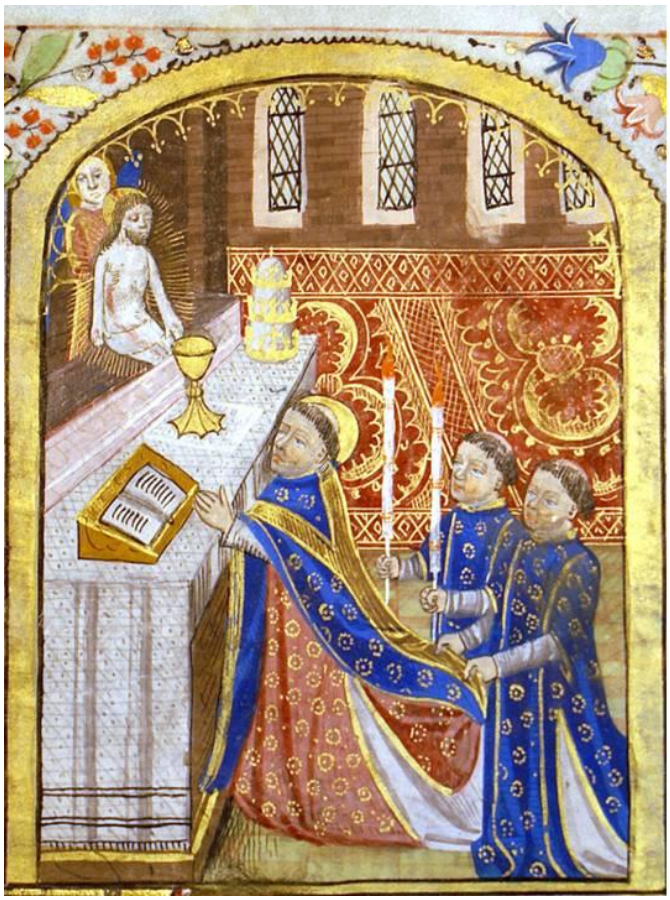
Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting us to come to this remarkable town to talk to you about some aspects of our research. You know the history of this town far better than us of course, and I don't need to tell you about its importance as the capital of salt production in the early C14 – you only have to look at the church to see what wealth that represented at precisely that period when it was being built in its present form. Nor do I need to say much about the three major guilds whose apogee in 1533 is clearly documented in Valor Ecclesiasticus and in the doom-laden Chantry Certificates of 1547. Nor probably how once the church guilds were forced to abandon their religious and educational work, this town, like so many others in the kingdom, entered into a long slide downhill, which I dare say it doesn't always feel has completely ended yet.

This afternoon, however, we are going to look back at the glory days when civic life was centered on its Church. When I say 'Church', I mean that part of the church building that was built, maintained and constantly embellished by all the people of the town, of whatever social status and of whatever skills or income. This part is these days called the 'nave', a term taken from the Latin for 'ship' which (though perhaps appropriate in a port) has nothing to do with churches of parishes but just with the western parts of closed monastic church buildings. Here in Boston, the capital-C Church (or in Latin, the *ecclesia*, the gathering place) comprised the tower, the three alleys [now known as the nave and its two aisles] together with the screen across the chancel arch and everything between these.

Beyond this rood screen in every church was what we now call the 'chancel', a word derived from the word *chaunsell or chauncel* found in late-medieval accounts, indicating the place where music was chaunted or sung, as all services in chauncels were. 'Quire' and 'sanctuary' were two separate areas here in the chauncel, and access to the sanctuary and the high altar in it would have been even more restricted than to the quire or *chauncel* as a whole.

Responsibility for building and furnishing these eastern parts of the building was firmly that of the Rector of the parish. Here this was the order of St John of Jerusalem, to whom the rectory had long been appropriated. The order's nominee as vicar in 1533 was John Mabylsteryn, when Valor Ecclesiaticus recorded that the high sum of £35 6s 8d was received by the rector, from which the vicar was paid. We don't know how much the vicar was actually paid, but it's clear that the Order of St John was going to have to pay the 10 per cent tax that Henry was planning to levy on the church in England and Wales.



A working chauncel

In the surviving accounts made by annually elected guardians of the property of the Church (the church wardens, as we now call them, half-forgetting their origins) it is clear that the Church people did a lot to sustain the activities of the clerks in their quire and sanctuary. There they sang up to twelve services a day, the eight daily offices from dawn to dusk (each of these announced by a pealing of a bell) and the high mass of the day, together with any funeral masses, chantry masses and special masses and vespers of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, so much venerated by the English.

This activity would have meant music in the church from dawn to dusk with only a few quiet moments for breakfast and dinner and during the central part of the high mass when singing

stopped at the silent climax of consecration, signalled by hand-bells to those in the church and by pealed ones in the tower or sanctus turret to the town outside.

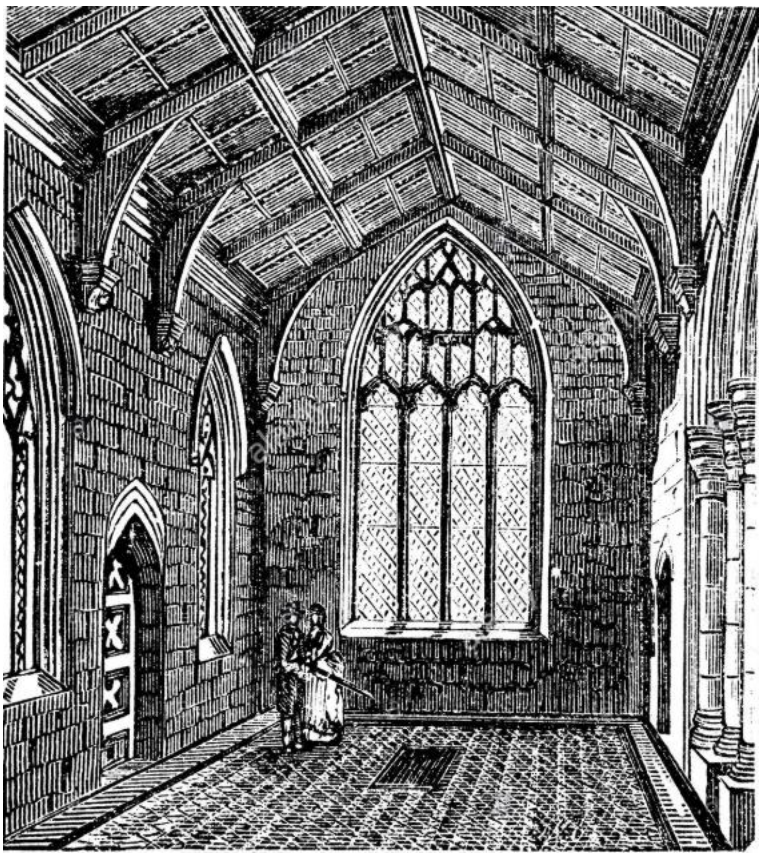
Walpole St Peter, Norfolk

Tattershall

Bells from St Botolph's Skidbrooke

A good chauncel to sing in

All that activity happened on the 'other' side of the normally-closed rood screen. In the people's Church, the three main guilds at Boston (of Our Lady, of Corpus Christi - the body of Christ - and of SS Peter & St Paul) also assured a round of services, as they would have done in many other places



St Peter & St Paul guild chapel rebuilt as Cotton chapel, in 1890s

Boston's Corpus Christi guild had a staff of six priest-singers (called 'presbyters or chaplains' in 1533), the guild of St Mary had four and St Peter came along with just two. So there were no fewer than 12 priests 'front of house', as it were, and there would also be a small retinue of younger clerks – acolytes who carried candles and incense, and singers.

A funeral in a Guild chapel

A possible likeness of John Tavener,
from the Forrest-Heyther partbooks, c. 1520

The Corpus Christi guild seems to have been particularly involved in education, and this might explain why its treasurer and then alderman until his death only two years before all church guilds were destroyed by government decree was John Taverner, the great musician and composer.

Taverner had made a return to nearer his roots in 1530 after the disgrace of Wolsey, the first of a long line of chief ministers to be sacked by that worse-than-Trump figure, Henry Tudor.

Wolsey was himself trained as a musician on his way to becoming the second prelate in the land and European diplomat. Taverner had been head-hunted by him to direct the music at Cardinal college in Oxford, one of Wolsey's twin foundation of colleges at Ipswich and Oxford, the latter of which still has Wolsey's cardinal's tassells and the leopards' heads of his patroness, the Duchess of Suffolk (part of the Pole family) as its crest.

When Taverner was at Cardinal College's foundation, he would have seen the foundations laid for the largest chapel in Oxford, rivaling in every way – quite deliberately – the King's college chapel at Cambridge, itself still far from being finished Its wooden roof, made in Berkshire, was already on site and ready to guide the masons as to the layout of the great work.

One has to imagine his – and everyone else's – disappointment when building Wolsey's college was abandoned. The never-installed chapel roof was taken away to become part of the King's

umpteenth palace, this one at Eltham in Kent, and the large body of clerks and choir singers mostly dismissed, leaving just a rump at what became 'The King's College at Oxford'. Perhaps Taverner stayed on there for a while? He was perhaps in Boston by about 1536, when he married Rose Parrowe; what he did between Oxford and then is not known, though some romantic authors have wanted to give him a part in the major destruction of the minor monasteries that took place from 1533 onwards. In a sense he did perhaps benefit, as no doubt his pension from Cardinal College was – as was the foundation of the college – funded from Wolsey's monastic closures. That had presumably made it possible for him to purchase a small landholding in the town, perhaps one that had belonged to one of the seventeen abbeys and priories known to have owned and rented out land and buildings in Boston in 1533.

The title of this talk is 'Quires and places where they sang'. Perhaps it has become clear to you now that one of the 'places' in Boston church was at the guild altars – and particularly, as we have seen, at the altar of Corpus Christi in its own chapel building on the SW corner of the Church.

