

THE ADAM

Part 2: Puritans, wit

by John F

After considering the dial and the rather crude movement of the unusual lantern clock in the first part of this article, attention is now concentrated on its unique brass corner pillars, each cast with a male figure and other features, **figures 17 and 18**.

These pillars are cast in one piece, with no separate finials or feet. The iron plates are riveted to two lugs cast at the rear

Part 2 of 3

of each pillar, which have been made specifically for a clock and not originally intended for any other purpose. So we can dismiss any suggestion that the clock was made by recycling various pieces of scrap metal, though the dial was certainly made from brass sheet that had once been part of some other item.

Initially it was thought that the figure was a smaller version of the Caryatids (female) or Atlantes (male) often found on ancient classical architecture and seventeenth-century carved oak furniture, to act as supports for a cornice or entablature. But none of them are similar to the figure on the clock and usually only show the upper part of the body



Figure 17. Top half of the pillars with a male figure, naked apart from breeches and boots.



Figure 18. Lower part of the pillars with a cross and the Devil's head.



Figure 19. A typical male figure found on seventeenth-century carved oak furniture.



Figure 20. Life-size figure found on the portal of the Split, Croatia.

supported on a tall plinth, **figure 19**.

After extensive searching and consulting experts in many different disciplines, it was found that this semi-clothed figure is not known on any other item of metalware, furniture, sculpture, ceramics, in architecture or archaeology.

It consists of a man with a large head, oval face, flat nose and a bald forehead to reveal hair at the top and sides. His arms and hands are in the 'Venus pudica' or modesty position, which can be seen on Greek and Roman statues and also Botticelli's famous painting 'The Birth of

M CLOCK

ches and the devil

Robey, UK



Life-size statue of Adam on the west door of the choir of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de la Salette, near Grenoble, France, carved in 1240.




Figure 21. Adam and Eve on a twelfth-century capital at Abbaye de la Sauve Majeure, near Bordeaux.

Venus'. He is naked, apart from breeches and boots, but it would have been very unusual for his spindly arms, legs and body to be depicted as uncovered in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His breeches are padded out at the top, with a row of five large buttons down the

outside of the right leg and one on the inside of the left leg. He is wearing 'short boots' as used by agricultural workers and labourers, rather than the more fashionable long boots or shoes. Below the figure is simple incised decoration, including a large saltire cross, while at

the base is the Devil's head with scrolling horns amid flames.

Without discussing all the discarded theories of who he represented the most feasible suggestion is that he is Adam after his expulsion from the Garden of Eden, but wearing contemporary breeches rather than a fig leaf, a loincloth or a skirt of leaves, which is how he is usually depicted. Above his head are what may be branches of the Tree of Knowledge, tied together to form a finial to which the bell frame is attached. The saltire cross is a well-known symbol to ward off evil spirits or malevolent forces that might interfere with the mechanism.

The identity of the figure becomes apparent when the pose of his arms and hands in the modesty position is compared to other representations of Adam. This same pose occurs in medieval images of Adam and Eve that exist throughout the Christian world, such as stone carvings, **figures 20 and 21**, as well as in later printed books, **figure 22**. It is even found on a seventeenth-century English painted chest of drawers, **figure 23**, where not only is Adam in the modesty pose, he has a very large fig leaf, while above his head are what are probably meant to represent the trunk and leaves of the Tree of Knowledge, 

