone font with rich carving, imagery and arms', and at Montacute the pulpit and font are described as 'very antique, and embellishd with Gothic carving'. In the case of Crowcombe, Rack, as mentioned above, makes clear his dislike of religious fanaticism: 'The font is a curious remain of antiquity, and still retains some of the figures originally carved upon it; but this and the painted glass in the windows bear evident marks of the hot intolerant zeal of the fanatics of the last century, who under the pretence of distroying idolatry, with Gothic barbarity scarcely permitted any species of religious decency to escape their sacriligeous hands'.

## MONUMENTS AND MEMORIALS

These were another common feature of the churches described by Rack, and include standing



*Fig. 7 Culbone Church, ?1840s, by S.G. Tovey, including high box pews, benches, pulpit, reading desk and ribbed wagon roof. Inscribed panels almost conceal the arch above the chancel screen*

monuments, mural monuments and ledger stones in the floor, but only a small sample can be given here.

Rack's descriptions sometimes provide only the most basic information, especially in the case of inscriptions on ledger stones in church floors, as for example at Pitcombe: 'Here are no monuments. In the floor are five stones inscribed to the Hall and the King families'. He is much more informative about mural and standing monuments, providing transcriptions of inscriptions and detailed descriptions of the structures.

Some of the monuments were medieval. At Chilthorne Domer, for instance, 'In a niche under the north wall lies the effegy of a man in armour, with his shield, military belt and sword; on[e] leg broken off. This is said to be one Lord Dormer, a great warrior who formerly lived here and gave name to the parish'. In similar vein, at Limington, 'Under the arch which divides the ayle from the

nave is a large tomb on which are the effegies in stone of a man with a military belt and sword and a woman by his side. And in a Gothic niche under the north window is the effegy of a Knight Templar with his shield, military belt etc. At his feet lie the effegy of a lady. All these effegies are much mutilated and there are no arms or inscriptions remaining on the tombs.' Another example is at Porlock where 'In the chancel, on a large tomb under a grand archd canopy supported by four stone columns, lie the effigies of a Knight Templar and his lady. He is in complete armour with a military belt and sword, the handle of which has no guard. She in a close bodice with a loose robe over it and a hornd miterd head dress. At his feet is a lion and another under his head, at her feet some other beast, probably a boar, but much mutilated. The pillow on which her head rests is supported by two cherubs. No arms or inscription remains'. This must be the Harington monument, now under an arch of the nave arcade and described by Pevsner as 'not in its original position'. It postdates the dissolution of the Knights Templar, but Rack sometimes assumes that an effigy of a man in armour can be identified with that order.

Some of the monuments dated from the early post-medieval period, as, for example, at Creech St Michael where 'Near the east end of the north ayle are the remains of a once large and elegant mural monument under an arch in the wall. The tomb, part of the cornice above, and two of the small fluted Corinthian pillars that supported it still remain, and also an inscription as follows' (details of Robert Cuff, d. 1595, also heraldic arms). Renaissance influences had clearly replaced Gothic design in monuments such as this.

An example from the early 17th century is the Wadham monument at Ilminster, which Rack describes in some detail: 'In the north part of the transept is an ancient tomb erected to the memory of Nicholas and Dorothy Wadham, formerly of the neighbourhood and who were the founders of Wadham Colledge in Oxford. This tomb is built partly of marble and partly of stone found in the neighbourhood. On the upper surface are their effigies in brass. From the mouth of Nicholas proceeds a label having this divine sentence in the ancient church text: 'Death is unto me advantage'. From the lips of Dorothy is another, saying 'I will not dye, but lyve and declare the worke of the Lord'. At their feet are the following inscriptions in the same text' (followed by details of the

deceased who died in 1609 and 1618 respectively). Other detailed descriptions include the Popham monument at Wellington and the Kingsmill monument at Bridgwater.

