From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

Stone Pulpits of Gloucestershire

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1931, Vol. 53, 251-255

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NOTES

STONE PULPITS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

The stone pulpits of Gloucestershire all date, as far as the writer is aware, from the time of the Perpendicular period of building. No doubt the majority were actually erected in the 15th century, but in a county like Gloucester, where this style began to make its appearance in the first half of the 14th century, it seems probable that some of the pulpits may have been built before 1400, while the Tudor flower on others suggests that they belong to the last quarter of the 15th century, or quite possibly to the early part of the 16th. Unless documentary evidence of the actual date of their erection can be traced, it is impossible to say more than this as to their origin.

Their distribution is interesting, for they are almost all to be found either on the Cotswolds or where good stone was available. This is the case with the series which occur in the southern part of the county, in such places as Iron Acton, Westerleigh, etc. Thornbury lies in the plain, but only just below the hill. Aylburton is in the Severn Valley, but the church there was moved from the hill to its present position in 1857, and no doubt the stone pulpit was brought down with the other ancient parts of the building, and so forms no exception to the rule. There are no other early stone pulpits in the churches in the Severn Valley. Obviously the church builders in the 15th century did not mean to carry about more stone than was necessary, though anything said about pulpits is bound to be somewhat tentative, for, almost more than any other piece of church furniture, they have been moved about, and superseded by modern substitutes.

The designs of the pulpits are restrained and dignified, and the majority are simply panelled. Others are finely decorated, and seem to be of two types: those with a definite horizontal line between the pedestal and the body, and those of the 'chalice' shape, in which the vertical line between pedestal and body is uninterrupted. Of this second type are the pulpits at Cromhall and Cirencester; of the former those at North Cerney and Chedworth.

It is notable that the vine-pattern which occurs fairly frequently on Somerset pulpits is never seen on the ancient examples in Gloucestershire, while the Gloucestershire pulpits are also, on the whole, less ornate than those of Somerset and Devon.

The fashion for stone pulpits ceased with the taste for Perpendicular architecture. During the 16th century preaching became less popular than it had been, and ministers tended to confine themselves to the use of the printed homilies. With the advent of the Stuarts the sermon became important once more, and very many churches were provided with the then fashionable wooden Jacobean pulpits. How many stone examples these replaced we cannot know. Dollman, in his book on ancient pulpits, dates the one at Winchcombe as 1520, but the one there now was built in 1872. The only one in this county in which the original colour, since repainted, can be seen is at Cirencester.

It may happen that an old pulpit has been so severely scraped and restored that it is difficult to distinguish it from a modern example.

The form of these stone pulpits is usually octagonal.

AMPNEY CRUCIS. Panelled and transomed, with double foliate heads to the upper panels, single to the lower.

AYLBURTON. Stumpy, with a double row of deeply recessed panels, nearly square in shape, with foliated heads.

BEVERSTONE. Panelled, with foliate heads to the long panels. Below the simply moulded cornice runs a band decorated with square paterae, and below that a band of carved foliage.

CHEDWORTH. A magnificent pulpit on a panelled pedestal base. It is divided by crocketed buttresses, and the panels are ornamented with crocketed canopies. At the base there is a kind of Tudor flower.

CHIPPING SODBURY. Wall pulpit, tapering at the base, supported on a corbel in the form of a crowned male head. The panels have tracery ornament and the whole is surmounted by a crocketed canopy, with a groined roof. There is a double-light window in the back of the pulpit opening into the north aisle. Inscribed above is 'Thomas Davis his charge'.

CIRENCESTER. Chalice-shaped pedestal. The panels are pierced and ornamented with crocketed canopies. The cornice is simple. Coloured and gilt. Said to date from 1515 and has an hour-glass stand.

COLD ASHTON. Wooden wall pulpit on a stone base, with a fine stone canopy, pinnacled and crocketed. It is approached by the rood-loft stair in the wall.

COLESBORNE. Pedestal panelled and transomed pulpit, with upper panels foliated, and a good cornice. One panel is pierced.

COLN ROGERS. Transomed and panelled stone pulpit, rather squat in design, on a hexagonal base. The heads of the upper panels are foliated.

COWLEY. Octagonal stone pulpit with unusual tracery on the panels. The ornament at the foot is varied, and includes trefoil, quatrefoil and miscellaneous designs.

CROMHALL. Beautiful chalice-shaped pulpit, transomed. The upper panels are pierced, and it is approached by a stair from the vestry. It might belong to the end of the 14th century.

ELKSTONE. A Jacobean wooden pulpit dated 1609, clumsily fitted on to a stone base with pierced trefoil ornaments.

GUITING POWER. Stone pulpit, modern, on an ancient stone base, buttressed.

HAWKESBURY. Pedestal stone wall pulpit, with long single panels with foliated heads. The cornice and base are ornamented with the Tudor flower, and above the panels there is a row of paterae surmounted by a band of foliage, strongly reminiscent of the vine-pattern. The stone of the pedestal has been recut from one with lacertine carving on it, some of which remains on the east face.

HORTON. Jacobean wooden pulpit on a panelled stone base.

LASBOROUGH. Simple stone pulpit, probably Perpendicular, but scraped. Base and body panelled, with trefoil heads to panels.

LECHLADE. Stone pulpit, modern, on an old pedestal base. The panels of the base have trefoil heads.

NAUNTON. Panelled and canopied stone pulpit richly decorated, with a wooden cornice.

NORTH CERNEY. Octagonal stone pedestal pulpit, probably the finest in Gloucestershire. Panelled base, with mouldings, panelled and canopied body; the panels divided by crocketed pinnacles. Tudor flowers at the base of the panels. Two bands of lily ornament round the cornice, and one at the base of the body.

NORTHLEACH. Elegant pedestal pulpit, attached to a pier. Perpendicular mouldings on the pedestal. Row of paterae on base of the body, surmounted by Tudor flowers. Panels divided by pinnacles, and canopied.

RANGEWORTHY. Massive stone pedestal pulpit. Pedestal ornamented with bands of foliage of typical Perpendicular type. Panels traceried, band of foliage on cornice, and paterae on the base of the body.

STAUNTON. Wall pulpit with no pedestal or corbel. Pulpit plain save for a simple cornice moulding. Approached by the same newel stair as the rood-loft.

THORNBURY. Massive pedestal pulpit, with panelled pedestal. Single panels with trefoil heads.

TURKDEAN. Massive panelled and transomed octagonal stone pulpit on a low plain base. Upper panels have foliated heads.

WESTERLEIGH. Pedestal pulpit, panelled with foliated heads to panels. Square cut billet-like moulding at the base of the body. Pedestal also panelled.

WINSON. Octagonal stone pulpit with pointed base supported on a corbel in the form of a male head. Panels of base and body ornamented with tracery. Pulpit much scraped and possibly not in its original position.

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FOLKLORE NOTES

Folklore has a peculiar interest, and is especially attractive as it seems to keep alive some knowledge of the past in the form of a story. The story may appear to be absurd, incredible, impossible, but if the key can be found, the truth may be seen in the midst of the apparent absurdity.

Here are given a few local stories with some considerations on them as suggestions (suggestions only) of the truth that lies at the back, and to account for their origin.

BLACK DOG

A phantom large black dog seems to have traditional history. Apart from appearances which 'they say' have occurred, one meets persons free from ordinary superstitions who tell of occasions when they have seen fine-looking black dogs which have suddenly disappeared mysteriously. Such appearances are said to be seen at