

356 BOOKCASE

VESTRY

A small freestanding oak bookcase with shaped ends and two panels within set at angles to receive the books. 20th C, h 16 x w 46 x d 22 cm.

357a BENCHES

Phs

NAVE, N. & S. AISLES

1 General:- See plan for numbering.

Benches nos 1-14 & 15-28 are arranged to accommodate nave columns; the side aisles all are half length on N and S walls. All stand on pine plank floors. Benches have close boarded backs with top rails being moulded and chamfered. Seats have rounded front edges and are 30.75 cm deep. Each bench (except those which have front desks only) has a book rest fixed to the back of the seat in front, which is supported by brackets formed by the extension of main floor-level bench supports. Also at floor level are fixed narrow prayer kneeler planks with support brackets at intervals. The restorers reused the old bench ends wherever possible, incorporating them with considerable skill with the new pews, and some new ends. The warped nature of the old ends make them obvious.

Bench fronts – see plan for numbering.

The E facing fronts of benches 26, 15, 1, and 46 at the E end, and 35, 5 & 52 at the E end of the crossing have similar panelling in two sections, one above the other with arched tops, blind tracery, and plain spandrels. The W facing back of 34, at the N door has stylised flowers with large petals using all the space in the bottom section.

The W facing back of bench 18, and the E facing front of bench 19 are similar, being divided into 8 panels, each having blind trefoil headed arcading mixed with an arched top containing a large central floral motif and two plain sections with daggers at each side. Spandrels have different stylised foliage and fruit motifs. Stiles are similar and have vertical tree of life motifs above a plain trefoil headed arch with a leaf each side of flared base. The E facing front of bench 35 has 4 such panels.

The W facing back of bench 4 and the E facing front of 5 have plain panelling evenly divided by stiles and rails. Each of 6 sections has a thick bevelled and chamfered rail with 3 panels above and one below. The W facing back of 34 has book shelves, close fitted.

The W facing back of 51, and the E facing front of 52 have 4 similar but more plain, and smaller panels with spandrels having stylised fruit and foliage. This is the only decoration to an otherwise simple Gothic blind tracery. Stiles have small vertical motif above arch.

Bench ends – see plan for numbering

The majority of the bench ends are pre-Reformation with only a few post-Reformation. All are richly carved with blind tracery and colonnades of trefoil-headed arches, spandrels having stylised foliage or flowers.

8 bench ends are of particular interest and have been photographed:

3 ends – 30, 32, 42 in N aisle have spandrels with caricatures of human faces representing the vices of malicious speech and deceit, and one 22a, has a hand holding a rosary depicted in great detail. All these are 15th C and are fully described in Peter Poyntz-Wright's book "The Rural Bench Ends of Somerset" Avebury Press 1983 pps 141 & 142, as follows:-

There are at Cheddar three bench ends that have human faces in the spandrels formed by the arches of plain tracery within the panel. It has been suggested that these carvings represent the vices of malicious speech and deceit, (Ref a) and close examination of their detail reveals that these lower qualities are portrayed in depth. The first of these (32) shows in the L spandrel as viewed a head with three faces, a full face forward and two profiles one on each side. The combined head, which has a small cap on top has two eyes and three noses, and each profile has a mouth showing teeth and a long, twisted tongue. The divided image illustrates deceit and split loyalties, and the twisted tongue represents lies. In the RH spandrel is a confrontation of two heads in profile, facing each other with their noses and foreheads touching. Their lips are drawn back in anger and they seem to be sharing the same tongue. This carving is more difficult to interpret as it illustrates a confrontation (and may be compared with another confrontation (*at S Cadbury*)). Yet the twisted or looped tongue is shared, suggesting some complicity which is hard to equate with the disagreement. It could represent the bearing of false witness, where both witnesses are at loggerheads, each telling lies about the other. The second of these carvings, (42) contains in the L spandrel, a face with horns rising from the forehead, large round eyes, a nose and mouth from which a twisted tongue protrudes on each side and ends in an animal's head. The lower of these heads on the L side has ears eyes and a tongue in the form of an arrow. Lightly carved and a little indistinct are two ears that project out and down from each side of the (human) head.

Clearly this character is demonic because of the horns and and represents eavesdropping with his ears and a substantial amount of lies and gossip with his twisted and two-directional tongues.

In the R spandrel is a dual face with a cap and a single eye. The profile facing to the R uses the central eye with a long pointed nose, a narrow mouth and a long, flowing beard, and probably represents the more pleasant side of a split character. (*what comes from his mouth is not described but appears to be less than pleasant*) The other half of the 'Jekyll and Hyde' image is shown in the L profile where the same eye is used in conjunction with a sharply turned-up nose and an extended pointed mouth from which an arrow protrudes to fill the L corner of the spandrel.

This is a very descriptive presentation of the traditional two-faced character.

The last of this trio of carvings illustrates lies and eavesdropping (30). In the L spandrel is a caricature of a face in profile showing a bulbous forehead, large eye, turned-up nose and an evil grinning mouth, showing a mass of teeth. From the mouth the epitome of lies is shown by the huge twisted tongue that curls its way to the lower corner of the spandrel.

In the R spandrel is a full face directed forwards. It has hair cut in a fringe, large round owl-like eyes, nose and protruded tongue. The main feature of this character is his enormous pair of ears, shown like huge leaves, that fill both sides of the spandrel and clearly illustrate the evils of listening to the private conversation of others.

The three bench ends contain a remarkable portrayal of the evils of deceit, lies and wilful eavesdropping, and are another splendid insight into mediaeval life and its forceful caricatures'

On page 79 of the same book is his description of the rosary bench end, as follows: 'There is one other portrayal of the rosary (*The others being at Kingston St Mary*) and this is in the top corner of a plain bench end at Cheddar (22a). This carving is in the spandrel caused by the traceried arch of the bench end. The hand, which springs from a very small section of sleeve is extremely finely carved with slender fingers and thumb; even the fingernails are shown. The knuckles of the forefinger pass across the corner to grip the last bead of the decade with the thumb. The rosary is of only four decades, and this may be because of the very restricted space. Each decade has ten beads with a larger 'our Father' between each. The upper decade is partly obscured by the hand. At the pointed base of the spandrel is an animal's head pointing downwards. It is not clear what this animal is; the ears brow and nostrils are distinct but it could be a dog or a deer'

Peter Poyntz Wright does not describe one further 15th C bench end, 3a on the plan, which has a fox's head emerging from foliage, with pricked ears, large eye, and many teeth, and with long barbed ended tongue as with the human faces.

One of the 'typical' bench ends with tracery, and foliage and flower decoration in the spandrels, has also been photographed. It is 36 on the plan.

The restorers, Trask & Sons, added to these with two 'copies', rather more crudely carved, bench end 52 in the S aisle, copies 32, and bench end 25a copies one of the spandrels of 30. They also copied the foliage and floral decoration in the spandrels of all the new bench ends, with great skill so that the whole is pleasing to the eye.

In the S. Porch are stored 4 bench ends, 2 pre and 2 post-restoration, 1 x narrow front desk end, 2 benches and a kneeler.

- 2 Oak
- 3 15th C with 19th C restoration
- 4 See Ch Plan
- 5,6 Butterfield, & Trask & Sons.
- 7-9 a) JCD Smith, 'Church Woodcarvings, a West Country Study' David & Charles 1969
- 10 -

ST. ANDREW'S, CHEDDAR,
SOMERSET

WOODWORK

BENCH PLAN

