

# SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES ON THE BENCH-ENDS IN ALL SAINTS' CHURCH, TRULL, AND THE WOOD-CARVER SIMON WARMAN

BY MARK McDERMOTT

## BENCH-ENDS

In a previous paper on the history of the bench-ends in Trull church<sup>1</sup> it was argued that the seating in the church includes a series of bench seats installed in 1863, many of which have either reused 16th-century carved bench-ends or new ends incorporating reused carved panels. It was also argued that these reused materials seem to have survived from early seating which had been displaced by box pews during the 18th and early-19th centuries, although it is possible that some of the carved panels may have formed part of a rood loft constructed in the 1530s. The purpose of this note is to draw attention to some illustrations in the possession of the Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society which throw further light on the survival of this carved work before its reuse in 1863.

The illustrations include a group of pen and wash drawings on two paper sheets (Plates 1 & 2).<sup>2</sup> The drawings on one sheet are annotated 'Backs of benches. Trull Church Somersetshire', with a mark (which may include the letter W) and the date 22 May 1844; and each sheet has the name or signature of J.(?) W. Archer at the lower right-hand corner, in a different hand from the annotation. Archer may merely have collected and mounted these drawings, although a collection of Somerset illustrations assembled by the Taunton artist W. F. Elliot in the 19th century included work by Archer himself: conceivably the Trull drawings (and some surviving Archer watercolours now in private hands) were part of this collection, which seems to have been largely dispersed.<sup>3</sup> J. W. Archer was presumably John Wykeman Archer (1808–1864)<sup>4</sup> whose work included many illustrations of historic features in London and elsewhere.

Whoever the artist was, the repetition of one of the designs (the emblems of the Passion) in two of the drawings suggests that he changed his mind about the representation of that particular carving (one version is shown in isolation, the other in context) but this does not necessarily indicate a major interval of time between the two drawings.

One of the drawings in this group represents the linenfold panelling which still survives at the west end of the north aisle, with the inscribed date 1560 and the name of the carver, Simon Warman. The other drawings reveal that several of the most outstanding of the carvings reused in 1863 (including the well-known 'processional' figures) had occupied two sequences of continuous panelling. The reference to 'backs of benches' may, however, be a rather loose description of the location of the panelling, some of which, in the 1850s at any rate, was evidently attached to other features, for in 1853 a writer commented that 'at the back of the reading-desk . . . is some fine carving, emblematical of the passion',<sup>5</sup> and in

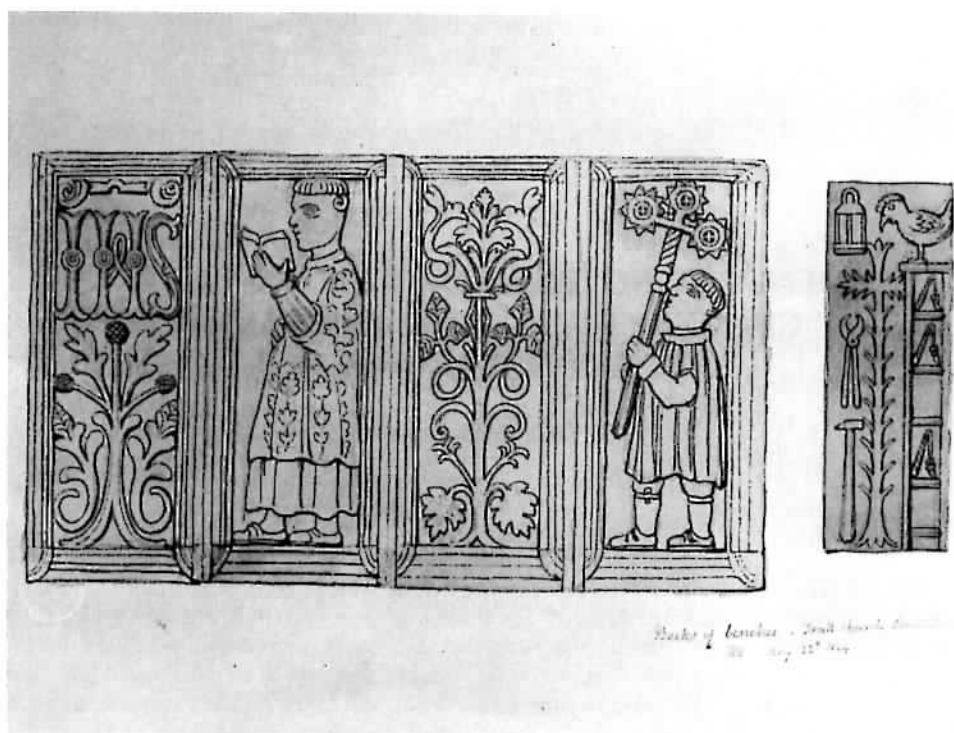


Plate 1. Pen and wash drawings of wood carvings in Trull church, by J. W. Archer(?), 1844 *From the Society's collection.*