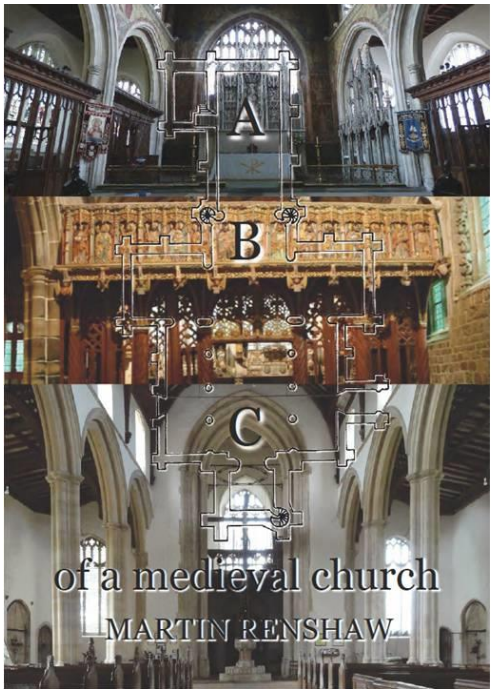
Guild chapel, Wolborough Devon

Here its six chaplains would have had time to teach young boys to sing, play the organ and learn the basics of Latin before they went on – still singing if possible – to the town grammar school at the age of 14. These boys might have been shared with the high altar choir, and it is very likely that the full staff of the church, which must have numbered around 40 or more, would have been expected to attend matins, high mass and vespers, and probably week-end vespers of Our Lady, these last being performances on the scale of the well-known Vespers of Monteverdi and his Italian and Spanish contemporaries.

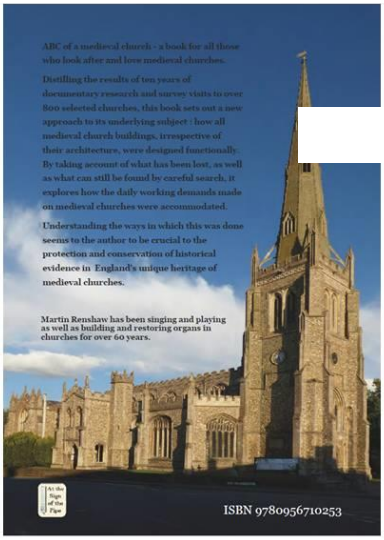
I would like now to home in on the part of every church where choirs sang, where music was studied and performed in medieval parishes for five hundred years. This is because I think we have forgotten just how much music went on in every one of the estimated 12 thousand parish churches

and chapels up and down this country until that fateful year 1548. We have forgotten too the extraordinary training that this musical activity gives to children. It's now confined to a few choir schools and some other fee-paying private schools, but in early C16 England and Wales it was everywhere. It has been calculated that there was a free grammar school for every 6500 of the population in the 1530s, but all that was swept away under Edward VI; educational provision on this scale was not achieved again until the 1890s.

But for the remainder of my talk I am going to concentrate on that part of the church that was not the people's, although supported wholeheartedly by them, as I mentioned earlier.



A B C of a medieval church



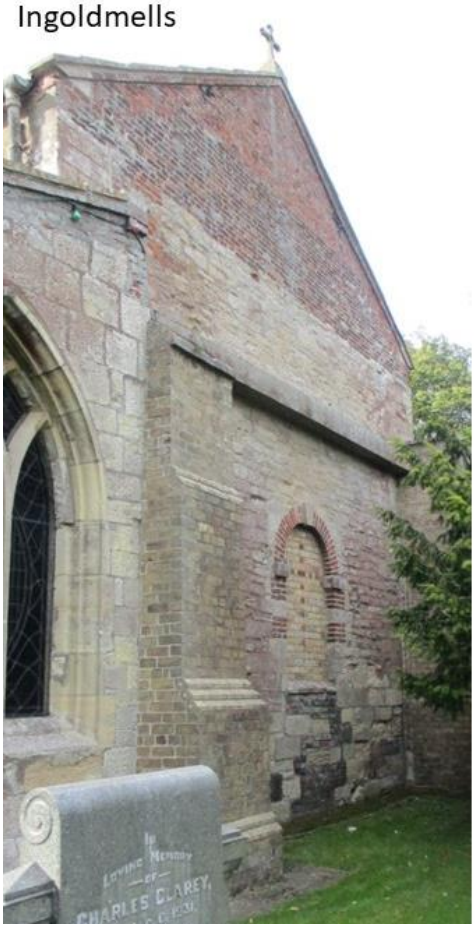
We have found in our researches that this daily practice of music is still partly documented in the buildings themselves. Why? Because the eastern parts of churches were designed, built and furnished precisely for this work. But this built-in memory of music has a particular poignancy in Lincolnshire.

Great chauncels

Heckington

Although liturgical music was as widespread here as everywhere else in England, Wales and Scotland, and was in many places practised with great fervour and elaboration in this once-rich part of the country, the chauncels of Lincolnshire churches have since suffered terribly from neglect. This was no doubt first caused by the dramatic and demoralising effects of the Pilgrimage of Grace and other local uprisings in the 1530s. The next decade saw a nation-wide spoliation of churches and this was repeated over and again in the 1560s and 70s, leaving Lincolnshire, like much of the rest of the country, impoverished in education and social cohesion for the next three hundred years. This county's dependency on agriculture had once been a huge economic power in the 13th to 15th centuries, a power demonstrated in the splendour of its churches, which were and are the public buildings that were largely created and sustained by the people of every parish. But this dependency on agriculture, once the intricate web of land-holdings owned by the church had been taken into a few lay hands and the salt marshes were drained for sheep farming, was to prove particularly depressive for the majority of the population of the county.

Ingoldmells



Once great chauncels ?

Addlethorpe

Throughout the medieval period, Lincoln's had been by far the largest diocese in England, stretching south-west as far as the Oxford we were looking at earlier – hence very probably Taverner's moves from Tattershall to Oxford and back to Boston. One of its early economic activities – recorded in Domesday – was the production of salt from salt-peat. Lincolnshire had more 'salinas' in the C14 than any other English coastal county. It is recorded that through this town of Boston, just from February to September in 1303, £600 of salt was exported – an enormous amount! The local salt-wellers were well-paid professional labourers who combined their work with farming.

Just to spend a moment considering the economic effect of a now-vanished industry once so important in these parts, we can remind ourselves that salt was used for:

- preparation of leather
- "the rubbing of chimneys"
- soldering pipes and gutters
- distillates from wine
- food preservation, especially bacon cheese and butter
- salted fish: swordfish, whale, sturgeon, porpoise, plaice, whiting, sole, herring and sprats.

To give another idea of the scale of the use of salt, in 1305, one pound weight of salt was used in every ten pounds of butter or cheese at Overton, one of the manors of the bishop of Winchester.

Later economic and educational recovery in the county was heavily retarded by an almost institutionalised absenteeism of rectors and clergy throughout the new dark ages and frequently also well into the second part of the C19. As a result of this absence and neglect, added to economic and social depression, quite a number of those churches for which we have records of musical activity up to the 1540s have completely lost their chancels, as at Addlethorpe and Ingoldmells.

Foreshortened Lincolnshire chauncels

Quadring

Wigtoft

Conisholm

There are also some chauncels where we know there were organs – and therefore quite intensive musical activities, as here at Quadring, Wigtoft and Conisholme – that by the C19 were so dilapidated that they were never restored to their full size and proportions, the rest of the sanctuary having never been rebuilt.

Frampton chauncel, south view

SE corner of chauncel, remains of sedilia

Another of these – at Frampton, just down the road from here – possessed a documented choir school – that is, a grammar school with a special provision for advanced musical training of children up to university level. But here most of the sanctuary was never restored in the C19. And there is the classic example of the church at Brant Broughton, where the medieval chancel was in such poor condition that it was entirely replaced by Bodley's famous re-creation in typically C19 post-Tridentine style.

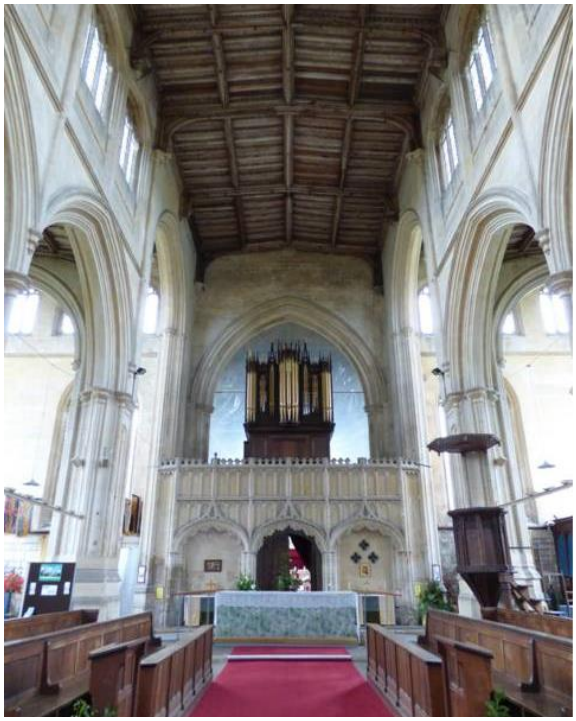
Almost all the photographs used here were taken by us of the churches we surveyed in Lincolnshire over the past six years. Here, in a Lincolnshire village church is what we have come to regard as a typical chancel in a medieval church. Although there are still parts of some quire stalls, almost everything else you see here now has been changed, and many things you would have seen in the C15 are no longer there.

Double cube chancel

Tattershall

The main aim of this talk, now we have looked at some of the musical, political and economic context, is to put you back into a medieval chauncel as it was, and to interpret for you to all the things you can see and to explain some of the things you no longer can see.

