

After a splendid morning in Salisbury we set off for the Woodford valley to the north of the city, where the River Avon flows through beautiful countryside and picturesque thatched villages. St. Andrew's at Great Durnford is a Norman church with a wealth of fascinating items. Both north and south doorways have elaborate Norman carving, one with a band of what looked awfully like shuttlecocks but were perhaps meant to be bees; this led to an inconclusive discussion as to when shuttlecocks were invented. (Answers on a postcard please!) The timber-framed south porch sheltered a door whose handle has the date 1714 on the baseplate, while the north door has 1677 carved on the lock case. These serve to remind us how frequently church doors were repaired or totally renewed in the C17th and C18th. Once inside we faced a feast of woodwork. The C15th benches have simple traceried ends and there is an C18th west gallery with a projecting centre section. It would originally have housed the singers and musicians and now carries the organ. On the north wall is a huge Royal Arms of 1678 with a very regal-looking lion. Royal arms are always worth a good look to see how the artist has tackled the lion, an animal with which few people can have been familiar at that time. To the left of the chancel arch is what Pevsner describes as a Jacobean family pew, with more panelling of the same type set against the wall behind the pulpit to the right of the arch. The pulpit is dated 1619, with round-arched panels and at the base a panel carved with a coat-of-arms; the whole pulpit has clearly been cut down from a two or three decker. The so-called family pew was probably the clerk's desk, while the panel with the coat-of-arms was perhaps part of its door or a backboard to the pulpit. There is a similar arrangement at Little Somerford, also in Wiltshire. The crowning glory of the pulpit is the green velvet pulpit cloth and cushion, on which the date 1657 is still just visible, an amazing survival. The only other one that I have seen is a splendid red velvet example at Plymtree in East Devon, which is dated 1697. The magnificent Jacobean double lectern has a turned and carved column, and the altar rails, also C17th, are unusual in design, with

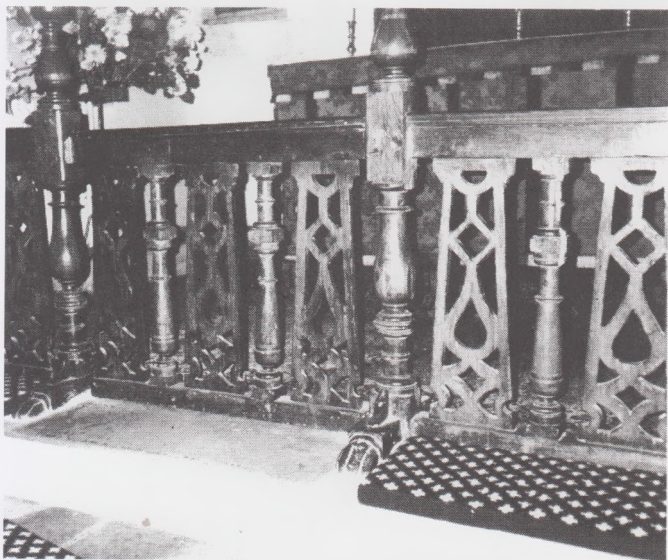


Fig. 11 17th century altar rail at Little Somerford

alternating turned and pierced splat balusters (fig. 11). This may be a Wiltshire feature, as others exist at Edington (with very unfriendly spikes on top of the rail!) and at Wylde, now reset. Almost overlooked beside all this woodwork was the splendid circular Norman font. This is covered with a carved arcade of interlacing round arches carried on capitals like simplified faces. The plain cover was given four carved scrolls in C17th style in the 1950s.