1856 the architect C. E. Giles in his report on the church observed that 'there appears to be a processional group . . . now attached to the reading pew and screen'.<sup>6</sup>

All the carved designs in this group of drawings can be readily identified within the church today with the exception of the multi-leaved plant at the end of the sequence of six panels, although plant motifs reminiscent of this illustration do occur on certain bench-ends. Interestingly, the processional figures alternated with contrasting panels in 1844, rather than forming a continuous sequence as might be supposed. It is uncertain, however, whether these sequences of panels in 1844 had survived unaltered from the 16th century or had subsequently been assembled from discarded materials.

Another illustration is a pen and wash drawing of the pulpit, dated 1849, by F. G. Lemann (Plate 3).<sup>7</sup> The drawing and the caption are mounted separately on a single sheet of paper which is endorsed 'J. R. Bramble Collection. Pres[ente]d by Mr H. Stuart Thompson, 1920'.<sup>8</sup> In his report in 1856 C. E. Giles commented that the base of the pulpit was 'made up from the debris of the screen'; and another writer observed in 1882 that 'some of [the] bench ends were found under the pulpit in 1862'.<sup>9</sup> Lemann's illustration throws more light on these statements. The pulpit now has a moulded stone base, but in 1849 there was a series of ill-matched carved panels forming a skirt around the base. Perhaps these were 'found' in 1862 in the sense of being *recognised* as former bench-ends. Some of the motifs on the panels are echoed in the designs of the carved work on the seating in the church today, but none seems to tally precisely. Lemann's illustration of the upper part of the pulpit and of the adjacent pier and screen is inaccurate in some of its details, however, and the represen-

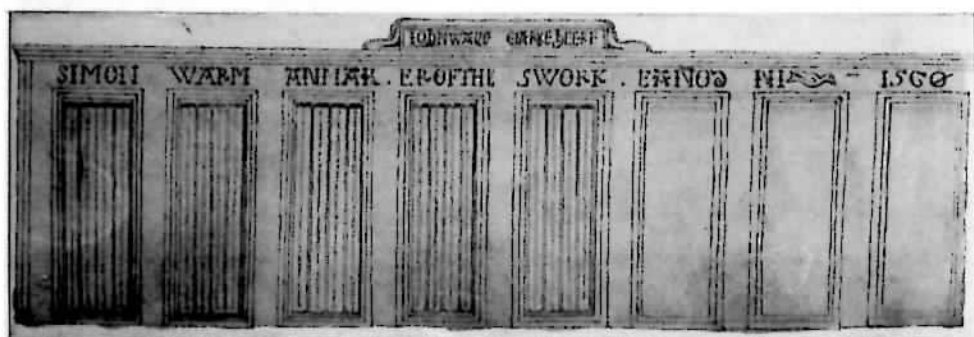
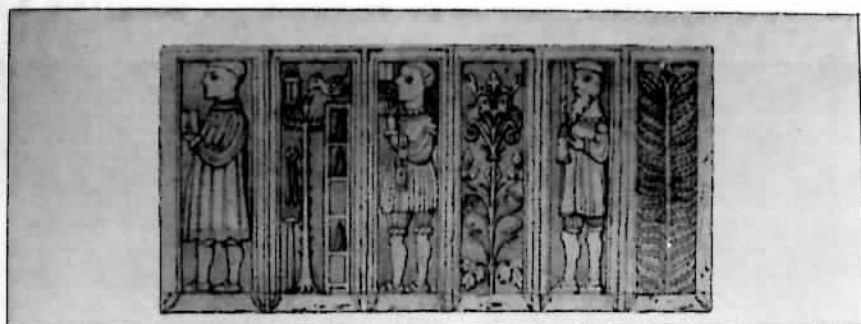


Plate 2. Pen and wash drawings of wood carvings in Trull church, by J. W. Archer(?), 1844 *From the Society's collection.*

tation of the lower panels may therefore be unreliable in precise terms. The illustration nevertheless provides useful information about how some of the redundant carved woodwork in the church had been reused before 1863.