In early churches, as is still the case in Orthodox churches, there was an almost impermeable division, placed at the eastern side of the peoples' part of the church building. In early churches this was a wall, as in very rare instances it still is.



Stone pulpitum, Tattershall:

a clear division between lay 'church' (ecclesia) and clerical 'chauncell'

In great churches with large chancels, such as cathedrals or colleges, there is still a stone division with a wide platform on its top. We now call this a pulpitum, but it had various names in medieval English, depending on how it was used. Very often the main organ in the building was placed there, the most advantageous position for it to sound throughout a large space.

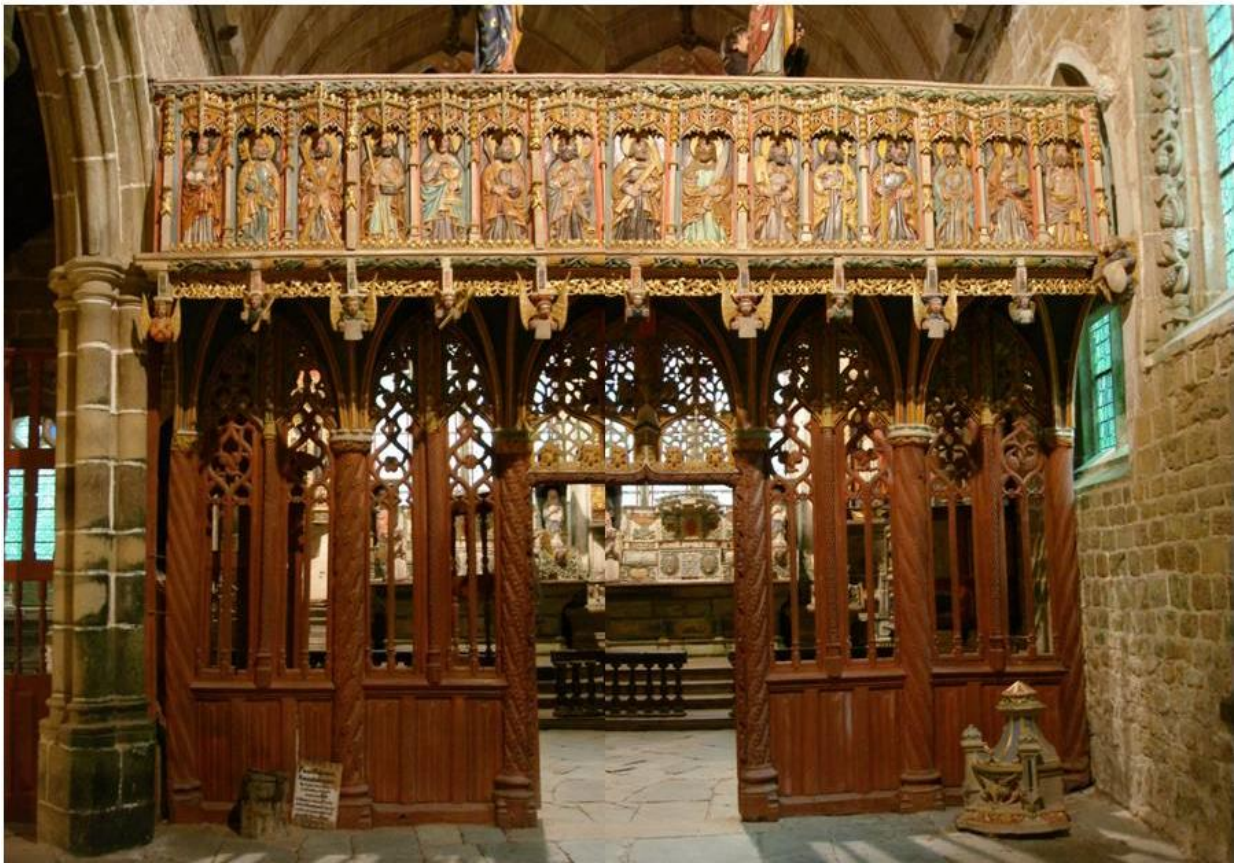
Stone screens

Westwell, Kent

Great Bardfield, Essex

In most ‘normal’ parish churches, once the chancel arch had been opened up, a more open screen was installed – sometimes of stone with wooden infilling or in the vast majority of cases a wooden screen, highly decorated.

Kerfons, northern Brittany



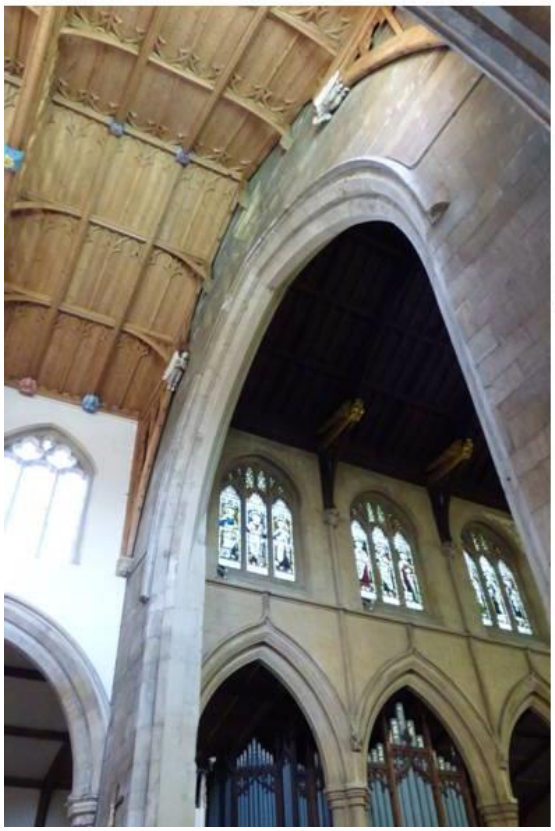
Lincolnshire rood screens

Saltfleetby

Theddlethorpe

South Somercotes

Later again, this screen was rebuilt and surmounted by a platform with candles on its parapet tops and images along its front. Above it was a large, life-size or larger, crucifix, hung from the chancel arch, with supporting figures of Mary and John and angels …



Hanging the crucifix

Louth

Deeping St James

Beyond this rood screen the 'quire' and 'sanctuary' were two separate areas here in the chauncel, and access to the sanctuary and the high altar in it would have been even more restricted than to the quire or *chauncel* as a whole.

Furnishing the chauncel

Boston

As we have seen, it was the rector of the church, or the monastic or other church who possessed the advowson (that's the right to nominate the vicar), who was responsible for maintenance of the chancel. They designed and built it, and saw to the installation of its furnishings and supply of consumables – wine, incense, candles etc – but the people, the *ecclesia*, supplied and repaired the service books and the vestments used in the quire and sanctuary.

Today, services in most rural and suburban churches are rare. There might be one on a Sunday and perhaps a week-day might have an office of some sort or a said communion service. But otherwise our churches are characterised by silence. Notices outside saying something like, 'This church has stood as a silent witness for hundreds of years,' are not as common as they once were, but the very fact that such notices could ever have been thought of as appropriate in any way, shows what a profound change has come over these precious buildings.

Around say the year 1450, things could not have been more different.

Times of services in parish churches:

4, 5 or 6 am: Morrow Mass at the rood screen for servants, labourers and travelers; the first of three bell 'peals' is rung by the sexton (the sacristan) *one hour before this.*

6 am or after: Mattins and Lauds (*Dirige* if a funeral is to be held later that day), Prime.

7 am or after: Chantry and/or guild Masses.

BREAKFAST

9 or 10 am: Terce and High Mass of the day (or *Requiem)*, followed by Sext and None.

DINNER followed by a brief rest, then work by the parish priest on his glebe lands.

3 or 4 pm: Evensong: Vespers (and *Placebo* before a funeral) and Compline.

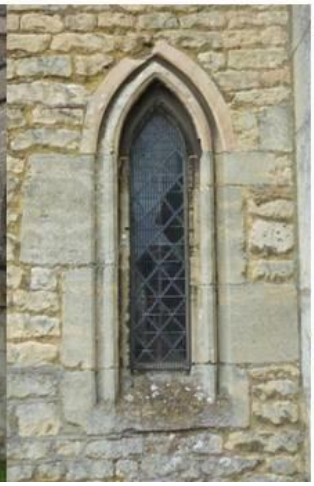
SUPPER and bed **about 8 pm.**

Note that these times are relative and will vary with latitude and time of year. Basically, the services start at daybreak and finish before sundown. A rural parish priest was allowed to say the minor offices in the oratory in his house, but he was obliged to sing at least Mattins, Mass and Evensong in his church, so that his parishioners could attend them. He would also have visited the sick and officiated at burials and sung their requiem masses. He would have taken (in English) the services of weddings, the churching of women after childbirth and christenings as required.

The parish priest in a town like Boston might have had help from a whole staff of auxiliary priests, including chantry and guild priests, who would say their own daily masses and act as deacons and sub-deacons at the daily High Mass. He would have been in charge of a number of other workers, depending on the size and status of his church.

While on the subject of timing of services, it is important to understand the reason for the arrangement of windows in chancels. Their size and position are determined chiefly by two factors: first, the need for light early in the morning so that the offices of Matins and Lauds could be sung at dawn. Although the psalms would have been known by heart, the priest would also need to sing the special antiphons and lessons for each day. This is the reason for the low windows which are often found only on the south side of the west end of a chancel where the seats for the parish priest were set, arranged with their backs against the east side of the rood screen. Since either or both screen and seats have gone, and with them the practice of early services – including those for travellers – only the windows are left to testify to the practice. Here are some examples in Lincolnshire:

Ruskington



Kirton in Lindsey

When extra texts and their anthems were added to offices, there arose a need to light the west end of chancels more generally, this being the quire area where singers now needed also to see to read written-down music.

