

SOME SURVIVING PAINTINGS OF KING DAVID AND OTHER FIGURES FORMERLY ATTACHED TO 18TH-CENTURY SINGING GALLERIES IN SOMERSET CHURCHES

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INTRODUCTION

Edmund Rack's Survey of Somerset in the 1780s¹ includes descriptions of almost 400 parish churches. Just under 60% of these descriptions mention galleries, the great majority of which are referred to as singers' galleries. According to Rack, the latter were usually located at the west end of the nave and a number were ornamented on the front with a painting of the biblical King David (in reference to his talents as a musician and to the Psalms which he is credited with writing). Tate and Brady's metrical version of the Psalms was a staple of the 'west gallery music' (also referred to as 'Georgian psalmody') performed in these galleries. Some churches were equipped with organs, but there is evidence, especially in churchwardens' accounts, that in the Georgian period the singers in Somerset churches were often accompanied by a band which included wind and string instruments. Contemporary illustrations of west gallery music (albeit not specifically related to Somerset) include J. Wright's satirical *Country Church Interior* (1790) and T. Webster's genre painting *The Village Choir* (c.1847).² Both show singers and musicians performing together in the gallery, dressed in everyday clothing.

Such galleries formed part of a characteristic arrangement in the pre-Victorian period in which the congregation was seated in box pews (sometimes with seats facing or at right-angles to each other) or, for poorer members, on benches or in galleries, so that a significant part of the congregation did not sit facing east. The emphasis during services was on the minister preaching from the pulpit or conducting the service (Matins or Evensong) from the reading desk. Communion was only taken on a handful of occasions each year and was a commemorative act associated with a communion table rather than an

altar. The minister would be assisted by the parish clerk who would have his own desk or pew and whose duties included leading the responses and beating time for the music performed by the singers and church band.

The common arrangement of church interiors at that time is well exemplified in Somerset by the churches at Cameley and Sutton Mallet (both in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust). Cameley church has surviving box pews and early benches, a pulpit dated 1637 with a tester (sounding-board) above, a west gallery dated 1711, and a south gallery dated 1819 and inscribed 'Erected for the Free Use of the Inhabitants'. The body of Sutton Mallet church was entirely rebuilt in 1827 and retains fittings of that date including box pews in the front half of the nave, benches at the back, a three-decker arrangement of pulpit, reading desk and clerk's desk, and a west gallery; and there is a polygonal eastern apse with insufficient space for elaborate ritual or a choir. Other surviving west galleries in Somerset include those at Holcombe, Emborough and Selworthy.

Many galleries were removed during 19th-century church 'restoration' as west gallery music went out of fashion, especially after the publication of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* in 1861, and the High Church movement (including the Cambridge Camden Society which was highly critical of galleries in general) placed renewed emphasis on the east end of the church. In this process the post-Reformation communion table was replaced by an altar, communion was taken by the parishioners more frequently, and music was increasingly performed by robed choirs in the chancel accompanied by an organ. Moreover, reseating schemes, replacing box pews with a more uniform pattern of east-facing open seats, increased the seating capacity, including the number of 'free'

seats, in many churches and made accommodation in galleries (which could provide congregational seating as well as space for singers and musicians) less necessary. Another factor may have been the preference by Victorian church restorers for neo-Gothic architectural forms, as promoted by A.W. Pugin and others, over the classical forms which seem to have been common features of galleries.

In Stocklinch Magdalen church there is a west gallery complete with a painting of King David on the front,³ but several churches in the south-west of the county contain paintings which seem to have survived from galleries which have been demolished. These paintings and the galleries and music with which they were formerly associated are the subject of this paper.