### SIMON WARMAN

In the previous paper on the Trull bench-ends it was briefly noted that the wood-carver Simon Warman, who was responsible for some of the woodwork in the church, has been identified with a Simon Warman of Bicknoller who was born before 1527, when he was already married, and died in 1585.<sup>10</sup> Warman was buried at Bicknoller on 27 August 1585 and his wife Joan on 28 July 1582.<sup>11</sup> Evidence for their longevity includes the record that in March 1570/1 they had claimed for their lives successively a tenement containing twelve acres of old auster by a 'copy' granted on 16 May 1527,<sup>12</sup> and that reversion had been granted in 1552 to two daughters, Agatha and Edith, and to Simon's nephew, Walter.<sup>13</sup>

The references to Simon Warman of Bicknoller certainly coincide with the period of the wood-carvings attributed to the craftsman of that name, and Bicknoller is within an area, on and around the Quantock Hills, in which his work has been identified.<sup>14</sup> If Simon Warman of Bicknoller is indeed the wood-carver of that name, it is apparent that he did not depend for his livelihood on his craft skills alone. In addition to the 12-acre holding mentioned

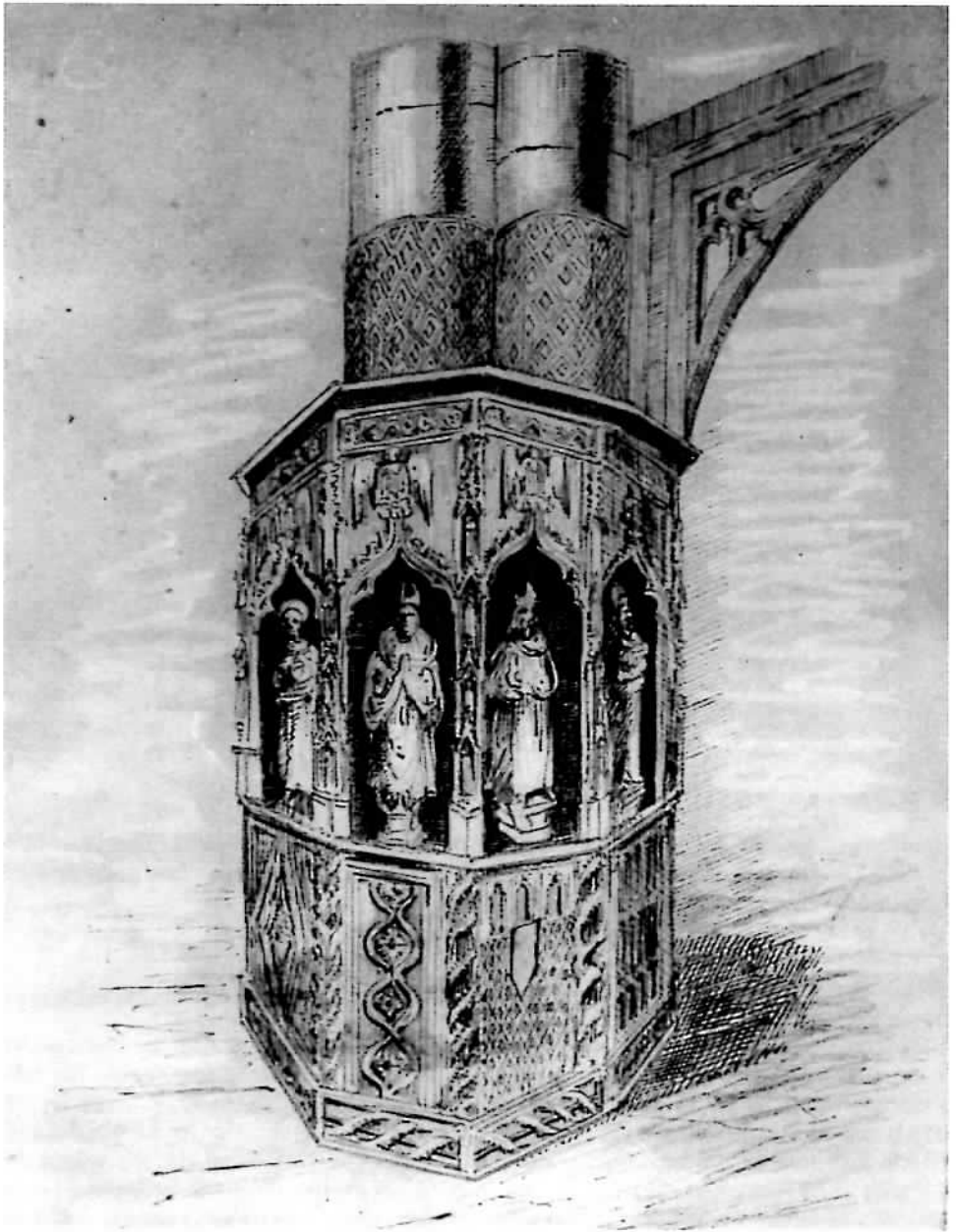


Plate 3. Pen and wash drawings of the pulpit in Trull church, by F. G. Lemann, 1849 *From the Society's collection.*