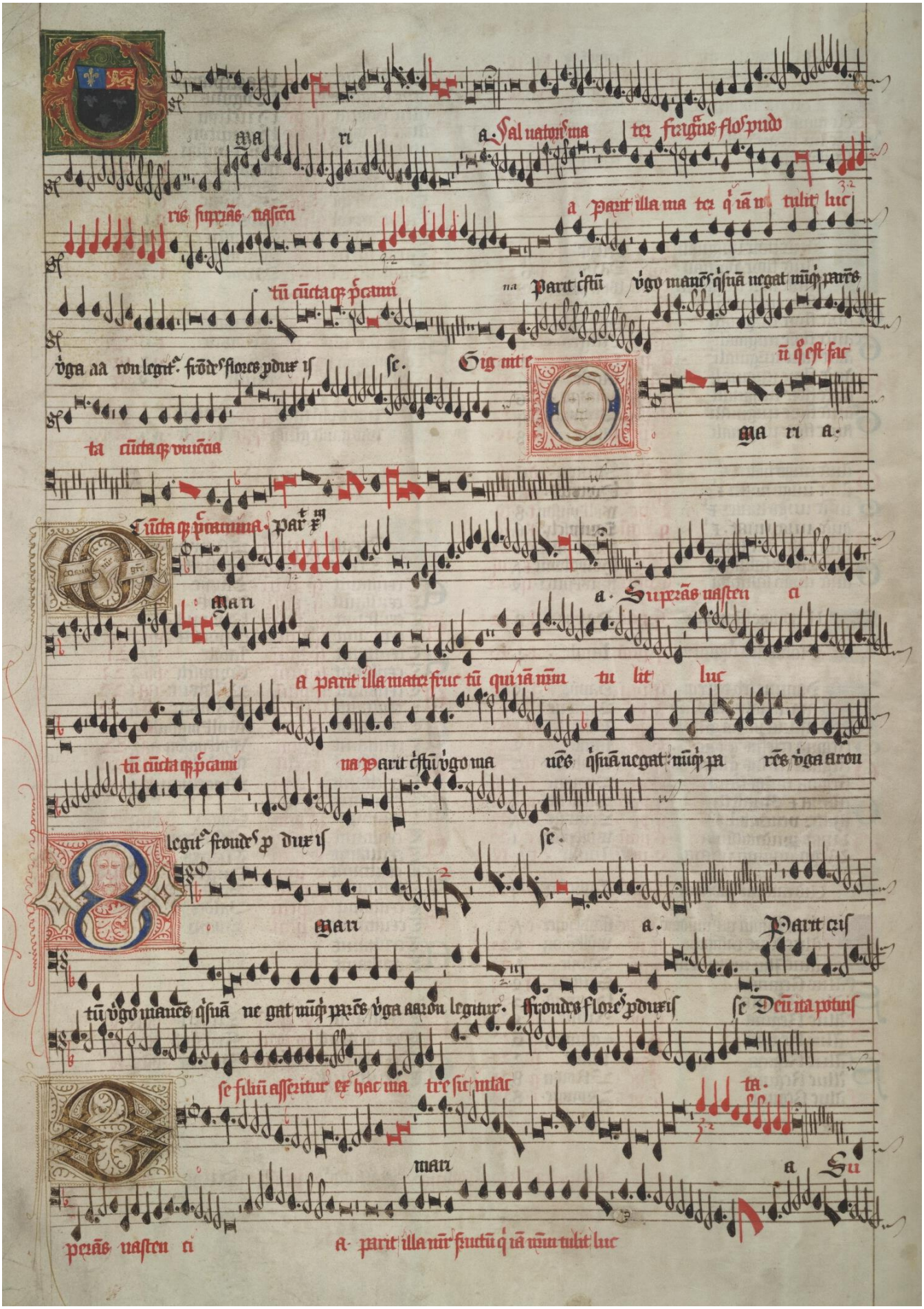
C13 chancel with later west windows

Ickham, Kent

This can also be traced in the architecture, where often smaller lancet windows are superseded by larger ones in this part of the chancel. Later, chancels were built or rebuilt (as at Boston) in the early C14, and these have much larger windows all round, partly for this reason but also because the whole choir was now beginning to sing written-down polyphony, music for several different voices with an individual one for each. Starting with only three distinct voices, one based closely on a plainsong tune and the others wrapped around this, it quite rapidly became much more complex, the choir adding specialised high and low voices. This is the kind of music composed by John Taverner, which could comprise as many as eight or even ten distinct lines. These anthems were written in large antiphoners like the Eton Choirbook (see over).

These were read and sung from a large desk placed in the middle of the choir stalls, and this needed as much natural light as possible. We will return to this in slightly more detail later; for now I just want to say two things that may seem obvious to anyone considering these needs but which seem to have escaped architectural historians up to now. First, that windows are meant to let in light. Obvious you may think, but consider the average church these days, in which the walls are white and the glass darkly coloured. In how many chancels now could you read music without needing artificial light? The second thing is the corollary of the first: that in a medieval church the walls were ablaze with colour from frescoes and patterns almost everywhere, especially on widow jambs, but by the C14 the windows were, by contrast, light with white, grey and yellow tints – the so-called 'grisaille' glass. This is the exact reverse of so-called 'restored' churches these days, as we will see on our visit to the parish church after this talk.

Eton Choirbook : John Browne c1490 *O Maria salvatoris mater*



In Boston church, in addition to the parish priest and the total of twelve chaplains working in Boston church for the three main guilds, a whole staff of people would be working in the new, bright early C14 chancel.

Busy chancel

There would be clerks in minor orders who would sing, teach and put out the books for services and look after distribution of holy water, keep the sacristy, and ensure the safety of the church's valuables. In terms of lay people, at a minimum there would be a sexton (the familiar term for the sacristan, a person who worked in the sacristy), whose other jobs might range from ringing bells to digging graves, sweeping paths, clearing gutters and to blowing the various organs when required.

The total of 62 stalls means that at least on high days and holy feasts it was expected that there would be this number to be accommodated in Boston's quire. These are not only for singers but all those who worked in the quire and sanctuary. From there they sang and served, and listened, along with the people in their *ecclesia*, to homilies and the regular reading of the bede (prayer) roll of the recently dead and of benefactors to the church.

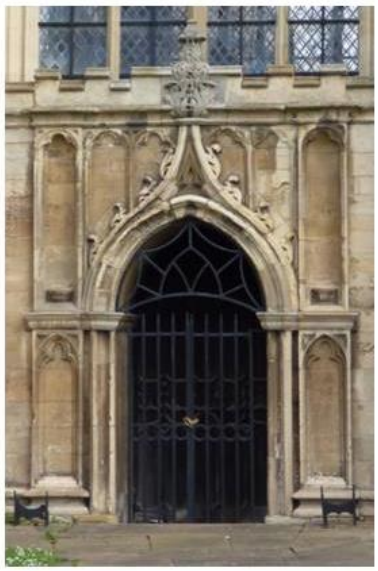
These chancels were also designed acoustically. In the C14 they are very often double cubes, where they are twice as long as they are wide and where, as in most medieval buildings, their walls up to the springing of the roof are as tall as the buildings are wide. They also had fully-ceiled inner ceilings, which reflected the sound along them and back to the singers, leading when well executed to congenial acoustic conditions for singing in. When you consider the time spent every day doing this, which could amount to three of four hours or even more every day of the year, you can see why designing a chauncel for music was a prime concern of rectors who themselves would have been brought up as singers on their way through the local and then national hierarchies.

Having set the general scene of the eastern parts of the church building, let us go back to some detail. The entry door, usually on the south side of the chancel, was for all those who work there, not just the parish priest. Here are some examples from all over the county of Lincolnshire, both large and small.

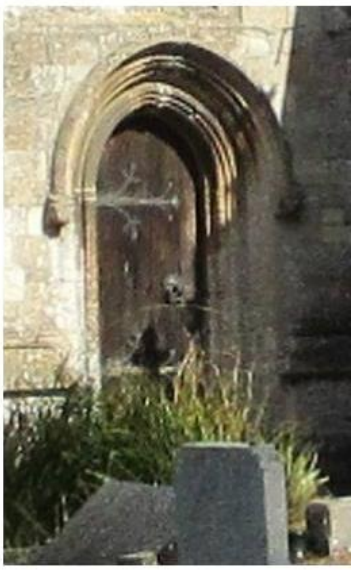
Chancel / clerks' doors

Frampton

Boston



Leverton



The gathering space

Heckington

Salle, Norfolk

What we call the gathering space is what these doors led on to. This connects the outside door to the sacristy or vestry opposite. Here are the floors at Salle, which still has its original patterns, and at Heckington, which does not. However, we are still not sure what those patterns in the tiles actually mean, and probably won't understand them until we re-enact the liturgies of offices and masses there one day.

Actual NE buildings

Heckington

Sleaford

Scars of NE buildings

Wigtoft

Frampton

A door out to the north of the chauncel led into buildings attached to the north-east of the church which served various purposes over time. They were primarily sacristies or vestries where vestments and altar frontals, cloths and candlesticks of all kinds were kept. Or if more securely designed, with a stout door and without any other entrance, they would have been treasuries for the 'jewels' of the church, where the chalices and their patens, crucifixes and candlesticks and the precious books were kept.

South Somercotes

Lost NE buildings

Such buildings are often now missing, having become redundant once the Latin church came to an end in England and Wales in 1548 in preparation for the new English Prayer Book of 1549. At this time, churches were plundered of their ornaments, and the wearing of any vestments was effectively banned with the introduction of the second Prayer Book in 1552. So there was no more need for these buildings which contained vestries, sacristies and treasuries, and they were allowed to fall down or were plundered for their stones. Up to now these external buildings have not been studied, but they had a vital role as 'service blocks' to provide space for everything that was used in the performance of medieval rites.