NORTH CURRY

In the 1780s, according to Rack, 'At the west end of the nave is a neat gallery for the singers, supported by four small Tuscan pillars'.⁴ When a faculty was granted in 1880 for a restoration scheme by the architect John Oldrid Scott,⁵ the intention was, *inter alia*, 'To take down and remove . . . the west gallery and the staircase thereto'. Scott's plan of the unrestored church shows that access to the gallery was by means of a stairway which was entered from outside the church through the west door of the nave (which was partially blocked with inserted masonry or brickwork to leave a relatively narrow opening) and that the gallery had a wide front which was canted at each end and supported on four posts or

pillars. According to the Revd Albion Kirke (vicar of North Curry 1928–31) the gallery was taken down in 1881 but was 'still remembered by several elderly people of the parish' and had been 'built, it is said, partly out of the materials of the rood loft'.⁶ If the remains of a rood loft had actually been incorporated into the gallery, these would have contrasted with the classical (Tuscan) pillars which Rack recorded.

Although the North Curry gallery has been removed, there survives in the church an unsigned oil painting on canvas measuring 63 x 27 ins (160 x 69 cms) and only recently provided with a wooden frame, of King David playing his harp, flanked by two flying angels sounding trumpets (Figs 1 & 2). Bearded, he wears a brown knee-length garment with long sleeves, with a long blue robe or cloak, edged or lined with ermine, over his shoulders. He



Fig. 1 Painting of King David in North Curry church before restoration (photo: Philip Hickman)



Fig. 2 Painting of King David in North Curry church after restoration (photo: Philip Hickman)

kneels on a red cushion, with golden tassels, on a chequer-pattern floor of black and white marble squares, and his crown is placed on the floor in front of him. To each side of him is a row of three receding classical columns. The tops of those on the right are hidden by a hanging green drape, and those on the left rise to the gold-coloured egg-and-tongue border of the painting. In the absence of capitals or an entablature it is not possible to determine whether these columns were meant to reflect the Tuscan pillars which Rack described as supporting the gallery.

The painting is unusually elongated and was presumably intended to fit within a particular feature, and although Rack does not mention a painting of King David in his reference to the North Curry gallery, it seems almost certain that the present painting was formerly attached to the gallery front, possibly set within a wide panel which would explain the absence of an original frame for the canvas. According to both Kirke and his predecessor, D.J. Pring (vicar 1901–28), it was 'said' during their time (presumably by people who could remember it) that the painting had 'adorned' the gallery (Pring) or been 'hung upon' it (Kirke).⁷ Artistically the painting seems to be of the right period,⁸ and it was evidently thought worth preserving after the removal of the gallery and was kept in the vestry⁹ before eventually being placed at the west end of the nave. The painting has recently been restored and framed by Peter Dunnett of Kingsbury Episcopi at the expense of some of the parishioners and mounted on the west wall of the nave (in the vicinity of the former west gallery) following an unveiling ceremony on 28 September 2013.

Evidence for a church band in North Curry, which probably performed in the gallery with the singers, is contained in a volume of churchwardens' accounts for 1819–1875.¹⁰ In 1820 1s 6d was paid for a bass viol bridge; 7s 6d was paid in 1821 for repairing a 'clarionet'; and 3s in 1825 for repairing a [bass viol and]¹¹ a bow. In 1828 £3.11.0d was paid to a Mr Poole for clarinet reeds and an instruction book and 8s 3d was paid to William Edwards for bass viol strings; 1s 7d was paid for bass viol strings in 1829 and 3s.2d in 1830 and in 1831; and there were several payments for 'violencella' (violoncello, i.e. cello or bass viol) strings between 1831 and 1833.

There is a direct reference to the singers in 1824 when the churchwardens paid 8s for a 'music book for the singers'. In 1830 18s 6d was spent on 'music books', but whether these were for the singers, the

musicians, or both, is not specified. The gallery itself is mentioned in 1831 when a bill for 'the gallery curtains' amounted to £4.11.11½d, and in 1856 George Dinham was paid 4s 6d 'for work in gallery'.

In December 1859 £70.0 was paid by the churchwardens to 'William Bellringer organist for a years salary', which implies that an organ had replaced the musicians by that year. An annual salary of £70.0 continued to be recorded until 1862, but there is then a gap until a Mrs Smith was paid £50.0 as organist in 1866 and again in 1867. No further payments to an organist were recorded but an annual payment of 15s was made to a man for blowing the organ from 1868 until 1873 (and in 1870 there is a reference to organ blowing on 'practice nights', presumably for the singers, as well as on Sundays) so the instrument was undoubtedly still being played. Oldrid Scott's plan of the unrestored church in 1880 shows that the organ stood in the north transept but extended slightly into the north aisle, perhaps to enable the organist to see the singers who seem to have remained in the gallery, for in 1867 the churchwardens paid £3.7.6 'for 6 new music stands & altering seats in the gallery'. The planned restoration of 1880 included not only the demolition of the gallery but also the installation of an organ in the chancel, which turned attention firmly towards the east end of the church in accordance with current liturgical fashion.



