

Four churches and a country house in south-west Shropshire

We first visited St Edith's, Eaton under Heywood, on the wooded flank of Wenlock Edge. The nave, dating from 1300, has a later timbered roof and the chancel has well decorated squared panelling, with large bosses and



The pulpit at St Edith's, Eaton-under-Heywood. *Photo Jeremy Rycroft*



All Saints', Neenton, chest, early sixteenth century, with carved front showing lozenges, quatrefoils and flamboyant gothic tracery; two child's chairs made in the local tradition by Thomas Amies, c. 1880s. *Photo Jeremy Bate*

masks. The entrance to the chancel has two carved panels, possibly from a pre-reformation screen. The exceptional pulpit reputedly came from 'the north', has linenfold panels and punched lacework detail. In the chancel are two seventeenth-century oak armchairs and a slim chest. A small poor box dated 1717 hangs on the wall. Oak pews were fitted in 1869 and previous seating arrangements were not known. Small wood panels carved with sets of oak leaves were acting as skirting boards by the north door.

St Laurence's, Ludlow – This grand church, of cathedral size, prospered from local wool, called the Golden Fleeces of England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and financed through The Palmers' Guild, provides unique woodwork and glass, and was not devastated by the Reformation. The screen entrance to choir and chancel hides choir stalls with 32 misericords, reputedly the finest set in a parish church. The poppy heads are also adorned with exceptional features. The choir ceiling adds to the atmosphere of wealth. Also a rare altar canopy adorns the north chapel altar. The decoration of the stall backs and canopies is Victorian.

St Mary's, Bitterley dates from the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, and was greatly restored in 1876. It has a vaulted ceiling, impressive chancel screen and a very long chest. Two seventeenth-century oak armchairs are in the chancel.

Bitterley Court, seat of the Walcot family, is now owned and restored by James Wheeler, including two unusual oak fire surrounds with pieces from the church, and is traditionally furnished throughout. Recently David Ackroyd was commissioned to make a set of ecclesiastical oak chairs and a long dining table.

All Saints', Neenton is a late nineteenth-century church with another interesting medieval chest. Two traditional child's oak armchairs by Thomas Amies for his sons Frank and James (initials on the back). He also erected the pulpit in 1892. Frank died at Arras in the first world war and a window is dedicated in his memory.

Peter Stone, with help from Jeremy's fulsome Conference briefing notes



Sometimes known as 'Simon the Cellarer', this is one of a number of misericords at St Laurence's, Ludlow, that depict medieval life. *Photo Jeremy Rycroft*