North-east chancel walls

Heckington

Sleaford

One of the reasons for NE service blocks was to provide space for the bellows of organs which were placed, as we will see, on otherwise blank walls on the north side of sanctuaries; many

Wigtoft

Frampton

churches have these spaces, and evidence of buildings behind them – often though the evidence is just a blocked door with nothing behind it and blank walls above it.

But occasionally the medieval set-up was adopted in the C19, with excellent results. Here are two examples in Oxfordshire, once down in the SW corner of Lincoln diocese.

Organs with bellows in lofts

Adderbury, Oxon

Warmington, Oxon

At Boston's great rival town, Louth, a third organ was ordered in 1530:

> Memorandum that the honest men of this town, desiring to have a good pair of organs to the laud, praise and honour of God and the whole company of heaven, made an assembly together for this purpose … at which time, Mr Richard Taylor … hearing of the good devout mind and virtuous intent of the said townsmen … offered to cause them to have a pair made by a cunning man in Lynn … for which beneficial act I pray Jesu to acquit and reward him in his kingdom of heaven. Amen for charity.

This new organ cost £22 and was set up on the north side of the chancel on the eve of St Barnabas, 10 June 1531. Another organ was brought by George Smith, a merchant, from Flanders, at a cost of £13 6s 8d., and set up in the church in 1501 and for a short while placed on the rood loft, c1508-9.

A Flemish organ

1481 Peter Gerritsz organ case, Koorkerk Middelburg, NL.
organ case originally from St. Nicolaaskerk, Utrecht

Both of these organs at Louth were apparently obtained with the help (or rather perhaps the impetus) of the aldermen of the town's guilds – the 'honest men of this town' referred to in the 1530 quotation. These costly organs would have been elaborate affairs, with richly carved and highly-coloured and gilded cases, as the case of the organ formerly at Utrecht once was.

So we can see how these NE buildings are crucial to the running of a complex liturgical pattern and the employment of many staff (numbers in quire stalls): they are the 'Service block' of the church.

The vestments, copes and suits of mass chasubles, dalmatics etc were kept here too. These were made from rich and expensive, usually imported, fabrics. They were embroidered with coloured silks and gold and silver threads in various centres in England, mostly by very skilled women paid at about half the rate of skilled men (nothing new there then), and they were (re-)exported throughout NW Europe.

Vestments and cope racks

Cope c1400 Chipping Campden, Glos

Aylesbury, Bucks

Examples can be found in many museums abroad. The artistry in designing these vestments and stained glass as well as frescoes and the wood and metal furnishings of chancels all disappeared with their abolition in the 1540s and 1560s, and has never been recovered.

Opus Anglicanum

from Cope of Boniface VIII

Chasuble Chichester c 1335

Pienze Cope

Bologna Cope

Candelsticks and Tapers large and small

Ranworth antiphoner

Dartmouth St Saviour, Devon

The booklet of the mass 1507, Brother Gherit van der Groude

Gloucester candlestick c.1104–13

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Candles and their short and long candlesticks were stored here too, together with tapers, the long sticks whose ends were dipped in a mixture of resin and wax and were held up at the moment of consecration at a high mass. Also the censers and their incense boats, to produce the smoke and smell that indicated holiness and the rising of prayers to heaven.

South Creake, Norfolk

Salle, Norfolk

Censers and Incense boats

'Angel' holding boat
Lady chapel,
Gloucester cathedral

Bologna Opus Anglicanum cope

Censers above a west doorway

Salle, Norfolk

Here, above a Norfolk doorway, angels with censers welcome the procession into the *ecclesia* through the west door at Sunday High Mass. On Palm Sunday, Jesus's entry into Jerusalem was re-enacted around these elaborate west tower faces and their doorways. Such ritual would be accompanied by ringing various hand bells, large and small.

Bologna cope (opus anglicanum)

Adderbury, Oxon – in medieval Lincoln diocese

Handbells

Heckington, Lincs

These were also rung in the chancel at high points of the mass – for instance at the sanctus and the elevation of the host, in order to draw the attention of the faithful to crucial moments which are otherwise silent.

Cushions and pillows (and an organ)

Simone Martini (1285-1344)

Embroidered cushions for seats were kept in the service block as well. Inventories also mention 'auriculars' (*auricularia)* or pillows, which are longer versions of these cushions. Books were heavy and bound in wooden boards studded with turned wooden bosses and semi-precious stones. So that they would not slip, they were placed on pillows which overlapped the desks of quire stalls; this is why such desks did not have ledges, since they were not needed. And there was the extra advantage that the books could be arranged at the right height for each singer, some of whom will have had the same trouble as many of us do: they became long-sighted with age or perhaps had other visual problems, as we can see in the illustration below, which were overcome in the same way as we do, by wearing glasses. Cushion-pillows would also have eased the backs of those sitting on the seats below as well, the typically-designed fronts of quire desks not being comfortable to lean against, as every cathedral choirboy knows.

Which brings us to a consideration of the books themselves. Their presence in medieval churches of all kinds has also been little studied, presumably because they almost totally disappeared in 1548. Breviaries contained all the basic information needed for the ever-changing daily services and were therefore the most common books to be found in quire stalls.

Breviaries and antiphoners

Fairford, Glos

Cheddar, Somerset
Mary with book on
lectern and cupboard

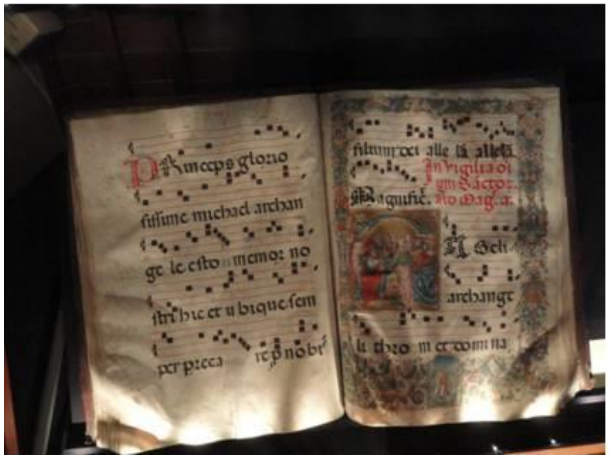
Shelton, Norfolk

Book of Hours c1450s
MS Harley 2971

In the late C13 and early C14, injunctions from local bishops and archbishops set out a list of the type of books that had to be obtained for every church. They ordered that a minimum of eleven books were to be bought by the people for use in the quire and sanctuary. Eight of these were 'noted', that is they contained the music to be sung at the daily offices and masses.

Graduals

Graduale dei Santi 'Maestro di S. Agnese'
Bologna c1300



Lucca, Italy late C14

Manual and Gospeller

Lucca, Italy late C14

Sion gospels book cover c1140-1150 V&A
Beech overlaid with plaques of gold & precious stones, enamelled, with sheepskin undercover

These books varied in size. The small hand-held books called 'manuals' were used for services (in English) in or near the *ecclesia* such as weddings, christenings, churchings and confessions, and the 'processioners' were used when singing litanies in procession. The full-sized missals or mass books lay on cushions or small desks on the altars.

'Epistolers' lay on wooden desks in the sanctuary, and large illuminated 'Gospellers' lay on eagle lecterns made from imported brass, placed in the sanctuary. 'Volumes' of large antiphonars with polyphonic anthems and masses lay on the special desks in the middle of the quire, as we have already mentioned.

Wooden desks

Cratfield, Suffolk

Lenham, Kent

Ivinghoe, Bucks

Shipdham, Norfolk

Tiverton, Devon

Eagle gospel desks

Lincoln cathedral

Croft

Leverington, Cambs

Antiphonars like the Eton choirbook were very expensive items; they were written by hand on expensive parchment or vellum, illuminated with fine coloured and gilded drawings and their end boards were covered with fine, tooled leather.

Cost of books at various times

1349: an illuminated missal for the high altar, £2 6s 2d [£20,000]

1371: a breviary, £1 3s 4d [£10,000]

1426: a simple processioner, 5s 11d [£3,000]

1439: a manual, 16s 8d [£6,250]

from *'The Old Books of the English Service', 1904*

The larger books, those that were laid on desks and not carried by hand, were bound between boards of oak covered with sheep, goat or calf skins. Wooden bosses that were fixed to them also helped to prevent their covers being torn, and semi-precious stones were used as ornaments on special presentation copies of mass books, gospellers and antiphoners. Clasps were used to hold these books together; these were sometimes lockeable to prevent unauthorised use.

Stobbes near altars and stalls

Dorchester abbey

Heckington

Blockley, Shrops

We still have some evidence for these books being in medieval English chancels and vestries. This is found in the surviving or re-discovered book cupboards there. (These cupboards were called 'stobbes'.) Measurements we have taken of these 'stobbes', which often show signs of locks as well as of wooden linings, confirm these book sizes. Since these cupboards are now usually referred to as 'aumbries' (this word now suggesting a place for a reserved sacrament), no-one seems to have fully appreciated their original designed use.