Fig. 3 Painting of King David in Stoke St Gregory church (photo and copyright: Julian Comrie)

STOKE ST GREGORY

Attached to the north wall of the north aisle of St Gregory's church is an unsigned oil painting on wood of a bearded King David playing his harp (Fig. 3). Within the moulded wooden frame (which may be more recent in date) the painting measures 29 ins (74 cms) wide by 32½ ins (83 cms) high. David wears a long-sleeved blue or green garment descending to his feet but largely hidden beneath a red robe lined with ermine. In contrast to the North Curry painting, he is here depicted seated and wearing his crown, and behind him is some panelling, but no accompanying figures. Near the edge of the painting is a discernible border which may indicate that the picture was formerly in a different frame or was fitted into panelling.

Rack makes no mention of a gallery in this church, but when a faculty was sought in 1887 for alterations to the church in accordance with a scheme by the Taunton architect J. Houghton Spencer,¹² the petition from the vicar and churchwardens stated that 'it is deemed desirable [*inter alia*] to remove the old gallery'. This had contained 49 children's seats but 'owing to its unsafe condition (being quite rotten) has been unused for several years'. The schedule to the faculty begins 'To take down the present organ and gallery . . .' and it is evident that the organ was itself housed in the gallery, for at a vestry meeting in February 1887 it had been resolved to ask Spencer for an estimate for (*inter alia*) 'taking down the organ loft now very unsafe'.¹³ The gallery stood at the west end of the nave and was supported at the front on four posts or columns in a straight line (in contrast to the splayed corners of the North Curry gallery) as shown in the Taunton architect Richard Carver's plans of the church for an earlier restoration in 1843–4.¹⁴ Access had been by a stairway rising from within the north aisle to the north-west corner of the gallery but Carver altered the layout of the stairs to create more space for new seating at the west end of the aisle. The revised layout is also shown on Spencer's plan of the unrestored church in 1887.

Although the Stoke St Gregory gallery had accommodated children during church services before falling into disuse, it is evident that it had originally been used as a singing gallery (as will be seen in the case of Combe St Nicholas, a singing gallery could be adapted for wider congregational use) and it is highly likely that the surviving painting of King David had been attached to the front.¹⁵ A memorandum in the parish register for 1561–1744¹⁶

records that the 'singing loft' was built in 1709, and the churchwardens' accounts, which survive from 1741,¹⁷ refer to the 'singing laught' in 1759, and in 1767 4s was paid for 'a pipe concerning the singers' (possibly a pitch pipe); so there were undoubtedly singers and a singing loft or gallery in the church in the mid-18th century. At a vestry meeting in 1784¹⁸ it was agreed to pay Richard Brewer £3.0.0 'in part' for a bassoon and that 'the said bassoon shall remain to the church gallery to be played in consort of musick by whom or whosoever can play it'; and a payment by the churchwardens of 10s 6d 'towards the bass viol' in 1796/97 indicates that there were at least two accompanying musical instruments by the end of the century. At a vestry meeting in 1798 it was agreed that £2.0.0 should be paid annually to the singers 'in respect of buying of books for tunes and keeping the musickel instruments in repair', which presumably explains payments made by the churchwardens to the singers of £2.2.0 (*sic*) in 1798/99 and £2.0.0 in 1800/01.