above, the manorial records for Bicknoller also refer to payments made by Warman in 1552, 1565 and 1567 for the right to cultivate additional land on the Quantocks.<sup>15</sup> Warman's wood-carving commissions presumably did not ensure consistent full-time work, and the combination of craftsmanship and farming by which he evidently made a living is an interesting example of 'dual economy' in this period.

The interior of Keeper's Cottage, West Bradley (detached), includes a datestone attached, immediately below an inserted first-floor ceiling, to the side of a roof-truss at the upper end of a former medieval open hall.<sup>16</sup> The stone is inscribed AD 1583, with the initials S W separated by a fleur-de-lis, above a double-headed eagle. The form of the inscription seems to be authentic for the date, although it is uncertain whether the stone is in its original position. There has been conjecture that some bench-ends in nearby Alford church may have been the work of Simon Warman and that the initials and bird symbol on the datestone may refer to him.<sup>17</sup> The date 1583 falls within Warman's life-span and he certainly used bird motifs, as evidenced by some of the carved woodwork in Trull church (a bird occurs on the inscribed linenfold panelling mentioned above, and two birds are associated with the letter W on one of the bench-ends), whilst a double-headed eagle on a bench-end at Cheddon Fitzpaine has also been attributed to him.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the Alford bench-ends are poppy-headed (not square-headed as in the work attributed to Warman elsewhere) and lack the foliate edge-mouldings which have been described as characteristic of Warman's work.<sup>19</sup> If the datestone does refer to Warman, it remains to be explained why the initials of a wood-carver, well-known for his work in churches, should appear on a stone inside a domestic building at some distance from the parish in which he was a copyholder and where, two years after the date on the stone, he was buried.

## REFERENCES

- 1 Mark McDermott, 'Early Bench-Ends in All Saints' Church, Trull', *SANH*, 138 (1994), 117–30.
- 2 Nos. 5700 & 5701 in a cabinet draw labelled 'Oversize topography: Somerset 2' in the Society's library.
- 3 Sale catalogue (1897) in the Society's library, ref. P/E 2 16. The T. W. Archer referred to in the catalogue is almost certainly J. W. Archer.
- 4 M. Bryan, *Dictionary of Painters and Engravers* (1886); H. L. Mallalieu, *The Dictionary of British Watercolour Artists up to 1920* (1976).
- 5 *Somerset County Gazette*, 5 November 1853.
- 6 SRO, D/P/tru 8/2/1.
- 7 No. 12615 in the Society's 'Topographical Collection'. The writer has been unable to further identify this artist.
- 8 Lt. Col. J. R. Bramble (1841–1908) was a prominent member of the Society whose interests included church architecture and heraldry. His obituary is in *Proc. SANHS*, 54 (1908), 160–63.
- 9 J. H. Parker, *et al.*, 'On the Carved Bench Ends in All Saints Church, Trull, near Taunton', *Archaeologia*, 48 (1885), 340–46.
- 10 Robin Bush, *Somerset The Complete Guide* (1994), 36.
- 11 SRO, D/P/bic 2/1/2. Robin Bush initially identified these references in the Bicknoller registers and also the following references in the manorial records for Bicknoller.
- 12 SRO, DD/CC 110002.
- 13 SRO, DD/CC 110002 & 131922/2.
- 14 P. Poyntz Wright, *The Rural Benchends of Somerset* (1983), 1, 160–61 and *passim*. J. C. D. Smith, *Church Woodcarvings: A West Country Study* (1969), 55–7.
- 15 SRO, DD/CC 131922/2, 131923/2 & 131925a/2.
- 16 *Somerset Villages: The Vernacular Houses with Farms and Farmsteads of Alford and Lovington* (Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group: 1986), 36. The grid reference of Keeper's Cottage is ST 600325.

17 *Ibid.* 37.

18 P. Poyntz Wright, *op. cit.*, 54. The moulded surround on this bend-end has affinities with, but is not identical to, that on work attributed to Warman in Trull, Broomfield and elsewhere.

19 *Ibid.*, 1–2 and *passim*.

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