The pages of the Eton Choirbook, a large antiphoner, originally measured about 24" tall by about 17" wide. With its wider covers, it would overall have been more than 2 feet tall by 3 feet wide

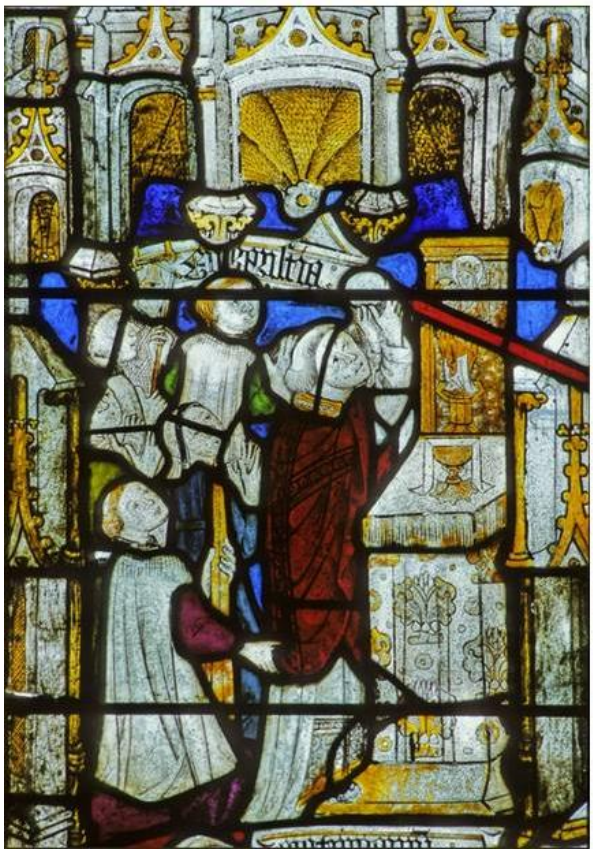
when open. It is difficult to estimate its thickness, but it must have been at least 3 inches plus the cover-boards, making about 4 inches in total. Nor is its original weight known, because only just over half of its original pages (126 out of 224) survive, but the amount of vellum used, from the expensive skins of about 112 calves, and its leather-covered oak boards, would have made it an Olympic lift. A modern paper facsimile weighs a mere 4.5 kilos or roughly ten pounds. Here are the measurements of some of the pathetically few surviving music books:

Dimensions of surviving music books

Smallest:	Pepys MS (1465)	7½" by 6"
Medium:	Egerton MS (1520s)	12" by 6"
The largest:	Caius MS (1520s)	30" by 21"
Peterhouse partbooks (c1540)		11¼" by 7 ⅞"

Similarly, there is also evidence for the sizes of chalices used at mass. These can be worked out from the height above shelves in piscinas, because deacons carried the chalice into the sanctuary at the start of mass.

Doddiscombsleigh, Devon



Chalices and piscinas

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

English Chalice c.1200

Blockley, Glos

They then placed it on these shelves between the wine and water cruets, which had been placed there before the start of the service. Here are two slides with just a glimpse of the amazing variety of piscinas in Lincs churches.

Lincolnshire chancel piscinas

Heckington

Deeping St James

Sleaford

Tattershall

Kirton in Lindsey north aisle

Heckington, north-east building

Varied piscinas for side altars
many with off-set bowls or space behind for cruets etc

Quadring east end south aisle

Sutterton south aisle pillar

Buckden north aisle

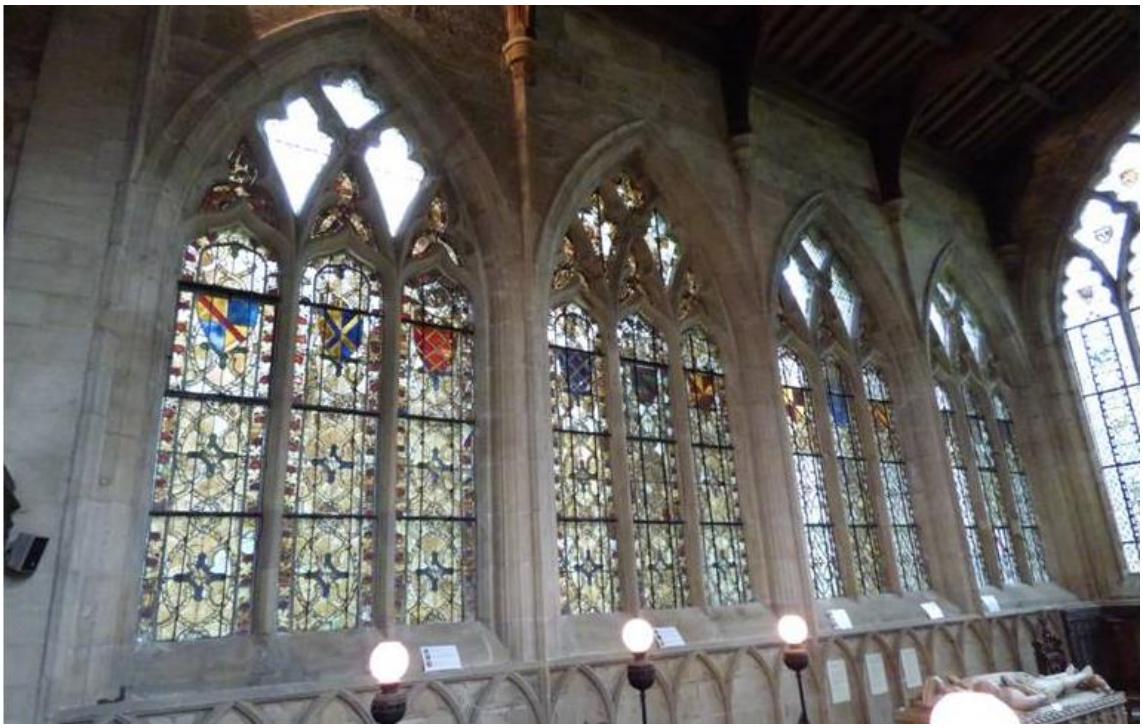
Sleaford south aisle

Tattershall south transept

Going back to books, an obvious question, which I raised earlier, is to ask how the singers and priests were able to read these books? Here are some early C 14 windows that consist mostly of the light 'grisaille' glass I mentioned. You have to imagine that all the windows in the chancel in the church here in Boston, built just at this time, were designed to be like these.

Norbury, Derbys c1400

Large chancel windows with basically original 'grisaille' glass, allowing plenty of light (north side shown) into parochial church



Selling, Kent c1400

East window: large sanctuary lighting with original glass

A late-medieval altar and the desks for the epistoler, to the south, and gospeller to the north were lit by specially-designed large north, south and east windows …

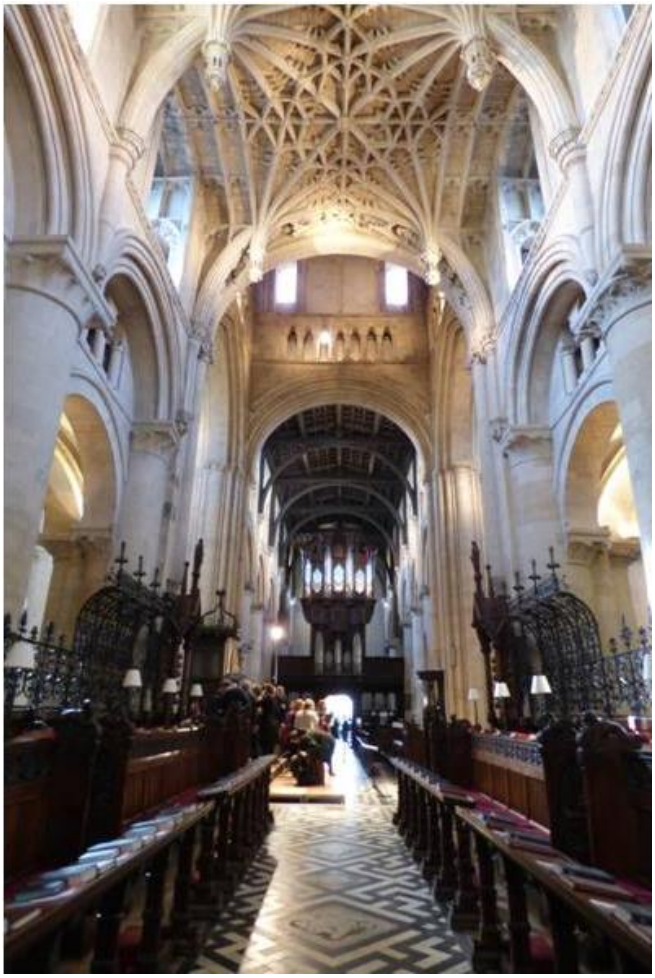
Large sanctuary windows

Tattershall

Leverton

Antiphoners were lit with substantial and heavy candelabra suspended on chains which were fixed to the roof timbers above the vault and then passed through holes in bosses.

St Frideswide's priory, Oxford: hole for chain of candelabrum



Fate of Books

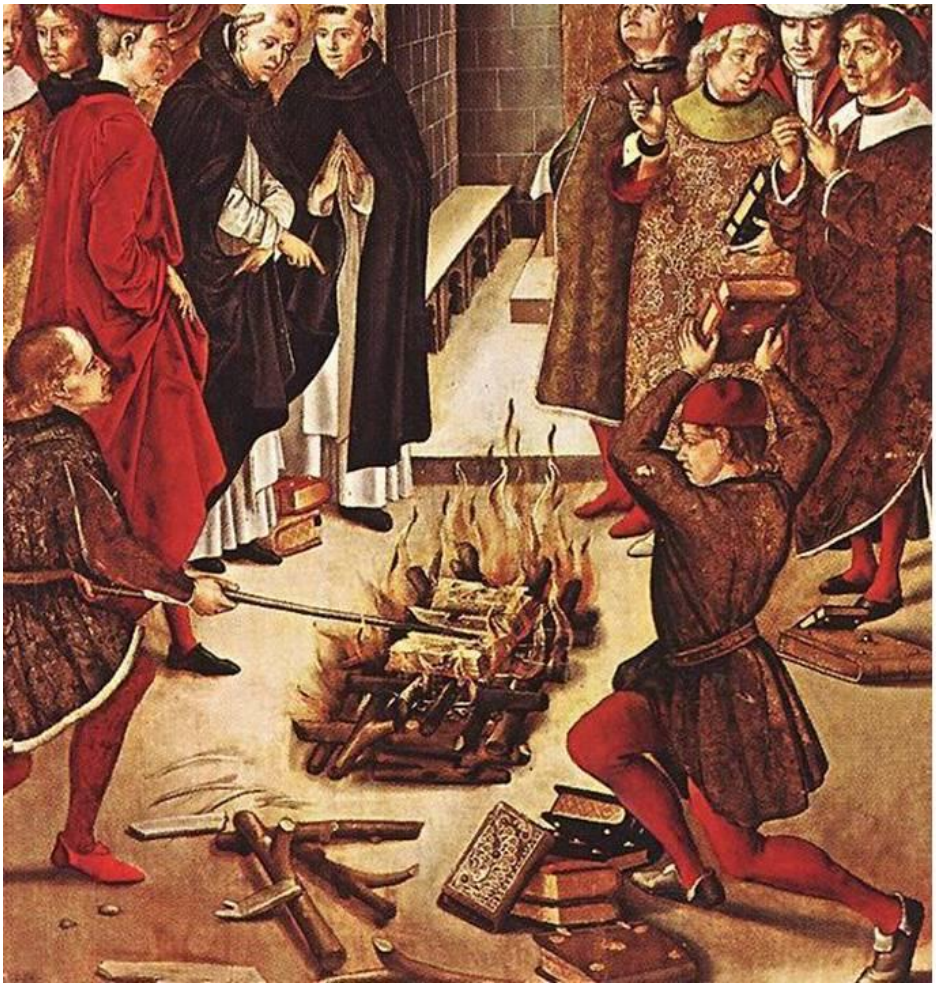
STATUTE FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF BOOKS, 1548

