

Front Elevation of Pulpit, St. Michael's Church, St. Albans.  
From a measured Drawing by F. W. Kinneir Tarte.

**St. Michael's Pulpit.**

BY F. W. KINNEIR TARTE, M.S.A.

This gorgeous, elaborately carved, and beautiful oak pulpit, is in a most excellent state of preservation, and is, I may say, almost intact. Several of the large black ornaments at the angles, and on the lower panels, are lost; and again, four of the candles in the tiny panels at the angles immediately below the cornice, under the bookboard, are missing.

I am very greatly indebted to the Vicar, Mr. Bicknell, for kindly searching the Churchwardens' Accounts for me, in order to find out whether there is any mention of a new pulpit. No reference is made to this, however; only of the small items which I shall give you later on. From this I gather that, probably, no pulpit was erected during the period of these accounts. The Churchwardens' Accounts date from the year 1625 to 1740-50, with the exception of the years 1640-45, during which period no accounts were entered, but I think it extremely improbable that the pulpit was erected during the missing years, the work being, in my opinion, too early for that date.

Bloxam, in "Gothic Architecture," says that pulpits of the reign of Edward the Sixth are very rare, nor are those of the reign of Queen Elizabeth at all



Scale—  
quarter  
full  
size.

One of the  
Carved  
Supporters  
under the  
Sounding-  
board.

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common. By the Canons of 1603, the Churchwardens, or Quest-Men were to provide in every Church a "comely and decent pulpit." He also says, "that the canopy or sounding-board appears to have been introduced in the early part of the 17th century, and gives an instance in 1626-7, that the Churchwardens of Grimston, Leicestershire, were presented for not providing a cushion and making a canopy or cover of wainscot over the pulpit."

This pulpit is so complete that it has its sounding-board and also a fine wrought-iron hour-glass stand.

From the Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Michael's, it appears that in 1628-31-32, there are items "for an hour glass, 8d."; in 1633, "altering the pulpit cushion," 2s.; in 1659, "mending the pulpit cushion," 1s.; in 1663, "mat for the pulpit"; in 1667-72, "mending the cushion," 1s. and 8d.; and in 1680, "the (hour) glass frame gilding," 2s. 6d.

It is now several years since my interest has been aroused by the crowned rose panel in the back, supporting the sounding-board, and I have always taken this for the Badge of Queen Elizabeth, whose badges were a Tudor rose, crowned falcon and sceptre. The badges of the reigning sovereigns, as I have pointed out before, were very frequently used in the decorative work of that particular sovereign's reign, so much so that I have found on several occasions, the date of work may be closely arrived at by the badge being worked into the design.

Now the most important and most conspicuous carved panel in this pulpit is the beautiful panel representing "a crowned Tudor rose," the flower with its stalk and leaves being finished in base with an ornament or vase. (See front elevation and also detail A).

With regard to the crowned falcon, I do not know whether we may go so far as to consider the supporters to the sounding-board to be falcons (it will be seen, on reference to the front elevation, that they are on either side the "crowned rose," see also detail in letterpress), but they certainly are birds with wings and tail-feathers. If we closely examine the carved panel immediately below the crowned rose on the front elevation, and also the detail C, it