Monuments from the second half of the 17th century recorded by Rack include that at Nynehead to Edward Clarke of Chipley and his wife Elizabeth, née Lottisham: 'At the south-east corner of the south aisle is a grand mural monument of stone, 5ft by 12ft, with an arch pediment profusely embellished with carving, gilding, arms, etc. On the base are the effigies of a man and woman kneeling on a red cushion, with a reading stand and two books open before them. The man is in black with a long flowing black cloak, the woman in a black gown the tail of which is tucked behind and tied to her waste – the sleeves are large, short and tied close round her arm above the elbow with short ruffles below. She has a black hood tied close under her chin.' Another example is at North Petherton, to Master William Catford who died in 1655: 'In the east end of the south aisle is antique mural monument of marble, having a detached round pillar of the Ionic order on each side the tablet. On the top is the figure of a hand reaching down from the clouds into a beautiful garden of flowers.'

At St Audries is an example of the incidental historical information which inscriptions sometimes provided in addition to the strictly genealogical information: here Rack transcribes a Latin inscription recording that the chancel was built by Alexander Harrison, gent, c. 1583, and repaired by his great-great-grandson, Ames Harrison, c. 1687, and that they and some later members of the family were buried in the chancel. (St Audries' church was totally rebuilt in the 19th century.)

Many monuments and memorials were relatively recent when Rack saw them, as for example, at Bathford: 'On the same wall [in the chancel] is an elegant mural monument of black, white and grey marble 6½ ft by 3½, the lower part of which represents the front of a tomb, on which sits a weeping cupid, wiping his eyes, with an urn on his right hand and emblems of mortality on his left. Above this, and supported by a neat cornice, is a white truncated cone on a background of black marble veined with yellow, on which is this inscription' (to Martha Maria Phillips who died in 1759). Weston church, also near Bath, had many monuments which were evidently attributable to the attraction of the city as a spa and fashionable

resort. According to Rack, 'This church is full of monuments, having been the burial place of many gentry and others who died at Bath'. Interestingly Rack recorded 'a very handsome tomb inclosed with a Chinese railing and terminated by an elegant urn 12ft high', with an inscription to Thomas Warr Atwood, 'an active and useful member of the corporation of Bath who having undertaken to superintend the public buildings then erecting unfortunately for himself, his friends and the public lost his life by the sudden falling of a decayed floor' on 15 November 1775, aged 42. This tomb was probably in the churchyard at Bathampton rather than in the church, however. Also of wider interest was the inscription on a mural monument in East Chinnock church to William Salisbury, who died on 17 June, 1705, aged 70 and bequeathed to the parish a large silver gilt cup for the use of the altar, £5 a year to the poor and 10s to the minister to preach a sermon on 18 June, to be paid out of his estate in the forest of Roach (Neroche).

There was evidently concern that graves and monuments might be interfered with. At Croscombe, on a black stone in the south aisle there was an inscription to John George, d. 28 February 1722, who gave £5 to the poor of the parish to be paid 'so long as his tombstone remain unmoved'.

#### BENEFACTIONS

These were typically recorded on inscribed boards. These occur less frequently in Rack's descriptions of church interiors than most of the other features listed above, but are recorded by him, in the form of a full transcription, in a number of churches widely distributed in the county. At Charlinch, for instance, Rack noted the following: 'Florence Baber relict of Edward Baber Esq late of Regilbury in the Parish of Chew Magna and Daughter of Roger Bowin Esq of Cothelney [Gothelney] in this Parish of Charlinch did by her last Will and Testament bearing the date April 3 1713 give unto the Parish of Charlinch one hundred Pounds for ever the interest whereof to be employd in binding out poor children apprentices to some honest calling at the Discretion of the Minister Churchwardens and Inhabitants'.

Education and relief of the 'Second Poor' (those who were not in receipt of regular poor relief from the parish overseers) were the themes

of an inscription over the south door of Lovington church: 'Mr Jn<sup>o</sup> Whitehead who died May the 24 1715 gave a ground called Brandiers, lying at Fodington in the Parish of Babcary for the schooling of poor children For ever. Mr James Clarke gave a House for a School House and to be connected with the Ground given by Mr Whitehead. Tho<sup>s</sup> Wallis gave twelve shillings to be paid to the Second Poor to be paid to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Poor [repetition by Rack] Labouring Men on Christmas day for ever; and tied a Ground called Hewish for the Payment of the Same.'

