

SALISBURY II STUDY DAY 4th October 2001

Gabriel Olive had kindly organised another day in and around Salisbury to view examples of period woodwork, presenting an opportunity to compare work from the earlier and later 17th century. Our first visit was to Trinity Hospital, a brick building erected in 1702. Passing through the tiled courtyard we were shown the chapel by Ed Walls, the custodian. Of particular interest were the oak stalls – unfortunately from our point of view cleaned of their original finish in 1922 - ranged on both sides of the aisle. Different treatment was applied to the panelling in the backs of the stalls; raised and fielded with stopped mouldings on the framing to the front, and left flat with scratched mouldings to the rear. The screen at the entrance to the chapel, and the priests' stalls both featured turned vase shaped balusters, mysteriously left darker after the cleaning of the woodwork. A carved panel within the altar base – under the original stone slab – aroused curiosity. It featured figures in a highly stylised landscape with a



Fig. 2 The pulpit at St. Lawrence

shell and lizard, giving rise to speculation that it might be of pilgrim origins. Expert opinion however dated its style to the late 19th century, and somewhat amateurish at that, and this was confirmed when the date 1878 and the initials M.H. were found inscribed on the back.

We next moved to a 17th century house in the Cathedral Close, where we were welcomed by the Reverend and Mrs Pugh. In the hallway were very fine wall panels with raised mouldings designed by Christopher Wren during his work in the Cathedral in 1668 and installed by the Salisbury joiner Alexander Fort, a close associate of Wren. The staircase featured panelling of an earlier date with vase shaped finials in elm, probably by Humphrey Beckham (fl. 1620-60), the notable local joiner and carver. The panels featured blocked pilasters, a favourite motif, possibly with Serlian influence. A chamber upstairs featured a fireplace of the same period with arcaded panels and split turnings. In this room was a Hepplewhite period shield-backed chair which had its original painted finish. Other items of note in the house were a very fine ebony and tortoiseshell cabinet on a later stand in the drawing room, with painted copper panels in the manner of Rubens, probably from Antwerp c.1625, and a fine panelled pine corner cupboard from the mid-18th century in the basement still with its original painted finish.

Our next visit was round the corner in the Close at The Bishops Palace, now the cathedral Choir School, where we were welcomed by Mrs Patricia Thackray, the headmaster's wife. Here we were taken up to the chapel, dating from the 15th century, and reconsecrated after the Interregnum in 1662 by Bishop Humphrey Henshman. It featured a magnificent panelled screen, of which the lower portion, along with the pews, appeared to date from around 1630, the upper portion, adorned with cherubs' heads, from the post-Restoration period. The roof was of framed joists in-filled with feather-edged boarding. We also had a view of the bishop's hall and solar, the former featuring elements of 18th century architecture and stucco decoration.

Progressing to the Cathedral, we were shown by Chris Crooks, the head verger, the Muniment Room in the Chapter House, built around 1260, with beautifully preserved original tiling. Here we were able to examine a large oak armoire, the frame made with simple mortice and tenon construction, the doors of simple boards abutted with feather edges set in to grooves with what appeared to be original sliding bolts, and clear tool marks in the interior, dating possibly from the 14th century. Also in this room was an iron bound chest mentioned in an inventory of 1448. In the Cathedral we were able to view three other chests which had been used at various times for the storage of documents and fabrics. It was suggested that the first might have come from Old Sarum and predate 1250. The heavy iron bound chest had no less than eight locks, the keys to which traditionally lay with eight different key holders. Treasurer Abraham's inventory of 1214 lists 6 iron

bound chests 'for the safe-keeping of charters and relics...one for gold and super-altar ...one in the treasury'. The 14th century fabrics fund was stored in the Treasury chest with 2 keys for the master of the fabric. In addition to the iron bound chest we viewed a late 15th century large 6 board coffer, with an enormous lock indicating a French origin, and a large chest with a clamped front dating from around 1400. Before we left the Cathedral we were shown the Dean Ralph Brideoak stall with its strange carved oak finials representing clasped hands below a spreading oak. Since the hands clasped were left-handed it was suggested that they must be those of a swordsman!

After lunch in the Cathedral Refectory we proceeded out to the church of St. Lawrence, Stratford sub Castle. Of particular interest was a finely carved panel of the Restoration period at the east end, surmounted by a pediment. Carved cherubs, fruit and flowers were set within the central circle of raised and undercut acanthus leaves, flanked by Corinthian columns. Of a slightly earlier date was the panelled pulpit (fig. 2) – again unfortunately the subject of enthusiastic renovation – clearly in the manner of Humphrey Beckham of Salisbury c.1640 with cusped arcading, the framework featuring channel mouldings and rusticated blockwork, and marguerites incorporated into the guilloche in the lower panel.

Our final port of call was the Wardenry in the village of Farley where we were welcomed by the warden's wife, Mrs Godfrey. The almshouses were constructed in 1682, at the same time as the Chelsea Hospital, by Sir Stephen Fox, the grandfather of the 18th century politician William Fox. Sir Stephen, who was the son of a local woodcutter, rose to become a Restoration court favourite who was not only prosperous – as Army Paymaster and Lord of the Treasury – but also reputedly honest. Responsible for the design and construction of the Wardenry and Almshouses was Alexander Fort, to whom payment was made in 1682 in the great book of accounts (used to this day); 'Paid to Alexander Fort Master Joyner in the Office of his Majesties Workes Surveyor of Building the Hospital & House in Farley for Severall Modes & Journeys about £50-00-00'. Of interest in the Wardenry was the differing character of the various rooms, from the simplicity of the oak panelled communal Long Room, to the grander moulding with bollection moulding in the warden's parlour up the imposing oak staircase. In a sleeping chamber on this floor was an 18th century 'achievement' stucco ceiling, featuring the Fox coat of arms, whilst above were two simple servant's rooms with sturdy braced plank doors. A visit to the contemporaneous brick church nearby completed this very full, enjoyable and informative day, with thanks to Gabriel for his flawless organisation and guidance.