Scale of Inches



2

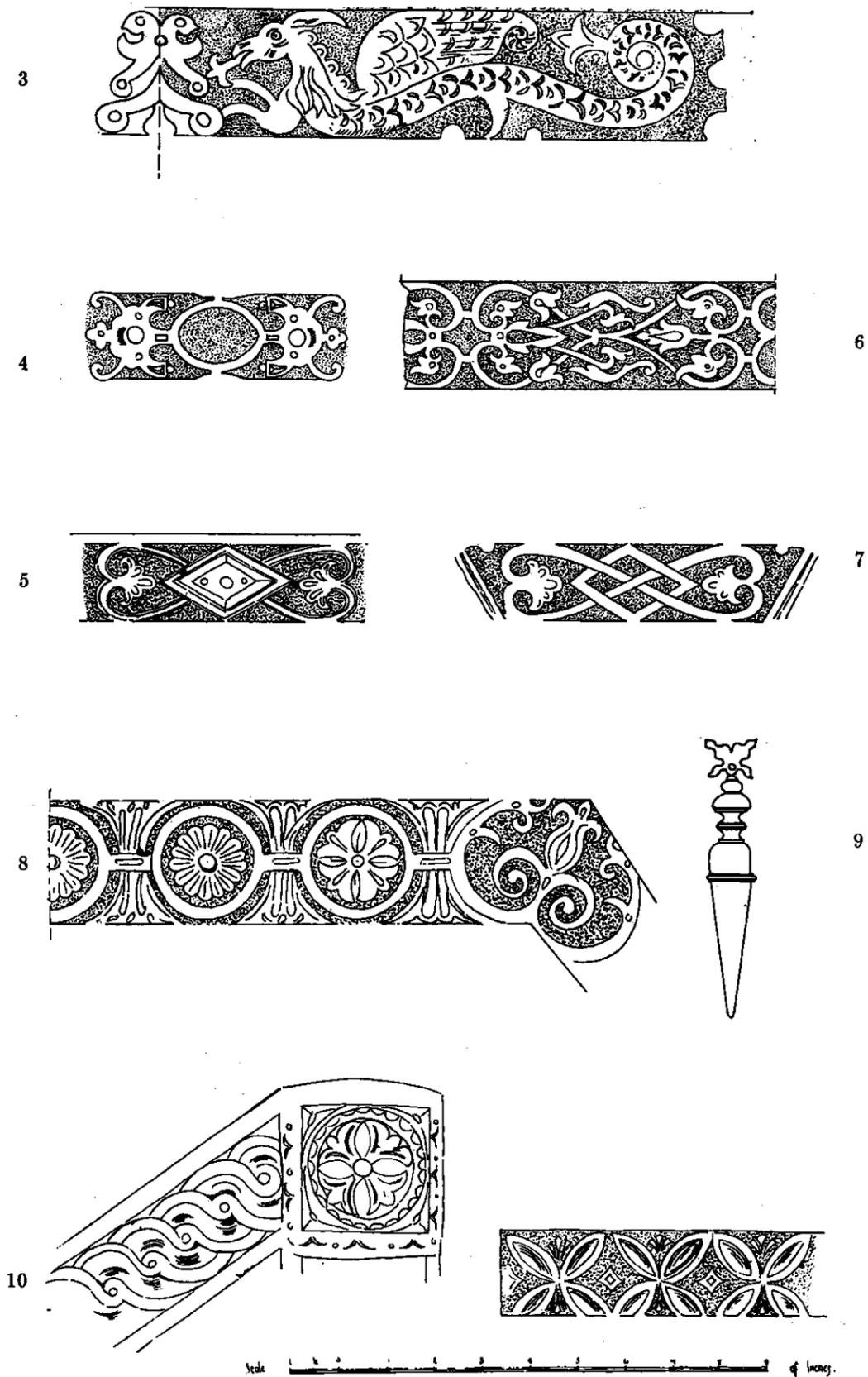
**Details from St. Michael's Pulpit.**

1. Detail A. Crowned Rose Panel on back of Sounding Board.

2. Panel above Crowned Rose Panel.

From measured Drawings by F. W. Kinneir Tarte.