Further references in the churchwardens' accounts include a payment of 6d to Francis Durman in 1796/97 for repairing 'the singing loft' and of 4s 6d to an unnamed carpenter in 1807 'for repairing singing loft'. In 1809/10 there was expenditure on paint, timber and nails for the singing loft and £2.18.8d was paid to Robert Keirle 'as per bill per singing loft'. In 1832 £6.0.0 was paid for a 'base vile' and in 1833 £1.1.0 was paid for a 'clarionet', 10s 6d for a new mouth piece and repair of the clarinet, and 10s to Richard Pearcey 'for laying out of money repairing the base viol, bow & strings'. In 1834 5s was paid for repairing the bass viol and in 1835/6 there was expenditure on bass viol strings at 1s each, whilst Henry Hembrow was paid for work which included repairing the gallery. In 1836/7 Thomas Miller was paid 10s for bass viol strings, in 1839 'Mr Summerhays bill for music strings & repairing bass' (*sic*) amounted to £1.16.6, and in 1840 4s was spent on a 'new bass vile bag', 4s on a 'music book' and 2s.6d on 'paper for music', and there were further payments for bass viol strings. These seem to be the last references to the existence of a church band in Stoke St Gregory.

In 1842 £1.13.0 was spent on a 'curtain for the singing loft window' (presumably the nave west window), £1.14.6 was paid to Mr Savery 'for two iron pillars for the gallery', £1.8.8 was paid for a 'curtain for the front of the gallery[,] binding cord and rings etc', and in the same year Mary House was paid for making the curtains and John House (related?) was paid 2s for 'putting up the curtains

and alterations'. Also, 17s 6d was paid to James Chedgoys 'for sealing the galery [*sic*] stairs etc'.

By 1887 the gallery had become an organ loft but had been unsafe and disused 'for several years' (see above). The replacement of the musicians by an organ must therefore have occurred at some point between 1840 and c.1880, possibly in 1842 when the gallery was strengthened by the two iron pillars for which Mr Savery was paid £1.14.6 and various other improvements were made.

COMBE ST NICHOLAS

Rack records that in this church 'The singers' gallery has a very neat front of panneld wainscot, in the center of which is a painting of David playing on his harp'.¹⁹ Churchwardens' accounts surviving from 1803²⁰ refer to an annual allowance of £1.1.0 to the singers until 1817 and to a payment of 8s 6d for a Common Prayer Book for the singers in 1812. The gallery is referred to in 1818 when 10s was paid for a post for the gallery and £1.12.2 for '28 feet of plank for the joists for the gallery', and in 1830 it was resolved that various changes should be made to the church, including 'that the singing gallery be enlarged'. Faculty records for a resulting scheme of enlargement of the church by Simeon Symes of Chard²¹ include a plan and section of a gallery at the west end of the nave. The section shows a very slender (cast-iron?) column, presumably one of several, supporting the front of the gallery, and rows of raked bench seats including four additional rows to increase the seating capacity of the gallery by 52 sittings, which suggests that the gallery was expected to accommodate part of the general congregation as well as the singers. The plan shows that the seats were divided by a central gangway, with ten rows on the south side but only nine on the north to allow space at the back for a stairway rising from the north-west corner of the nave. The gallery was also entered through a doorway (shown on the plan) in the north wall of the nave (the side aisles were not extended as far west as this until 1862–3) and an illustration by W. W. Wheatley in 1849²² shows that the doorway was approached by a solid stone external stairway rising alongside the wall. (The surviving west galleries at Stocklinch Magdalen and Cameley are still approached by an external stairway of this kind.)

Records of another scheme, by William White of London, in 1862–3²³ include a plan of the 'present arrangement' of the church, including the gallery

which is shown with two rows of eight bench seats on either side of a central gangway, but at the back is an organ flanked by two short rows of bench seats, and there is no evidence of an internal stairway from the nave. A drawing of the north elevation of the church shows the external doorway and stairway, visible behind a superimposed drawing of the proposed extension to the north aisle. White's scheme thus included removal of the external doorway and stairway and also the gallery itself. The north and south walls of the nave were replaced by arcades for the extended aisles, and other alterations included the provision of seating for the choir in the chancel. The organ mentioned above may have been a barrel organ (surviving examples are to be found in Muchelney and Isle Abbots churches), a pipe organ or a harmonium, and was evidently installed in the gallery at some time between 1830 and 1862. Previously the singers may have been accompanied by a band, but there is no evidence for this in the churchwardens' accounts.

