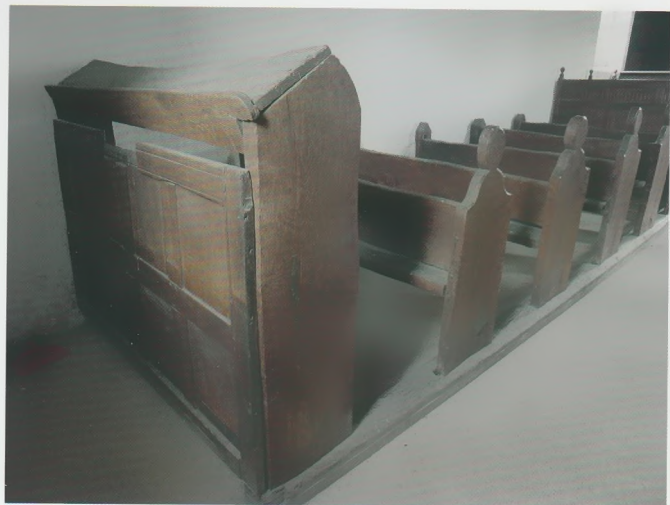


Three churches: St Michael's, Pitchford, Langley Chapel and St John the Baptist, Hughley

The first of the three churches we visited was **St Michael's, Pitchford**, a small Grade 1 church founded by Ralph de Pitchford in about 1220 and remodelled later in the thirteenth century. The rebuild of the chancel east wall in 1719 included a stone bearing the carved face of Pluto found buried on the site and probably of Roman origin. Inside is a medieval font with concave base, plain bowl and moulded top; in the chancel there were medieval decorated floor tiles either side of the altar. We were to see decorated paving tiles of similar age and design in the next two churches visited and it is highly probable that all these tiles were produced in a kiln established at Wenlock Priory. Monuments of note were a well-preserved over-life-size oak effigy of Sir John de Pitchford (died 1285) lying cross-legged on a trefoil-arcaded oak base, four very fine incised alabaster slabs commemorating the Ottley family, dated respectively 1529, 1534, 1578 and 1586 and some family hatchments. Seventeenth-century oak furnishings worthy of mention were the octagonal pulpit and tester, reader's desk with guilloche ornament and finials and communion rails with alternating turned and lozenge-section balusters and finials. Either side of the altar there is re-used sixteenth/seventeenth-century linenfold panelling.



Octagonal pulpit, seventeenth century, at St Michael's Pitchford. *Photo Jeremy Rycroft*



High pew at Langley Chapel, probably for musicians, seventeenth century. *Photo Jeremy Bate*

Langley Chapel is an appealing solitary manorial chapel largely dating from the post-medieval period and thankfully unscathed by the ravages of Victorian restorers. The chancel, paved with decorated medieval tiles, has a rare early seventeenth-century pre-Laudian layout with continuous oak benches, kneelers and reading shelves to three sides of the replica altar table (the original was stolen in 1969). The nave is simply decorated with roses and fleurs-de-lys on a plaster frieze between the roof and south wall. The most impressive feature is the set of early seventeenth-century oak fittings namely the square pulpit with two back walls (as if it were a square room with two walls removed) and square tester, a smaller movable pulpit matching the large ornate enclosed squire's pews, other smaller box pews and a high pew at the west end probably for musicians. There are open benches at the back, with primitive disc-like poppy-heads, for servants and farm labourers from the now demolished medieval Langley Hall where only the free-standing gatehouse remains.

St John the Baptist, Hughley, a small attractive parochial church dating from the thirteenth century with fourteenth/seventeenth-century additions and restored by Norman Shaw in 1871-2. It has some fine late



Carved oak rood screen, early fifteenth century, at St John the Baptist, Hughley. *Photo Jeremy Rycroft*

fourteenth-century stained glass and well-preserved floor tiles, still with clear cut designs of the same period. The outstanding internal feature is the early fifteenth-century carved oak rood screen almost identical to three others in the Marches and probably removed from Buildwas Abbey following the dissolution of the monasteries. The screen, said to be the finest in Shropshire, is richly carved throughout. The other fittings and furniture of note are the late seventeenth-century carved oak pulpit, medieval long oak chest, pillar piscina (probably fifteenth-century) and a statue pedestal resting on the carved stone head of a woman.

Robert and Anna Holland