Whereas in the former Service Book[s] are things corrupt, untrue, vain, and superstitious, **be it therefore enacted that**

all books, called Antiphoners, Missales, Grails, Processionales, Manueles, Legendes, Pies, Portuasses, Primers in *Latin* and *English*, Couchers, Journalls, Ordinalles, or other books or wrytings whatsoever, heretofore used for the service of the Church, written or printed in the *English* or *Latin* tongue ...

shall be by authority of this present Act
clearly and utterly abolished, extinguished
and forbidden for ever to be used or kept in this realm, or elsewhere within any of the King's dominions.

We know that practically all books were destroyed in a fierce holocaust, following an Act of Parliament for their delivery by all churches for destruction by bishops and sheriffs under threat of severe financial and penal penalties. Other sweeps during the latter part of Edward VI's reign and again under Elizabeth completed the task of the destruction of probably 200,000 hand-written illuminated parchment and vellum books. Astonishingly, even those few historians who have noticed this destruction don't seem to have any inkling of the catastrophe that this was for music.



Holocaust

Burning books,
Pedro Berruguete late C15

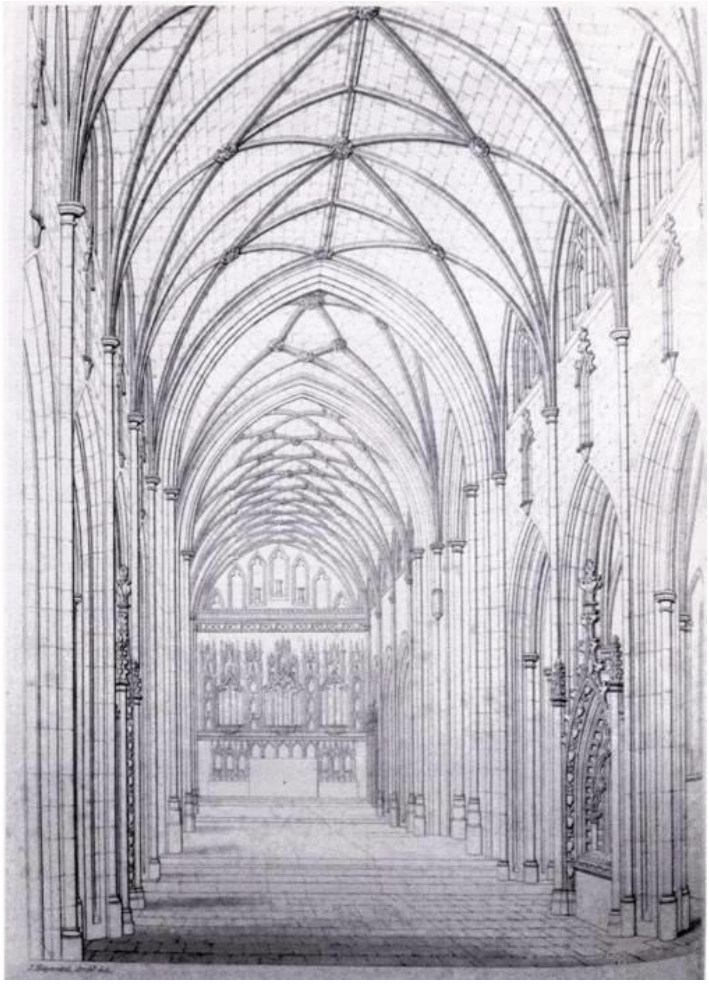
57

If we did not have the surviving parts of the Eton Choirbook and just two or three other music books we would now have no idea at all of the richness of the English church quire's repertory – or even to be in a position to deplore this terrible loss. Historians are supposed to be the guardians of memory, but this act of destruction has apparently been passed over in almost unaninimous silence, and it's hard to tell if this is deliberate or the result of ignorance – both equally culpable.

Let us return to considering other important aspects of the medieval chancel's design: to those things that we need to reconstruct imaginatively, so as to have a full understanding of these spaces and what went on in them.

Chancels were designed with an orderly system of floor levels. One step at the rood screen led into the quire stalls space. Another step up at the east end of the quire stalls led into the gathering space. Another step led up into the sanctuary, the area in front of the sedilia. Finally, there was another small step around the altar, with a small carpet placed on it at the front of the altar.

Chancel floor levels: Ottery St Mary, Devon



Hayward, early C19: medieval levels

These differing step-levels were often completely cleared by order from 1548 onwards, usually along with the destruction of altars, which we will come to in a moment. Victorian 'restorers' put back steps, but they did not use medieval English models but took over continental C17 and C18 post-Tridentine ideas (which included altar rails), often in a way that made a nonsense of surviving original medieval fixtures.

Sedilia and altar rail, Leverton

If you want to rediscover original levels, all you have to do is to try sitting in sedilia, or imagine washing your hands in the piscina. If your back is doubled up doing these things, the levels have

been wrongly reinstated by C19 'restorers'. They often put in steps that were never there before and then somehow had to include a communion rail and its kneeling step. This rail was also a C17 Tridentine and Laudian idea, needed because the rood-screen had been breached, its doors left unlocked or (more often) removed altogether. Altar rails now often crash across sedilia and into founders' tombs. They are alien to medieval chancels and should be ignored when assessing their original design.

Frampton

Tattershall

Heckington

Used by the celebrating priest and the deacon and sub-deacon at mass, for instance during the singing of the epistle and during homilies, these seats were ornamented in often surprising ways, and sometimes integrated the piscina in their overall design. Let us not forget that these were all coloured, and that the backs of seats, as with those in the quire as well, were often ornamented with paintings, some of which undoubtedly still lie under layers of Reformation whitewash.

Heckington

Easter Sepulchres

Permanent Easter sepulchres were usually placed on the north side of the sanctuary, opposite the sedilia, as were organs on their galleries, so the eastern ends of chauncels were not always so bare as they are now. The sheer amount of things originally placed in medieval chauncels explains their sometimes unexpected size, and explains why many chauncels were extended or completely rebuilt during the later C15. I am sure that many of the vestiges of such things as last-gospel lecterns, sepulchres and even sedilia must still lie hidden in walls. We know that some were in fact found by the Victorians and then hidden again.

Busy altars

The booklet of the mass 1507,
Brother Gherit van der Groude

There are two other aspects of medieval chancels that seems to have become lost to memory. The first concerns another style of art that has been totally lost – or nearly. All altars consisted of solid slab of stone supported on pillars or a solid block of masonry.

Mensas

They were consecrated with holy oils and the five crosses made on them were cut in the stone, as you can see. Some original altar stones (or 'mensas') still remain despite being demolished in

Two mensas in Theddlethorpe church

1548, restored in 1554 and then demolished again from 1559 onwards. These survivors show that an altar was usually about one-third of the width of the sanctuary or chapel.

Retables

English high altar retable discovered at Audignon, France

Side altar at Saltfleetby

Side altar at Theddlethorpe All Saints

Above the altar, under the east window, was a series of 'tables' which were sculptures in stone or alabaster, or paintings in niches on the wall there. Since they were destroyed with the removal of altars in the 1540s, we have forgotten about their existence, but there are still traces of these if we look carefully. It is quite possible that paintings like those in the niches on the retable at Audignon survive under layers of paint in these examples in Lincolnshire, as they must elsewhere. The French example, called locally 'the English altar' shows the extent of elaboration of these retables, all of which must have come crashing down when the altars built into their walls were removed in the 1540s. They have disappeared almost without trace and once again the memory of them has gone too.

The other aspect of medieval chancels that has also almost gone without trace is hiding in plain sight in a very high proportion of our churches. This is what is commonly called 'a string course'. However, this usually-overlooked ornament has a deep-seated significance whose origins go back to the Anglo-Saxon church in Britain. Most churches of any size then were minsters, now a much-abused term but one which then had a specific meaning: a centre of evangelisation from whose communities priests and others were sent out into the surrounding countryside. When churches were built in increasing numbers as the parochial system was established from the C11 onwards, this communitarian idea was not forgotten. The string course is the visual and ever-present symbol of that original collegiate idea; it is the girdle that binds together the community, a symbol of fellowship. (It still is found in the architecture of Orthodox churches.)

Sleaford

Girdle courses

Frampton

By contrast, the western parts of chancels do usually survive, even though so often denuded of their original furnishings. However, there are fortunately quite a lot of churches where their quire stalls still survive – more than those which are noticed by historians because they do not necessarily have misericords, some having quite plain benches and simple desks.