On display in the church is an unsigned framed oil painting on wood(?) of King David playing his harp (Fig. 4). This was formerly mounted near the



Fig. 4 Painting of King David in Combe St Nicholas church (photo and copyright: Julian Comrie)

west end of the north aisle, after the removal of the gallery and the extension of the aisles, but in 2013 the frame was restored²⁴ and the painting was repositioned near the west end of the south aisle. Within its moulded wooden frame the painting measures 1 ft 8½ ins (52 cms) wide by 2 ft 7 ins (79 cms) high at the highest point of the round-arched top, with sides 1 ft 10 ins (56 cms) high. David with his harp occupies a central position in the composition. He is bearded and wears a crown and a blue garment under a red robe which is lined with ermine. He kneels on one knee on a tasselled blue cushion on a black and white chequer-pattern floor. His raised knee, lower leg and a sandalled foot are exposed. Above him is a tasselled blue drape folded loosely over a cord, and he stares upwards towards shafts of light (presumably heavenly light coming from God) descending from the top-right of the scene. There is some deterioration in the paintwork and a dark feature at the top of the blue drape is difficult to identify. On the right side of the painting two putti hold a scroll bearing on the back the words

‘Exsurge
Gloria mea &c’

which occur in Psalms 56 and 107 in the Latin Vulgate.²⁵ The front of the scroll, which is not visible to the viewer, is held facing David as if to enable him to read the words and music which he is performing. On the left are two young women or angels, one playing a cello, the other a flute, both of which instruments were commonly used in Georgian church bands.

On a metal plaque attached to the bottom of the frame is a memorial inscription to John Brown of Wadeford, who died on 21st April 1918, dedicated by the children of his sister Frances Eliza. The inscription also records that ‘This Painting prior to the restoration of the Church in 1863 hung on the Singers Gallery’, which implies that the painting was preserved (and reframed?) in John Brown’s memory. This provenance, together with the style of the painting, indicates that this is very probably the painting on the front of the gallery which Rack referred to in the 1780s, although this would have had to survive the enlargement of the gallery in 1830–31.

GOATHURST

In his description of this parish church Rack states that ‘The singers’ gallery is fronted with wainscot; and in the panels are eight emblematical paintings

poorly executed’.²⁶ As will be seen below, a gallery was in existence by 1707.²⁷ In June 1883, in a report to the rector and churchwardens on a proposed restoration of the church,²⁸ J. Houghton Spencer (architect here as well as at Stoke St Gregory) remarked that ‘The removal of the organ gallery would much improve the interior by throwing open the tower arch and western window’. The latter were medieval Gothic features obscured by the later gallery. Following the completion of the restoration in 1884 a report in the *Bridgwater Mercury* on 12 November²⁹ included the comment that ‘By the removal of the western gallery the boldly moulded arch between the nave and the tower has been opened up’. This report not only indicates the location of the gallery and the year in which it was removed, but also refers to a ‘plaster screen, which formed the back of the gallery’ on which were written ‘the following quaint lines [a poem, quoted in full, on the subject of bellringing], a copy of which will still be hung in the belfry for the guidance of the ringers.’

Churchwardens’ accounts for Goathurst survive from 1703³⁰ and include a payment of £1.14.6d in 1707 to a ‘Mr Wels’ (Wells?) for painting the gallery, pillars, screen and pulpit, ‘being 34 yds and half at 1s per yd’ (which seems to indicate painting of a general rather than an artistic kind) and he was also paid £1.0.6d for writing the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and ‘the sentences’ (Ten Commandments?) over the gallery and over the church door. The gallery is referred to as the ‘singing gallery’ in 1779; and in 1786 2s was paid ‘for a pitch pipe for the gallery’, perhaps implying that the singers were unaccompanied. In 1824 the singers were paid a total of three guineas for three years at a guinea a year, and in 1826 a Mr Jones was paid £3.3.0 for a ‘violincello’ (violoncello or cello) ‘for the use of the singers in church’. A green baize bag for the cello cost 6s 2d. From 1827 until 1856–7 William Parker was paid 5s a year ‘for finding strings’ for the cello (sometimes referred to as a bass viol) although occasionally the sum would vary and include a bow, or ‘hairing’ a bow, for the cello. In 1847 Parker was paid 8s 9d for strings for ‘his bass-viol’ and in 1854 the churchwardens paid £3.0.0 ‘for the exchange[?] of a bass viol for William Parker to play in the church’: he evidently played as well as maintained the cello. This is not the only instrument referred to in the accounts, for in 1833 £4.4.0 was paid for two flutes.