The second poor were also the object of a benefaction at Nunney: 'James Singer of this Parish Gent. gave 100£ the Interest whereof to be distributed by the minister churchwardens and overseers of the poor, one half on Easter Monday, and the other the 26 of Dec for ever to such honest and industrious middle poor as do not receive alms of the parish.' In such cases the donor presumably wished to incentivise the 'industrious' poor and to avoid subsidising the payments made out of the rates to paupers who were already receiving parish relief.

The benefactors of the poor listed 'in a small frame' at Brislington included not only a member of the gentry (Sir William Cann), but two yeomen, one of whom (Thomas Jones) funded an annual distribution to six poor 'Howes Keepers' (housekeepers, presumably in the sense of householders), and also a Bristol plumber (John Newman) who funded distributions of bread 'to those poor that frequent divine service' in Brislington church. At Pensford, three benefactors made provision for the poor who were not already receiving relief, but two of them (William Sage and Thomas Maggs) also funded sermons on Palm Sunday and St Thomas' Day respectively; and at Lamyat it was recorded on a frame against the north wall that 'M<sup>rs</sup> Ann Pitney gave to the use of the comm<sup>n</sup> Table here one silver Patten AD 1740' and that 'The Rev<sup>d</sup> Trethewy Tooker gave to ditto one large silver Flaggon AD 1746'.

#### POSTSCRIPT

Many of the fixtures and fittings described by Rack can still be identified in Somerset churches, including, for example, the carved bench-ends at Broomfield, Crowcombe and elsewhere, although in instances such as Trull and Stogursey early bench-ends have been attached to later seating

created during church restoration. Box pews have survived less well, but in the remarkable unrestored nave at Cameley the pews (and west gallery) mentioned by Rack are still to be seen. Many of the pulpits and fonts seen by Rack have survived, but tympana have been particularly vulnerable. Examples of the limited number of surviving west galleries may be seen at Selworthy and Stocklinch Magdalen, and although at Combe St Nicholas the gallery has been removed, the painting of King David has been attached to the wall of the north aisle.

St Michael's church in Minehead may be taken as an instructive example of the mixed effects of 19th-century restoration (in this case by Piers St Aubyn in 1886). Many of the altar pieces described elsewhere by Rack have disappeared, but the 'miserable daubings' of Moses and Aaron together with the Decalogue etc which together formed an altar piece behind the communion table in St Michael's have been relegated to the west end of the north aisle, and the table itself, 'full of antique carving', has been supplanted by an altar in the chancel, but is now to be found at the east end of the aisle. The chancel screen has survived, but not the gallery above it; the west gallery (containing an organ), which Rack also mentioned, has likewise been removed, as have the numerous pews; the wagon roof which Rack recorded in the nave has been replaced by a design which is uncharacteristic of medieval Somerset churches; and the alabaster statue of Queen Anne, which Rack also described as standing in the church, now stands under a stone canopy in Wellington Square in the town centre.

Rack's Survey is clearly of great significance in providing a detailed description of the interiors of the great majority of parish churches of a single county and diocese at a particular point in time before the sometimes drastic changes which occurred in the 19th century: it is a major source for forming a picture of Georgian church interiors in Somerset and for assessing what has survived and what has been lost since the 1780s. Indeed, in the extent and vividness of its written detail this source may be unique for its period within the country.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> BRO, MSS 32835, boxes 32b and 32c.
- <sup>2</sup> SHC, A/AQP 2 – 38.



- <sup>3</sup> McDermott, M., and Berry, S. (eds), 2011. *Edmund Rack's Survey of Somerset*, SANHS, Taunton.
- <sup>4</sup> BRO, MSS 32835, box 32a. SHC, A/AQP 39.
- <sup>5</sup> McDermott, M., 1996. 'The restoration of Stocklinch Magdalen church', *SANH* 139, 135–47, esp pl. 3 on p. 144.

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