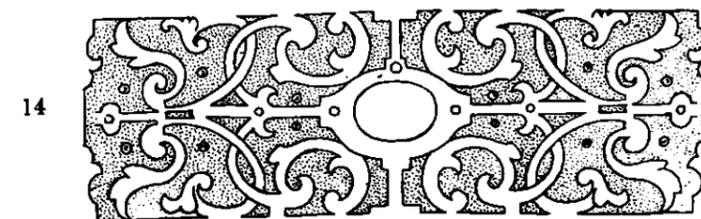
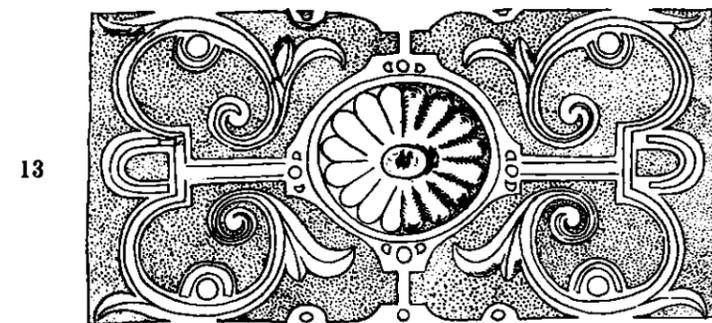
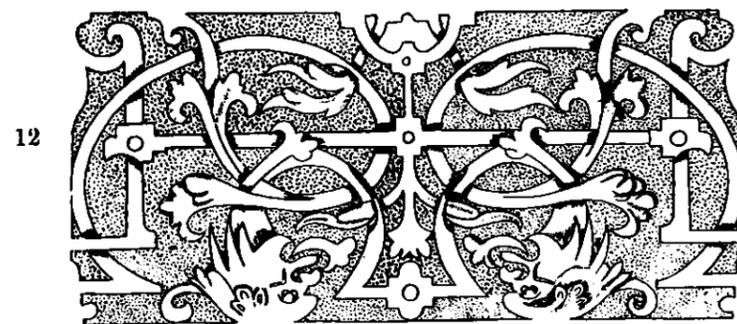
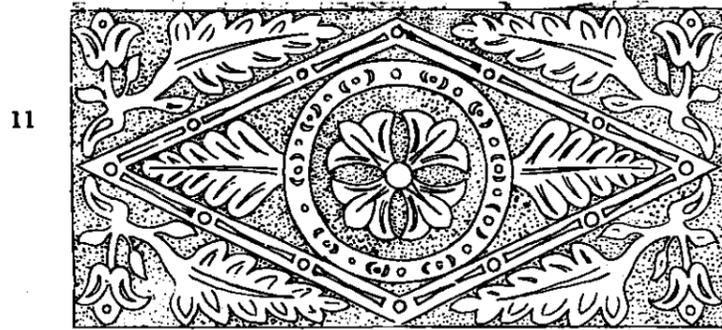


**Details from St. Michael's Pulpit and Sounding Board.**

3. On edge of Sounding Board.      4 and 6. On angles of base.  
 5, 7 and 8. On Sounding Board.      9. Candle under Bookboard.  
 10. Newel to Stairs.

From measured Drawings by F. W. Kinneir Tarte.





**Details from St. Michael's Pulpit.**  
 11. Detail D. Panel at base of Pulpit.  
 12. Detail C. Panel under Crowned Rose panel.  
 13. Detail E. Panel under Book Board.  
 14. Panel on Book Board.  
 From measured Drawings by F. W. Kinneir Tarte.





The Pulpit at St. Michael's Church, St. Albans.  
From a Sketch by F. G. Kitton.



is at least striking, that we should find the outside portion of the design, on either side of the central ornament, to represent the letter "E." It may, of course, be an accident, but it is a coincidence nevertheless. I call your attention also to the very beautiful strap-work panels, details D. E. and others, which, I think, belong to the date of Queen Elizabeth. In many instances, in the rich carving of the cornice, the enrichments in the arch around the crowned rose (detail A.), and in other places, the rose is present.

The Badges of James I., Charles I., Charles II., and James II., were a thistle and rose dimidiated and crowned, but I have searched this pulpit very carefully, without having found the presence of the thistle, which became quite a common ornament after the accession of James I.

I believe, however, that the bookboard and the brackets supporting it, are of a later date. These brackets are planted on the margins of the strap-work panels below, but the panels were evident never intended to have their margins covered in this manner. The carving on both the brackets, and the carved panels on the bookboard, are much coarser, and I do not think were carved by nearly such a skilled workman as was the rest of the work.

To sum up, I venture to say that I believe the pulpit belongs to the Elizabethan era, and not, as is generally supposed, to the Jacobean period. It would not be strange to find an Elizabethan pulpit in St. Michael's Church, for the Queen paid visits to Gorhambury in the years 1571, 1573, and 1577; and what could have been more fitting than to erect a carved oak pulpit in the Church, to commemorate the visits paid by her to the neighbourhood?

In 1846, the Rev. James Brogden read a paper on St. Michael's Church, before this Society, in which he states, "that the richly carved pulpit and sounding-board have been cleaned, varnished, and restored to a state of decent appearance, and a fringe-covering, concealing some brackets, removed."

I have, in conclusion, to thank Mr. F. G. Kitton for kindly allowing me to use his sketch of this pulpit.