References to the singers after 1826 include payment ‘for candles for the singers’ in 1835, for

'a book for the singers' in 1836, for candles in 1846, for 'repairing[?] music books for the singers' in 1855 and for candles for the singers in 1858-9. There are no payments to William Parker after 1856-7, however. In 1857-8 a carpenter was paid 3s 'for work in the gallery in the church' and in April 1859 there is a reference to 'the organ lately erected in the church . . . purchased with the subscriptions of the inhabitants of the parish, and others'. A payment in 1860 of £1.0.0. to a carpenter 'for work at the gallery in the church' may be connected with this significant change in church music at Goathurst, and in the same year a Miss Kingston was paid £2.0.0. 'for playing the organ in the church for one year'.

The organ was housed in the gallery, as J. Houghton Spencer's reference to 'the organ gallery' in June 1883 indicates. The singers, however, continued to perform in the gallery: in 1860 4s was paid for candles 'for the singers in the church gallery' and in 1861 3s 6d was paid for candles 'for the singing gallery'. Also in 1861 10s was paid 'for straw hassocks for kneeling in the gallery', presumably to encourage a more 'devotional' attitude, and in 1862 5s was paid for more candles for the gallery. The gallery thus housed both the organ and the singers, as it had previously housed the singers and (almost certainly) the church

band in which William Parker played his cello for thirty years. The organ was in its turn disposed of during restoration in 1884, when the gallery was demolished, and replaced by an 'American' organ (a type of harmonium) for which £20 was paid in 1885.³¹

Within the bottom stage of the church tower is some panelling attached to the north wall which includes eight oil figure-paintings in two horizontal rows (Fig. 5). Each painting is 1 ft 9½ ins (55 cms) square within a moulded surround but the paint appears to have been applied directly onto the woodwork of the panelling. This must have been done *in situ* or in a nearby workshop, presumably by a local or travelling artist. The paintwork has deteriorated over time, but the eight figures include a seated King David playing his harp (Fig. 6): he is bearded and wears a crown, and over a pale green garment is a red robe edged or lined with ermine. The background is generally indistinct but includes some sheet music near the left edge and a drape in the top right-hand corner of the painting. Another painting is of a seated female harpist with shoulder-length hair, dressed in a pale costume under a loose blue robe. This might be a representation of St Cecilia, one of whose traditional attributes is a harp. At least five of the remaining six figures are bearded men, and several hold a quill pen and



Fig. 5 'Emblematical' paintings in Goathurst church. King David is at the left-hand end of the top row of paintings (photo and copyright: Julian Comrie)

a script or book. One figure is accompanied by an angel or winged man, another by a lion, and a third (holding a paintbrush and palette) by a bull or ox. These must be the Evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke, but no eagle (for St John) is discernible in the remaining three paintings.



Fig. 6 Painting of King David in Goathurst church (photo and copyright: Julian Comrie)

In the neighbouring parish of Durleigh, Rack noted a gallery with six paintings on the front including King David and the four Evangelists.³² These paintings seem not to have survived, but at least five of the subjects evidently coincided with those at Goathurst. Conceivably one parish emulated the other and may even have employed the same painter.

The painted panels at Goathurst were placed in the church tower in 1902 after being discovered in a neighbouring almshouse and are believed to have formed part of the west gallery.³³ The panelling has a cornice along the top, but there is a horizontal butt joint in the woodwork between the two rows of paintings: it is possible that the lower row was formerly on the same level as the upper row and formed a continuation of it under a longer cornice. In its present form the panelling is 5 ft 5 ins (165 cms) high (more than might be expected of a gallery front) and 9ft 5½ ins (288 cms) wide, which is almost 2 ft narrower than the arched opening into the tower. The combined width of the two rows of panelling is 10 ins (25 cms) wider than the west end

of the nave, however, in which case the front of the gallery could only have been accommodated within the nave if the ends of the panelling had intruded a short way into the openings of the north and south windows near the west end. The windows would in that case have been partially obscured by the gallery, but some patching of the stonework in the reveals of these windows might relate to a former arrangement of this kind.