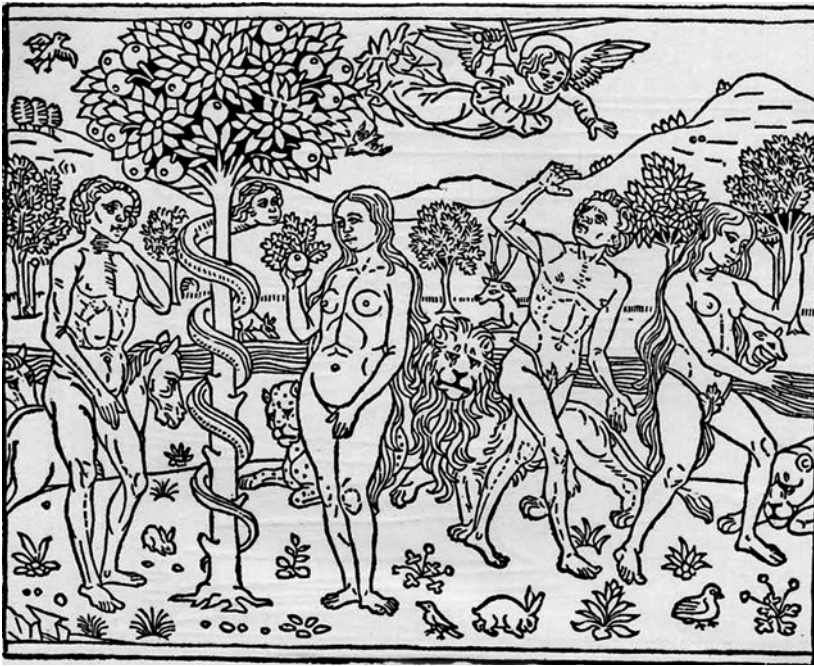


Figure 22 (above). Woodcut of 1492 showing Adam and Eve in Paradise, naked before the Fall, and wearing fig leaves.



Figure 23 (left). Adam painted on a chest of drawers, c1675. Photograph by J Chinnery.



vaguely similar to those on the clock's pillars.

In Protestant England one group of people for whom the story of Adam and Eve played a special and significant role was the Puritans. Whereas nonconformists, such as Baptists, Independents (later known as Congregationalists), Unitarians and other sects, wanted to break away from the Anglican Church, Puritans wanted to reform it from within by doing away with the corrupting influences of ritual and the hierarchy of bishops. Adam and Eve's banishment from

the Garden of Eden played a large part in Puritan views of Salvation and reminded them of their original sins. It also supported their belief that women were inferior, both spiritually and intellectually, subordinate to men and that all women were suspected of evil, some even being witches. This is why there is no image of Eve on the clock.

The Bible story of Adam and Eve, as told in Genesis Chapter III, recounts that after their banishment from the Garden of Eden (known as the 'Fall'), they covered their nakedness with clothes made from leaves. In Protestant England the version of the Bible most widely used was the Geneva Bible, translated in 1560. In this translation, influenced by Calvinistic susceptibilities, Verse 7 reads: 'Then the eyes of them both were opened and they sewed figge leaves together and made themselves breeches'.