Misericords

Louth

Swineshead

Benches

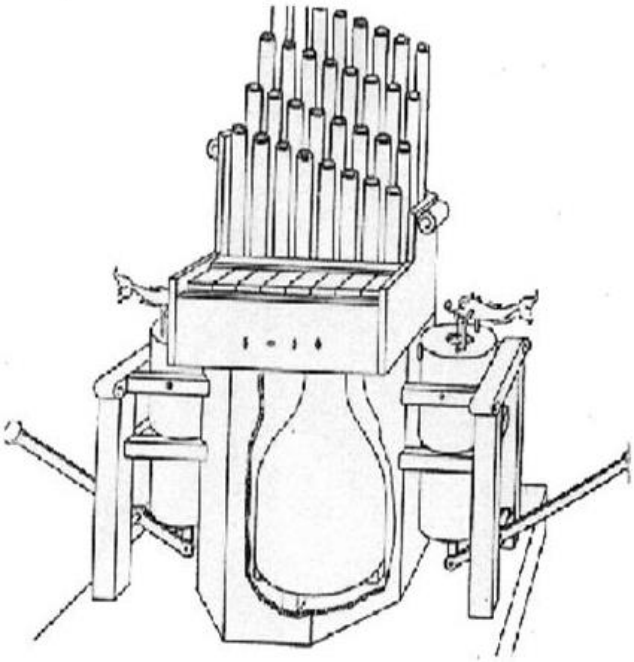
Walpole St Peter, Norfolk

Finally, we come back to the largest and most prominent fixtures in chancels after the altars: their organs. Pre-Reformation organs are now universally missing, having declined severely under Elizabeth's watch and their removal having been finally enacted by the Puritan parliament in 1644. Lincolnshire churches that are known as having organs, organ books, choir schools and organ players from church wardens' accounts and various inventories or other pre-Reformation documents include Addlethorpe and Ingoldmells, Boston, Crowland Abbey, Fleet, Lincoln Cathedral, Louth, Marshchapel, Quadring, South Somercotes, Tattershall College, Frampton and Wigtoft. We believe though that the majority of churches in this very wealthy county had organs; some town and coastal churches certainly possessed two and even three.

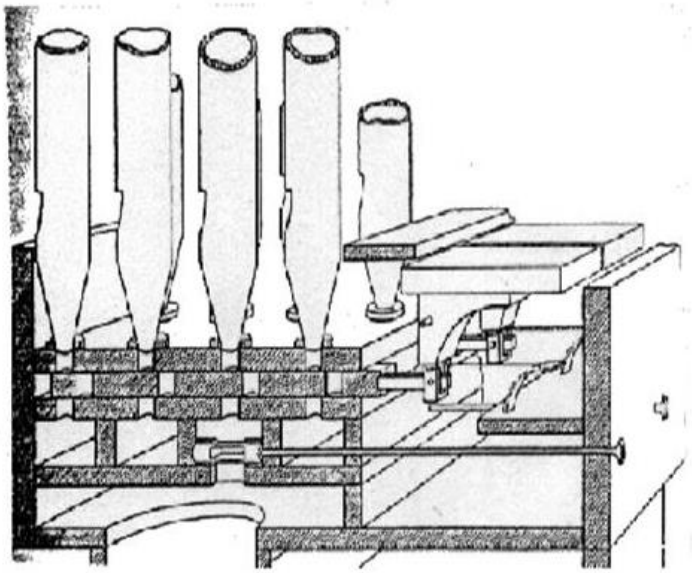
Why were organs placed in chauncels? Partly to help singers by being played in 'alternatim' (in turns) with chant, and to enhance the liturgy with appropriate embellishments. They were – as they still are, or could be – valuable educational tools. We know that young boy singers were taught to play the organ. That way, composers were trained, as they improvised on plainsong (as they were taught to do as singers) and then wrote down their best efforts.

Early organs

Water is used to create wind-pressure



Wind-chests with sliders operated directly or by 'keys' to sound pipes using a key-slider



But what about the organs themselves? What do we know about them? Organs are known to have been 'tools' used by the classical Greeks to measure acoustic phenomena from around 1500 BC onwards. They came into the Christian church along with other Roman paraphernalia.

Organs stayed relatively simple, until in the early C15 a technical change meant that they could be played with fingers rather than fists. At that point they start to come into churches in considerable numbers.

Early C14 life-size organ at Leon cathedral, northern Spain

More or less chromatic finger keyboard

Later in the C15 a further technical development allowed more ranks of pipes to be brought into play in a graduated way; 'stops' were born. This led to the larger, fixed organs placed on galleries accessible from the quire stalls being supplemented with moveable organs called in English 'portatyffs'. The various tonal sections of these organs, fixed or moveable, seem to imitate the 'terrace dynamics' of English choral polyphony, as exemplified in the Eton Choirbook.

Church Wardens' Accounts on maintaining an organ

Louth

1515: Item paid to Thomas Carsare for tuning the small organs 2d; paid for a paire of pliers for the wires in the organs 4s ...

[later:] paid to John Ketching for gluing the bellows of the organs 6d ... for lead for [weighting] the bellows 2d

1518: [paid to] Anthony [later, 'Fraunsche man'] for making 3 bellows for the great organ by agreement 20s ...

By the start of the C16, 'dedicated' organists, that is to say trained singers now paid primarily to play the organ, start to appear in accounts. So it seems that organs were being used in a different way from the previous 'alternim' system. But we do not really know how, since all the 'organ books' were destroyed in the holocaust of 1548.

'Eton Choirbook' organs

c1860 South Pickenham, Norfolk
– made for West Tofts

1950 Winchester college

The fixed organs were placed on a gallery, usually on the NE wall of a chancel, with their bellows in the loft over the vestry behind, as we have seen. Strangely, we still speak of 'organ lofts', whereas upper floors dedicated to organs and their bellows are very rarely found in churches these days.

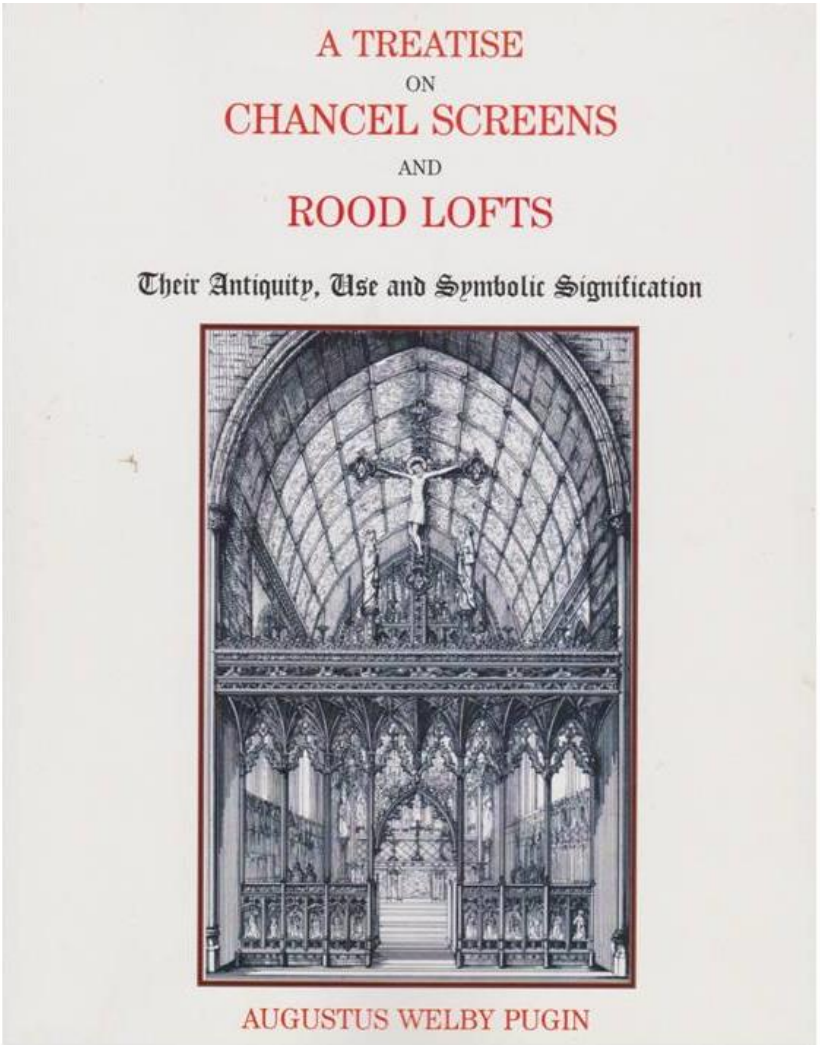
To sum up … what was all this activity in the chancel <u>for</u>?

The church building as a whole seems to have been designed as a graduated place of education, socialising and solace.

Entering through the porch, where you or your parents might have been married and passing the font where you were baptised, you came into the west end of the *ecclesia*. Here the carvings on pillars, walls and roof bosses reminded you of your potential for bad behaviour – the 'seven deadly sins'.

As you moved further eastwards, salvation in the form of the crucifix over the rood screen came into view, and the saints on the screen and the parapet of the rood platform were there to help you do better, following their example.

Confession and absolution were available at the rood screen.



And from beyond the screen came the sounds of the worship of God, echoing the constant praise in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Heavenly Sounds

Research: Survey visits to about 10% of all surviving medieval churches in England and Wales, 2012 to present.

Supported with expenses grants from the Society of Antiquaries, 2013-2016.

About 700 detailed, dimensioned surveys of churches with documentary evidence for music before the 1540s and surviving medieval chancel parts have been done and approximately 150,000 photographs taken.

Results: These will appear on the website in due course.

Past lectures and the Master List of these churches can be found on the website.