Two miles down the valley we stopped at All Saints', Middle Woodford, largely rebuilt in 1845 by T.H. Wyatt, but retaining a number of earlier furnishings. Access to the interior was temporarily blocked by an admiring crowd gathered round a C17th credence table now used to hold leaflets and the visitors' book. A second credence table is less complete, having lost its stretchers and gained a drawer, but was singled out as a fine example of the Beckham school of carving and the possessor of a single surviving finial, a great rarity. An unusually large C17th chest, five panels long, has lozenges carved on the end panels and deeply carved double scrolls on the front. Speculation as to its origins came down in favour of Somerset. The plain oak pews dating from the rebuilding caused comment due to their quality, being much more like medieval examples than the usual mechanical offerings of the Victorian age. The medieval font has a flat cover with decorative ironwork and a locking bar, all fixed with hand-made nails; could this possibly be medieval, or is it another example of the best of C19th workmanship? Similar doubts existed over the date of two carved brackets of early C17th style supporting the west gallery, which surmounted a genuinely C17th tower screen. Beyond the screen the medieval door to the tower stair survives, complete with elaborate wrought iron handle.

Our third visit was to Little Clarendon, a small manor house at Dinton owned by the National Trust; C15th in origin, it was remodelled in the early C17th and again in the early C20th. It contains a wonderful collection of furniture, enthusiastically explained to us by Gabriel Olive. His greatest delight was the small oak settle table in the hall, possibly dating from as late as 1800; he pointed out that the latest example of a type is as interesting as the earliest, and that it is too easy to overlook the end of a tradition. Forming a screen by the front door is a piece of double-sided linenfold panelling, freestanding and possibly part of the screens from the medieval house; a groove in the top showed that it was originally taller. Other treasures were numerous. One table had the unusual combination of an elm top and a walnut frame, while a small C17th table provoked the comment that as C17th coffee tables do not exist, what on earth were these small tables used for? An oak bureau of circa 1740 gained a circle of envious admirers; it was beautifully fitted, with stepped drawers, elegant dividers, and a central door with a round-arched panel. The top drawer proved to be false, with access to the compartment via a sliding panel in the desktop. However, the 'drawer' front was also removable, held in place by two plain wooden turnbuckles. What was stored in here, not exactly a secret compartment but one to which access was made deliberately awkward? Other items of interest were a small armchair with a lozenge in the back



panel and extremely basic cresting, and a lovely corner cupboard with inlay around the door panel and butterfly hinges. A date of circa 1760 was suggested. Before we left we were shown the chapel, created by the property's then owner Mary Engelhart in 1920. It contains an eclectic collection of furnishings, fluted and twisted mahogany bedposts reused as columns, kneeling rails all with different designs of turned balusters, panelling, and a strange carved post that was clearly earlier than most of the woodwork surrounding it; could it have been from a medieval bed?

St. Mary and St. Lawrence at Stratford Tony, set high above a clear stream, is now looked after by the Redundant Churches Fund. Its typical Wiltshire tower has stone and flint chequerwork and a small pyramidal roof. The sloping site was perhaps unstable, as the south wall of the nave was totally rebuilt in the C17th and the north wall in the C18th. The interior is light and airy, making it easy to examine the late C17th (?) woodwork. The guidebook refers to an Episcopal Citation of 1683, and suggests that perhaps this dates the rearrangement of the interior. Two large box pews, perhaps for the squire and for the vicar's family, are set behind the chancel screen, which is topped with a balustrade of delicate turned columns and a ramped top rail. In front of this screen is a two-decker pulpit, with the clerk's desk enclosed by panelling topped by a straight balustrade and a crenellated top rail. This continues around the walls, where many of the panels bear the marks of butterfly hinges, a sure indication that the present benches are in fact cut down box pews. The mixture of medieval-looking crenellation and C18th style balusters and ramped rail made dating rather problematical. The visit was a brief one for the three of us who needed to get back to Salisbury, and I had a hasty look at the enormously long ladder leading up to the belfry, and missed the tower screen altogether! The group went on to visit the church at Coombe Bissett, to complete a memorable day. Many thanks to Gabriel Olive and to those who gave lifts to the carless.

• *Linda Hall*

*Photographs courtesy of Chris Currie.*

*OED gives Shuttlecock, 1522, used in the pastime 'Battledore & Shuttlecock'. Ed.*