The fact that the panelling contains eight paintings, which include King David and the Evangelists with their symbols, suggests very strongly that these are the 'eight emblematical paintings' which Rack recorded on the panels of the gallery front; and what has survived appears to be a substantial part of the gallery front complete with integral paintings, but possibly rearranged in two parts one above the other. It is possible, but unlikely, that these paintings were included in the 1707 reference to 'painting the gallery'.

CONCLUSION

There are clearly some conventions in the way in which King David is presented in these paintings: in each case he is shown as a harpist in reference to the Psalms and to his skills as a musician, he is bearded, presumably as an indication of maturity (in contrast to the youthful slayer of Goliath), and he has a crown and a robe lined with ermine as symbols of his royal status. In the North Curry painting, however, the crown is placed on the floor, perhaps as a gesture of humility in the presence of the God whom David is praising. In the North Curry and Combe St Nicholas paintings David kneels or half kneels on a tasselled cushion on a chequered floor which suggests a building of high status (perhaps the royal palace in the City of David), especially in the North Curry painting which includes rows of columns with moulded bases. In those same two instances, and in the Goathurst painting of David, there are curtain-like drapes which may further emphasize the high status of the building.

With regard to the background and the arrangement of the figures in the Combe St Nicholas painting, there are some remarkable similarities to a painting of King David by the early 17th-century Italian baroque painter Domenichino (Domenico Zampieri),³⁴ although the composition has been reversed and there are a number of differences of detail: for example, the Italian painting shows a clothed boy or angel holding a book in front of David

(in contrast to the two naked putti holding a scroll in the Combe St Nicholas painting) and behind David is another child writing in a book, which contrasts with the female instrumentalists at Combe St Nicholas. Both paintings include drapes behind and above the figure of David; the drapery in the Combe St Nicholas painting gives the impression of a tent-like structure which might be interpreted as a reference to the tent which David erected to house the Ark of the Covenant, but in Domenichino's painting the drapery is more obviously within a grand building which includes a classical pillar. The Combe St Nicholas painter is unlikely to have seen Domenichino's painting but he may have seen an engraving (reversed?) or a derivative picture which provided him with an overall design which he could use as the basis for his own composition. The Combe St Nicholas painting seems to be more sophisticated in both composition and execution than the other paintings described in this paper, and the Latin words on the scroll, apparently taken from the Vulgate, may be unexpected in the context of 18th-century west gallery music, suggesting perhaps that the painting was *acquired* rather than commissioned for the church.

In the paintings of King David at Stoke St Gregory and Goathurst, the background to the central figure is neutral or indistinct, but in the other paintings David is accompanied by additional figures: angels blowing trumpets at North Curry, putti holding sheet music and women playing instruments at Combe St Nicholas, in each case emphasizing the musical theme of these paintings. Such a theme was entirely appropriate to the west galleries with which these paintings (and the additional figures, including a female harpist, at Goathurst) were almost certainly associated. These were settings for the singers and accompanying musicians, although the latter might eventually be superseded by an organ which was itself housed in the gallery. In all four churches the galleries were ultimately demolished during improvement schemes but the paintings survive as a tangible reminder of a phase in the history of Anglican worship and popular culture which was eclipsed by changes in liturgical fashion during the Victorian period.

These paintings may seem rather naïve and dated, and the Revd D. J. Pring described that at North Curry as 'an antiquated painting . . . of a style both quaint and crude',³⁵ but all were evidently thought locally to be worth preserving after the removal of the galleries. Pring became vicar only twenty years after the North Curry gallery was

taken down and may have reflected a general reaction against paintings of this kind, but the historical significance of such paintings and their interest as, very probably, the work of provincial artists from within or close to Somerset may now be better appreciated than in Pring's time.