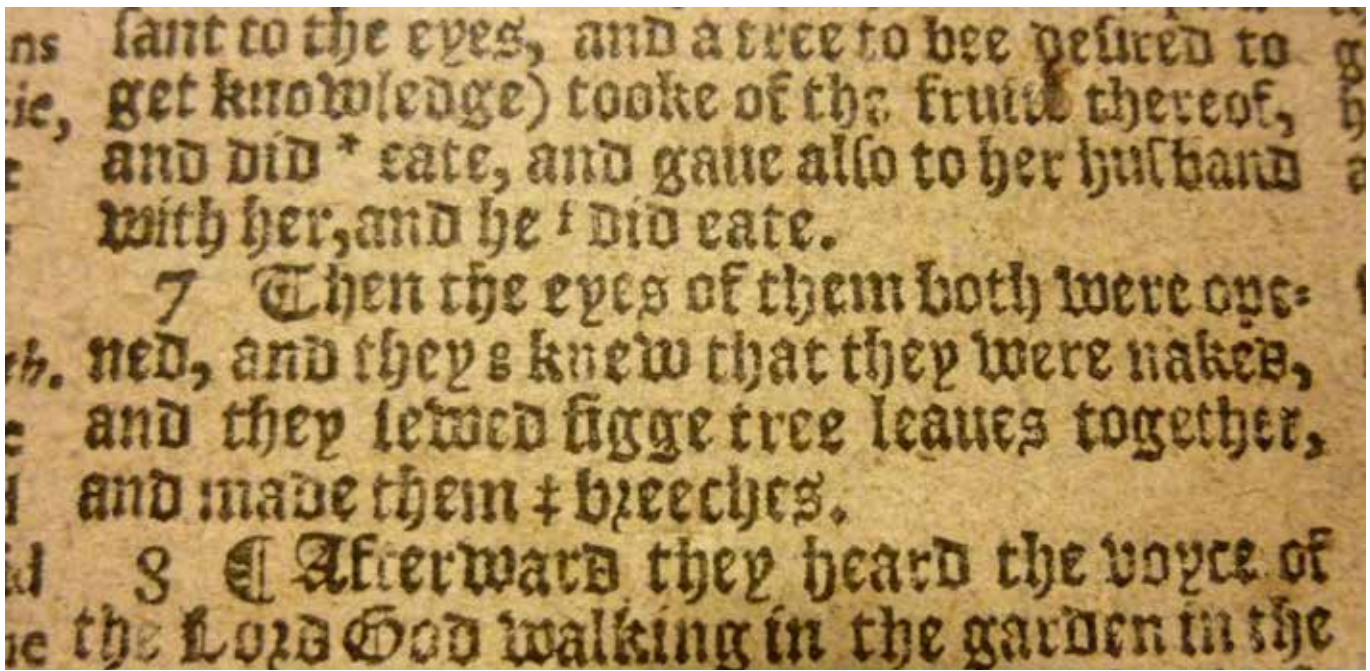


Figure 24 (above). *The Breeches Bible showing Genesis, Chapter III, verse 7.*

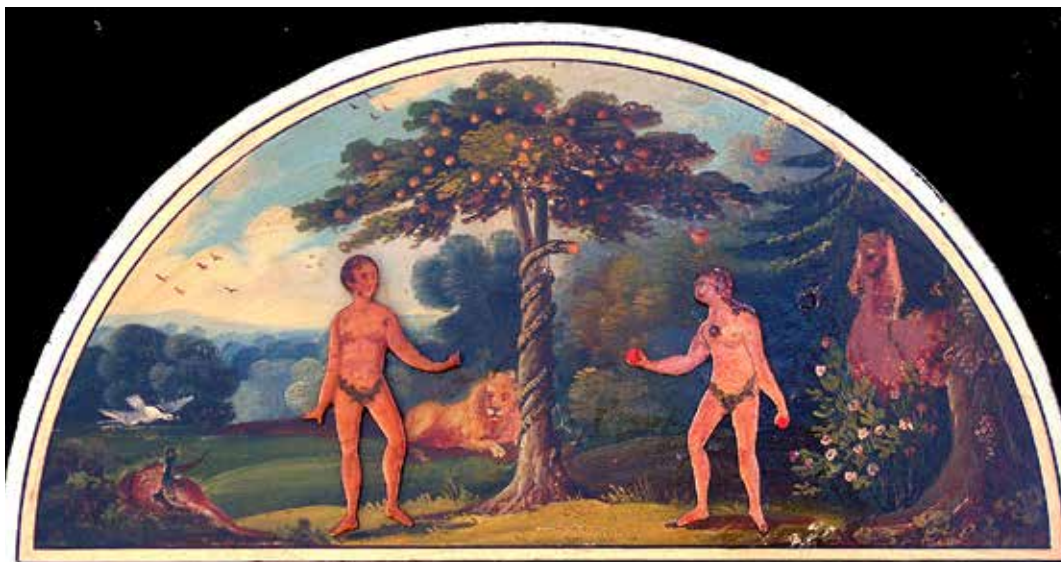


Figure 25 (far left). *Stained glass window in Canterbury Cathedral, c1176, depicting Adam working the land.*

Figure 26 (left). *Simple Adam and Eve automaton in the arch of a longcase clock, c1840. Only Eve's arm moves.*

As a result of this mistranslation, this version became known as the Breeches Bible, **figure 24**. It was the version taken by the Pilgrims to the New World in 1620, after which it was also called the Pilgrim's Bible. The Breeches Bible was reissued many times until 1644 and copies were still being used throughout the seventeenth century. Hence the concept of Adam wearing breeches was ingrained in the minds of many Protestants, especially Puritans. Since the words of the Bible were accepted literally by most people at this time, a figure of Adam wearing breeches would not have appeared incongruous, even though no other such image (either printed or in any other form) is known.

On this clock not only would the pose and the wearing of breeches reinforce Puritan morals, but even the labourer's boots had a religious significance,

especially to Puritans. Some stained-glass church windows depict Adam toiling alone, usually digging, **figure 25**, and the portrayal of him as a peasant with work being his curse represents the fate of humanity exiled from Eden, and this view confirmed Puritan work ethics.

All the costume experts consulted during the earlier investigation of this clock remarked on his deliberately unfashionable footwear to indicate that he was an ordinary working man. The lower part of Adam's legs are noticeably thin to emphasise his boots. This is a further allusion to the Puritan beliefs that after the Fall Adam's fate was to work as a peasant.

Images of Adam and Eve also appear in the arch of some late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century longcase clocks, usually with painted dials. These normally take the form of a simple automaton

with Eve's swinging arm offering an apple to Adam, **figure 26**, whose arm may also move, with the serpent appearing to slither round the tree on more mechanically complex versions. These are unlikely to have been used to promote a religious message; rather they were included just for the novelty of seeing arms swinging in time with the movement of the pendulum and the ticking of the escapement.

The large saltire cross gives an insight into other beliefs and superstitions commonly held by a large proportion of the population, including the maker of this clock. Since medieval times and throughout the seventeenth century and later, there was a widespread belief in evil spirits, witches and other supernatural influences that might cause harm to individuals and their way of life. A common means that was thought to



Figure 27. X-mark on the latch of a cellar door, c1720.

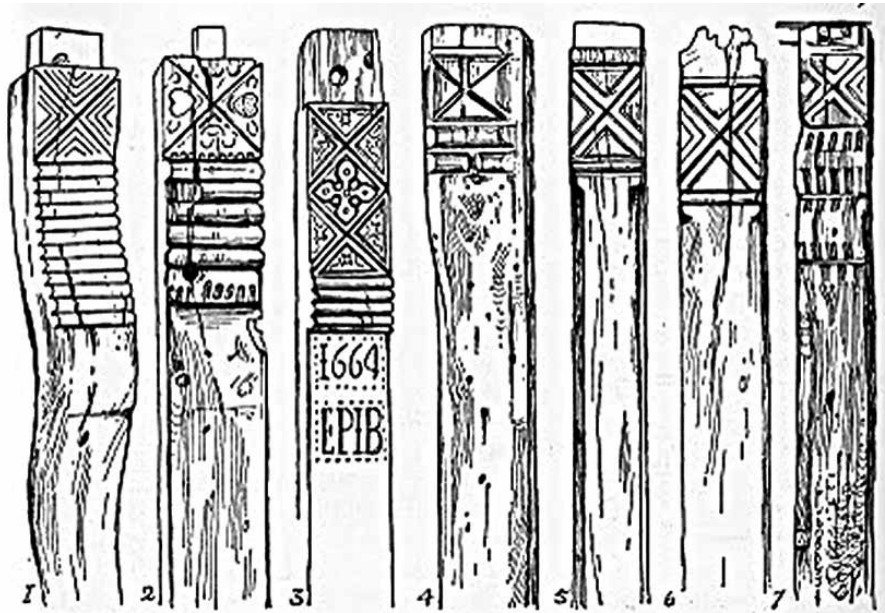


Figure 28. Witch averting marks carved on the timber posts supporting fireplaces in Lancashire.



Figure 29. The Puritans believed that the Devil could appear in many forms.

provide protection from such imagined malevolent forces, was to put apotropaic (evil-averting) marks at the openings of buildings through which evil spirits might enter, such as on door and window frames, latches and hinges.

The example in **figure 27** is on a cellar door, which would have been regarded as an entry point for harmful spirits to come in through the vents, so a protective mark was included on the latch. Since chimneys had to remain open they were thought to be especially vulnerable, so symbols popularly known as 'witch averting marks' often occur on chimney beams, or the timbers of fireplaces, **figure 28**.

The most commonly found symbol on metalwork over many centuries is an X cross, often bounded by a single or double line on two or four sides to represent the frame of the opening, with the cross acting as a 'no entry' sign. On the Adam clock the saltire was used to prevent evil spirits from upsetting the mechanism and causing unexplained malfunction, especially since one at each corner would provide extra protection.

While these marks have long been recorded on buildings, it is only since research began on the Adam clock has it been realised that what were once regarded as purely decorative, are actually symbols to ward off evil spirits. Some lantern clocks and posted-frame 30-hour longcase clocks have Xs filed into the hammer spring and/or the hammer stop.

The grotesque Devil's head with curling horns and flames represents another aspect of Puritan belief. Puritans believed that Satan and his agents were active in causing evil, **figure 29**, and responsible for many of the hardships they encountered in their daily lives, but he could be resisted by leading a simple and pious existence. They also believed that some women were completely lost to God and had turned to witchcraft to serve the Devil. This was at the height of Puritan fears and terror of the power of witchcraft, when even King James I encouraged their persecution. This culminated in the hysteria of witch trials that took place in both Europe and the American colonies.

The final part of the article on this unique early English clock will discuss where and when it might have been made and by whom. Strong circumstantial evidence points to just one localised region of England and even suggests a possible, or even probable, clockmaker. 📍