The author would welcome information about other examples of ex-gallery paintings, which may have survived elsewhere in the 'historic' (pre-1974) county of Somerset.

ENDNOTES

Capitalisation has been modernised in all quotations from documentary sources in this paper.

- ¹ McDermott, M., and Berry, S. (eds), 2011. *Edmund Rack's Survey of Somerset*, SANHS, Taunton. See also McDermott, M., 2013. *Fittings, furniture and decoration in Somerset churches in the late 18th century: the evidence in Edmund Rack's Survey of Somerset*, SANH 156, 135-159, esp. pp. 137-8.
- ² Both illustrations have been reproduced in Bettey, J.H., 1979. *Church and Community*, plates 21 & 23. See also another satirical illustration by the circle of J. Wright (c. 1800) reproduced in Cooper, T., & Brown, S. (eds), 2011. *Pews, Benches and Chairs*, p. 198.
- ³ The painting is illustrated in McDermott, M., 1995. *The Restoration of Stocklinch Magdalen Church*, SANH 139, 135-147, p. 144.
- ⁴ McDermott and Berry, 2011, p. 224.
- ⁵ SHC, D/D/cf 1880/9 North Curry.
- ⁶ Kirke, A., 1932. *North Curry. A Short History of Church and Parish*, p. 17.
- ⁷ Kirke, 1932, p. 26; Pring, D. J., 1930. *The Cathedral of the Moors*, p. 23.
- ⁸ Richard Kay of the Picture Department of Lawrences Auctioneers has suggested c.1790-1820.
- ⁹ Kirke, 1932, p. 26; Pring, 1930, p. 23; Mee, A., 1941. *The King's England - Somerset*, p. 299.
- ¹⁰ SHC, D/P/cur.n 4/1/4.
- ¹¹ Fiche in SHC illegible here, but see earlier transcription in Olivey, H. P., 1901. *North Curry: Ancient Manor and Hundred*, p. 193.
- ¹² SHC, D/D/cf 1887/11 Stoke St Gregory.
- ¹³ SHC, D/P/sto.st.g 9/1/4.
- ¹⁴ Lambeth Palace Library, ICBS 03183.
- ¹⁵ A similar opinion is given in Dunning, R., 2010. *The History of The Parish Church of St Gregory, Stoke St Gregory*. 'The painted panel showing King David playing his harp is the only part of the singing gallery to survive.'
- ¹⁶ SHC, D/P/sto.st.g 2/1/1.
- ¹⁷ SHC, D/P/sto.st.g 4/1/1, 4/1/2 & 4/1/3.

- ¹⁸ SHC, D/P/sto.st.g 9/1/1.
¹⁹ McDermott and Berry, 2011, p. 206.
²⁰ SHC, DD/SAS C/909/114 and D/P/com.n 4/1/1.
²¹ Lambeth Palace Library, ICBS 01219.
²² SANHS collection.
²³ SHC, D/D/cf 1862/1 Combe St Nicholas. Also Lambeth Palace Library, ICBS 05894.
²⁴ Info. from Diana Griffith, churchwarden.
²⁵ See, for instance, the website www.sacred-texts.com. Alternative numbers for these two Psalms in other versions are 57 and 108.
²⁶ McDermott and Berry, 2011, p. 16.
²⁷ SHC, D/P/gst 4/1/1.
²⁸ SHC, D/P/gst 8/2/2.
²⁹ SHC, D/P/gst 8/4/1.
³⁰ SHC, D/P/gst 4/1/1 & 4/1/2.
³¹ SHC, D/P/gst 8/2/3.
³² McDermott and Berry, 2011, p. 12.
³³ Ansdell, R. D, and Howison, R. D., n.d., *Notes on St. Edward's Church, Goathurst*, p. 4. See also Dunning, R. W. (ed.), 1992. *Victoria History of Somerset*, VI, pp. 51-2: 'Painted panels under the tower may have come from the former gallery.'

- ³⁴ The original painting is in the Appartement du Roi at Versailles (see Wikipedia). The British Museum online catalogue includes a French engraving of the painting, dated to between 1718 and 1729.
³⁵ Pring, 1930, p. 23.

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